

Groton Daily Independent

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**No School at Groton Area today.
No Aberdeen paper delivery today.**

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Groton Community Calendar

Thursday, April 6

Senior Menu: BBQ Chicken breast, rice pilaf, mixed vegetables, fruit, cookie.

Catholic: Holy Thursday Mass 7:00 pm with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament until 10:00 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.; Worship with communion, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Worship in fellowship hall with meal, 6:30 p.m.

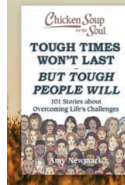
St. John's Lutheran: Maundy Thursday Service with Communion, 7 p.m.

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

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

"You can't just sit there and wait for people to give you that golden dream. You've got to get out there and make it happen for yourself."

-Diana Ross



Postponed to April 11: FFA Career Development Event in Groton, 9 a.m.

Friday, April 7

Good Friday

City Hall Closed, No School

Ecumenical Service at Methodist Church, 7 p.m.

Catholic: Stations of the Cross 7:00 pm

St. John's Lutheran: Good Friday Service, 7 p.m.

Track at Hitchcock-Tulare, 11:30 a.m.

Saturday, April 8

Easter Egg Hunt at the Groton Area Elementary School, 10 a.m.

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

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

Sunday, April 9

EASTER SUNDAY

Groton CM&A: Breakfast, 9:30 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

that resulted in his father's historic indictment. Meanwhile, former federal prosecutor Glenn Kirschner believes an indictment related to Trump's handling of classified documents may soon follow.

- Prosecutors and the FBI are investigating the death of Dalaneo Martin, a Black teenager, who was shot in Washington, D.C., on March 18 by a police officer. The probe was announced after the release of new bodycam footage.

- Saudi Arabia and Iran have agreed to reopen diplomatic missions in each others' capital cities after a landmark summit in China, according to an Iranian news agency, as relations between the two nations continue to improve.

- China condemned House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's meeting with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen in California, promising to "take resolute and effective measures to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

- Despite U.S. appeals to ease tensions, violence resumed for the second night at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque after Israeli police clashed with Palestinian worshippers hours after arresting more than 350 people in a police raid.

- North Korea accused the U.S. and South Korea of escalating tensions "to the brink of nuclear war" through their "reckless" joint military drills and has vowed to respond with "offensive action."

- A U.S. court has denied an appeal by former Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo Manrique to stop his extradition to his home country, where he faces corruption charges.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky suggested that he might order a troop withdrawal from the city of Bakhmut if they found themselves in danger of being encircled by Russian forces.

- Idaho passed legislation that makes it illegal for an adult to help a minor obtain an abortion or abortion pills outside the state without parental permission. The state, along with Indiana, signed bills into law that also ban gender-affirming care for minors. In Kansas, the GOP-controlled legislature voted to override Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's third veto of a bill restricting transgender athletes from participating in women's sports.

- Donald Trump Jr. has said he signed a check used as evidence by prosecutors in the hush money investigation



Effective the week of April 10th, to help preserve our streets, Groton residents are asked to bring their garbage to the following locations until further notice:

- Railroad Avenue, Main Street, Sixth Street, & Highway 37**
- Residents of the Broadway Mobile Home Park need to take their garbage to Highway 37.**
- Residents north of 13th Avenue (Olson and Jacobson Development) need to bring their garbage to the Bus Barns.**

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South Dakota CARES: annual day of giving kicks off this month

Sioux Falls, S.D. (April 5, 2023)— Every South Dakotan deserves to be healthy, safe, and accepted. That is the vision Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota has worked toward for more than 100 years.

From mental and behavioral health programs, to foster and adoption care, LSS' work has a lasting impact throughout our communities. To celebrate and honor that commitment, each year, LSS hosts South Dakota CARES, a statewide day of giving to support these vital services. This year's event takes place April 10-14 and features tours of their various programs, generous matches to online giving, and social celebrations.

"It all started with a day of giving back in 1921," said Vice President of Philanthropy Paige Short. "And while philanthropy is becoming a stronger, more prevalent part of our work at LSS, it's all possible because of our people. Our employees bring dedication and compassion to our clients every day. We are excited to be showcasing their work, the success of our clients, and our impact in the community through tours of several of our facilities this year."

During last year's event, more than \$282,000 was raised by nearly 300 donors.

This year's focus will be on five areas: Behavioral Health Services, Foster Care Services, the Center for New Americans and the Multi-Cultural Center, Adoption Services and Pregnancy Counseling, and the Cutting Edge Care Fund.

"We are incredibly thankful to have generous individuals who are passionate about the work we do. Thanks to our most loyal benefactors we have several matches available during South Dakota CARES that enable us to put focus on areas that we see as greatest needs in the community," said Short.

A growing need for many individuals and families in South Dakota is access to affordable mental health care. A gift to LSS Behavioral Health Services significantly impacts the lives of those struggling with a range of challenges, including family and relationship conflicts, depression, grief, loss, anger, anxiety, abuse, substance use, PTSD, or domestic violence.

"One of our priorities at LSS is removing barriers for those who need services. We do this in Behavioral Health Services by offering the sliding fee scale to help lower-income individuals and families. It's just a part of who we are," Short said.

"We wouldn't be LSS without the hands and hearts that work directly with clients. We couldn't do this work without generous contributors who entrust us to create the greatest possible good for their friends, neighbors, and community. For this, we are grateful and inspired to continue ensuring that our vision becomes a reality," Short said.

To learn more about South Dakota CARES or donate to the life-changing work of LSS, visit SouthDakotaCares.org.

Rounds Announces New Aberdeen Office Location

ABERDEEN – U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) announced that his Aberdeen office has relocated to 221 Brown County Highway 19 S, #112. The office is under the direction of Jennifer Hieb, who serves as the Northeast Regional Director for Rounds.

“One of the most important parts of my job as a senator is working on behalf of South Dakotans during times of need,” said Rounds. “I have highly-qualified individuals on staff, many of whom have years of experience dealing with casework on both the state and federal level. Whether we are the first call someone makes when dealing with a federal agency or their last call when they feel as if they can no longer fight the government on their own, we are here to help. I am pleased to announce our new Aberdeen location, and I encourage constituents to stop by and visit.”

“South Dakota is filled with many strong communities,” said Hieb. “Whether it’s Aberdeen or Lake City, we need to make sure federal policies are working at the local level. Please feel free to stop by the new office as we value feedback from constituents to better understand how legislation impacts our communities and how it can be improved.”

The office number will remain unchanged at (605) 225-0366. Office hours will continue to be 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CST.

In addition to his Aberdeen office, Rounds has four other offices in Pierre, Sioux Falls, Rapid City and Washington, D.C. All office locations and contact information can be found at www.rounds.senate.gov.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Federal funding for Western water projects includes \$22 million for Mni Wiconi

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 5, 2023 5:18 PM

The Biden administration will send \$585 million to water projects in 11 Western states, Interior Department officials said Wednesday.

The funding, provided in the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law, will go toward 83 projects in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, South Dakota, California, North Dakota and Washington. The law provided \$8.3 billion for water infrastructure projects over five years.

South Dakota's funding includes \$22.17 million for maintenance and upgrades to the Mni Wiconi pipeline that brings water from the Missouri River to cities, rural users and Native American reservations in the central and western parts of the state. The money will fund backup generators, water mains, a storage tower near Kadoka, replacement of an eroded crossing under the White River, and replacement of an aging booster station.

Additional South Dakota funding of \$2.16 million will go to the town of Kenel, on the Standing Rock Reservation, where 3,200 feet of asbestos-cement water pipes will be replaced with modern polyethylene pipe.

Speaking to reporters by phone Wednesday, administration officials said the funding was part of a government-wide effort to respond to persistent drought conditions that have caused increased wildfires in Western states and threaten future drinking and agricultural water supplies.

The 23-year drought "has culminated in critically low reservoir conditions in the Colorado River Basin and across the West, putting a strain on our people, our farms, our wildlife and their habitats and our very livelihoods," Interior Deputy Secretary Tommy Beaudreau said.

The funding will be used to repair water storage, water treatment and hydropower facilities.

Wednesday's announcement coincided with a visit by administration officials to the Imperial Dam that spans the Colorado River on the Arizona-California border, and they gave particular attention to that river system, which supplies water to 40 million people.

"We'll use every available resource and tool at the federal level to protect the Colorado River system and the critical services it provides to millions of people in countless ecosystems," Beaudreau said.

The projects, selected by the Interior Department's Bureau of Reclamation that manages water resources in Western states, are in every major river system in the West, Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton said.

The list includes 27 projects in North Dakota and 24 in California. No other state had more than six projects selected.

California alone accounted for more than half of the funding, with \$307.8 million allocated to projects in the state. North Dakota will receive \$80.2 million.

Colorado projects will receive the third-most money, at \$68.3 million.

The largest single project is a \$66 million building modernization of the Trinity River Hatchery in California.

Among the other costliest projects selected is a \$56 million allocation to finalize the "planning, design and subsequent construction" of a water treatment facility and chemical storage building at the Leadville, Colorado, mine drainage tunnel.

That tunnel siphons heavy metals from nearby mines out of groundwater that flows to the headwaters of the Arkansas River.

— *South Dakota Searchlight* staff contributed to this report.

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

COMMENTARY

Regulatory limits needed to prevent price gouging and ensure availability of medicines

TOM DEAN

High costs and shortages of pharmaceuticals are serious, ongoing issues. Drug prices in the U.S. are among the highest in the world. A recent survey by the Rand Corporation looked at drug prices in 32 developed countries. U.S. prices were the highest in the group and were more than twice the average of prices in other countries. What is especially troubling is that the products sold in many of these countries are the same drugs produced by the same manufacturers as those sold in the U.S. at much higher prices.

When it comes to drug prices, consumers – and even third-party payers — have little bargaining power. The reality is, drug companies are free to charge “what the market will bear.”

Recently developed, brand name drugs are typically the most costly. New drugs are usually covered by patents that give the developers exclusive rights to market the product without competition. Patents are for 20 years and begin when a new drug application is filed. This usually occurs years before the product actually comes to market. Nonetheless, companies typically enjoy 10 or more years without any direct competition.

When patents are nearing expiration, companies have numerous ways to “game” the system. One of the most common is to make minor, often insignificant, changes in the product and apply for a new patent. Sometimes major producers actually buy up smaller potential generic competitors or pay such companies to delay the introduction of competitive products. Regulators have blocked some but not all such practices.

The patent process is defended as a way to give firms some assurance that they can recoup the expenses they incur if they undertake the costly and highly unpredictable process of drug development. The public clearly has an interest in encouraging new drug development. Critics, however, have pointed out that often much of the early development is done in academic centers, usually at public expense.

Even when patents expire, the usual market forces do not always bring about effective cost control. The best example is insulin. There are three major producers of insulin who produce very similar products. Instead of competing on price, all three companies progressively raised the retail prices of insulin. Insulin prices in the U.S. climbed to as much as 10 times those in Canada. Recent legislation has forced companies to limit out-of-pocket insulin costs for Medicare recipients to no more than \$35 per month. Subsequently, public pressure led all three insulin producers to agree to a limit of \$35 per month for all users. In this situation, competition produced real benefits. However, one wonders if the companies can afford to drop the price from over \$100 to \$35, what was their margin before the reduction?

What about prices that are too low? Some older drugs are still vitally important. In several of these cases, the prices — and the profitability — have dropped to the point where producers have left the market, leaving us with seriously limited production capacity.

Vincristine is a cancer drug, a key component in the treatment of childhood leukemia. Because of low profitability, virtually all vincristine has come from a single manufacturer. When that producer ran into production problems, no other source was available. Cancer physicians struggled for months with heart-rending decisions of having to ration among seriously ill children the very limited amounts of vincristine they could get.

There are other more recent examples. This past winter there were serious shortages of amoxicillin, a widely used antibiotic and, more recently, we are facing dangerous shortages of albuterol, a key treatment for asthma and COPD. In each of these situations the companies have made what they considered to be sound business decisions, but decisions which were clearly not in the public interest.

What to do? Open market principles have often served us well, but we need to be smart enough — and tough enough — to recognize when we are benefitting and when we are not. We need regulatory limits that protect creativity and innovation yet prevent price gouging and ensure availability of vital medicines. That is a high bar, but one we as a society must keep working toward.

Tom Dean is a retired family physician who grew up on a farm west of Wessington Springs. He graduated from Wessington Springs High School, Carleton College in Minnesota and medical school in Rochester, New York. He completed a family medicine residency at the University of Washington in Seattle. He returned to Wessington Springs to practice in 1978 along with his wife, Kathy, a certified nurse midwife. He retired after 43 years of practice and still lives in Wessington Springs.

Legislation could doom Sanford-Fairview deal with ban on anti-competitive health care mergers

BY: MICHELLE GRIFFITH - APRIL 5, 2023 9:49 AM

Democratic lawmakers in Minnesota are weighing a ban on anti-competitive health care mergers that could spell the end for the proposed merger between Minneapolis-based Fairview Health Services and Sioux Falls-based Sanford Health.

The deal has sparked fierce resistance from Democratic lawmakers, rural residents and health care unions, who say it would create a health care monopoly in greater Minnesota and likely lead to clinic closures and higher costs. Lawmakers and the University of Minnesota have also expressed concern that the university's teaching hospital could wind up in the hands of an out-of-state entity.

Since announcing the merger in November, leaders from the two health care giants have buckled to public pressure and pushed back the merger date twice, saying on Monday it would be delayed until at least the end of August.

The bill (HF402/SF1681) put forward by Democrats could lead the deal to be taken off life support and laid to rest for good.

The legislation would prohibit health care transactions that "substantially lessen competition" or "tend to create a monopoly," which opponents of the deal say it would. Attorney General Keith Ellison is already investigating the deal for potentially running afoul of antitrust and charity laws, but an explicit state prohibition regarding the public's interest would give him greater latitude in bringing a case in state court.

In a statement, the Office of the Attorney General said it supports the provisions of the bill that bolster its oversight.

"This bill would build upon the attorney general's existing authority to represent the interests of the public by adding tools to its toolbox that 29 states already have," said John Stiles, a spokesperson for the Attorney General's Office.

The legislation seems tailored to the Sanford-Fairview deal, but it would apply to all mergers and acquisitions of health care organizations that have an annual average revenue of at least \$40 million.

"There's a lot of money to be made in health care," said Rep. Robert Bierman, DFL-Apple Valley. "This helps policymakers going forward to prevent some of the onerous mergers that can take place — even the ones we don't even know are coming."

The bill would also require health care organizations to notify state officials 90 days before a merger or acquisition is completed. Sanford and Fairview originally planned to complete their merger less than five months after announcing it.

As part of the notice to state officials, the health care entities would have to disclose the acquisition price, plans to close facilities or eliminate services and any information the attorney general or health commissioner requests.

Ellison has repeatedly said Fairview and Sanford have not fully complied with his requests for significant information and told lawmakers last month that his office had not received information his office should have received months ago.

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The proposed legislation would make it harder for control of the University of Minnesota Medical Center, which Fairview purchased in 1997, to go to an out-of-state entity.

The prospect of a South Dakota-based company owning the university's main teaching hospital has outraged politicians and health care advocates. That was also one of the reasons then-Attorney General Lori Swanson squashed the merger when it was proposed a decade ago.

Former Minnesota Govs. Mark Dayton, a Democrat, and Tim Pawlenty, a Republican, testified last month before lawmakers about their concerns that an out-of-state company could profit off a teaching hospital that receives significant support from Minnesota taxpayers.

The bill says if an out-of-state organization purchases a health system that is organized as a charitable organization — including the university's medical center — that health system must pay back to the state any charitable assets it received from the state.

Whether Fairview would have to pay the state for the cost of the medical center is contested, however. According to the bill's fiscal note, the University of Minnesota says Fairview received the medical center from the university, not the state.

For good measure, Bierman has also authored a second bill (HF3108/SF3124) which would outright ban out-of-state entities from owning, either directly or indirectly, University of Minnesota health care facilities.

"We need to do whatever we need to do to keep the University of Minnesota under the auspices of Minnesotans," Bierman said.

In a statement, a spokesperson for Fairview and Sanford said the companies have been cooperating with the attorney general and have agreed to his request for a 90 days' notice prior to closing the merger at a future date.

"Since December of last year, our priority has been continued cooperation to support the existing and robust review that is already in place by the attorney general," the statement says. "We remain confident in the benefits of the merger for our people, patients and communities and our shared vision to advance world-class health care for all we serve."

The Minnesota Hospital Association in a letter to lawmakers said it was concerned about the attorney general's oversight in the bill, as health care companies often need to adapt and denying a merger "could result in essential health care services being eliminated from a community in our state."

Hospital executives are unlikely to be able to dissuade a unified Democratic trifecta from voting against the bills. Republicans, however, appear skeptical of the law, noting that mergers can help rural communities by supporting local clinics and that health care companies don't want to undergo more government regulation.

House members on Tuesday voted to send the bill to the House Ways and Means Committee, which is usually a bill's last stop before it goes to the floor.

This story was originally published by the Minnesota Reformer, which like South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, a network of news bureaus supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. Minnesota Reformer maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor Patrick Coolican for questions: info@minnesotareformer.com. Follow Minnesota Reformer on Facebook and Twitter.

Michelle Griffith covers Minnesota politics and policy for the Minnesota Reformer, with a focus on marginalized communities. Most recently she was a reporter with The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead in North Dakota where she covered state and local government and Indigenous issues. For two years she was also a corps member with Report for America, a national nonprofit that places journalists in local newsrooms and news deserts. She lives in St. Paul and likes to knit and watch documentaries in her free time.

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Inside the battle over who gets to build the grid of the future

'Right-of-first-refusal laws' in some states means customers may pay more for expansion

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - APRIL 6, 2023 5:00 AM

The U.S. Department of Energy issued a draft report in February that found a "pressing need" for new electric transmission infrastructure across the country to improve reliability, connect a rapidly growing number of solar, wind and battery storage projects, supply increasing electric demand and alleviate scattered pockets of consistently high prices across the country.

To meet the future envisioned by the federal infrastructure act and the Inflation Reduction Act, which both contain major provisions to boost clean energy, the country needs to increase its current transmission system by an eye-popping 57% by 2035, the report says. Princeton University's Net-Zero America study estimates expanding transmission capacity by 60% by 2030 will cost \$330 billion and tripling it by 2050 will cost \$2.2 trillion.

But in some states, bills that have been pushed by utilities to give them exclusive or preferential treatment for building regional transmission lines, called "right-of-first-refusal" laws, mean customers might pay more than they should for all those wires and towers, critics say.

"What's important to note is that the clean energy transition is going to require a significant amount of new transmission. Because of that, that's why you have these protectionist battles going on across the country," said Sharon Segner, senior vice president of transmission policy at LS Power, a company that owns about 680 miles of transmission lines and has been awarded more than \$4 billion worth of competitively bid transmission projects.

"The incumbent utilities are trying to obtain a monopoly for the clean energy transition."

The Edison Electric Institute, which represents investor-owned electric utilities and has pushed the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to grant utilities rights of first refusal for regional transmission lines, did not respond to a request for comment on the rationale for right-of-first refusal laws. However, in statehouses across the country, proponents have argued that such laws actually benefit consumers because they remove the incentive to offer unrealistic lowball bids to win solicitations, avoid delays dealing with procurement, preserve state regulatory oversight and result in streamlined, more efficient projects because local utilities know their communities better.

But they also represent a potential windfall for utilities.

"The more capital they spend, the more profit they make under government-guaranteed rates of return," said Josiah Neeley, a senior fellow at the R Street Institute, a right-leaning free market think tank, in testimony on a failed right-of-first refusal bill in Wisconsin last year. "Historically, the absence of transmission competition has resulted in a severe lack of economic discipline — leading to cost overruns, with captive consumers footing the bill."

'Crony capitalism'

Last month, after a lawsuit by LS Power and another company, the Iowa Supreme Court halted legislation from 2020 that gave a right of first refusal for transmission projects to utilities operating in Iowa. The court, which ruled based on the manner in which the bill was passed, not its substance, nevertheless called it "quintessentially crony capitalism" and "rent-seeking, protectionist legislation" that will "impose higher costs on Iowans."

That ruling comes as the U.S. Supreme Court weighs whether to take up a case involving Texas' even more extreme 2019 law, which says the ability to build, own and operate new transmission lines that connect directly to an existing utility facility "may be granted only to the owner of that existing facility." The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit held in August that the Texas law may violate the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution, reversing a lower court ruling that upheld the law. The 5th Circuit, calling the law a "ban on new entrants in a market" remanded the case to the district court to consider whether Texas regulators can show they have "no other means to advance a legitimate local purpose."

Writing for the conservative Cato Institute, Vanderbilt University law professor Jim Rossi called right-of-first-refusal laws (ROFR) "constitutionally suspect" and noted that of more than \$10 billion in transmission

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projects recently approved by the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, which operates the electric grid in all or part of 15 states, more than 90% will be built by incumbent utilities rather than competitively bid.

"State transmission ROFR laws reflect bad policy choices that thwart reliability in competitive regional power supply markets and, at bottom, are harmful to customers," Rossi wrote. "Transmission ROFRs pose a barrier to a coordinated approach to grid expansion, making it more difficult to promote reliability and new technological approaches that enable the lowest-cost power supply options for customers."

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma and South Dakota have laws on the books that grant utilities right-of-first-refusal privileges to build local or regional transmission lines. Mississippi passed similar legislation this year. Bills to add new ROFR rights or expand existing ones have been introduced in Missouri, Montana, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Kansas and Indiana.

"If you want to see more clean energy we need more transmission and you want to keep all the options on the table for who's going to develop those projects," said Ari Peskoe, director of the Electricity Law Initiative at the Harvard Law School.

Current right-of-first-refusal laws at the state level have their origins in reaction to a FERC order in 2011 that sought to promote more competition in regional electric transmission projects in part by removing federal rights of first refusal for certain transmission projects.

"The agency reasoned that federal rights of first refusal might 'be leading to rates . . . that are unjust and unreasonable,' in large part because 'it is not in the economic self-interest of incumbent[s] to permit new entrants to develop transmission facilities,' even if those facilities 'would result in a more efficient or cost-effective solution,'" the 5th Circuit judges wrote in their opinion.

Utilities, Peskoe said, "saw it coming and went to their legislatures and said 'please protect us from this competition.'"

Just 3% of today's projects are competitively bid, according to the Electricity Transmission Competition Coalition, which includes 70 companies and organizations from 48 states, including manufacturers, consumer advocates, transmission developers, retail electric customers and public power representatives.

Transmission tension

The legal battles over right-of-first refusal laws come as the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission grapples with a suite of issues surrounding transmission planning and construction, including whether to reinstate a federal right of first refusal for utilities, a move that is opposed by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.

"American consumers and businesses should not be denied the benefits of competition when paying for this significant transmission investment," the agencies said.

FERC, which regulates interstate electric transmission, is also exploring the concept of an independent transmission monitor. That's because some state regulators and consumer advocates say that as transmission spending by utilities is becoming an increasing portion of electric customers' bills, projects are escaping rigorous oversight because of varying regulatory regimes, a lack of expertise at the state level and too little transparency. FERC also has a draft rule out that would alter how regional transmission projects are planned and costs allocated.

And what's more, some critics argue, many utilities aren't incentivized to build the types of interregional transmission projects that the Department of Energy reported have the best benefits for customers.

The Texas case, they contend, is a textbook example of what's wrong with the status quo.

Building power plants, Peskoe said, has always been the major source of profit for utilities. New transmission lines that might bring in cheaper power from elsewhere reduce the need for those pricey new facilities.

"You're sort of cutting yourself off at the knees because you're reducing the opportunity to build power plants in the future," he said. "Bringing in energy from elsewhere may be good for the consumers but maybe bad for utility shareholders."

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'They ran to their state legislature'

The Texas right-of-first-refusal law is being challenged by NextEra Energy Transmission, a subsidiary of utility giant NextEra Energy, which owns Florida Power & Light, the nation's largest utility.

NextEra had won a competitive bidding process in 2018 held by MISO to build, own and operate a 500-kilovolt line to be sited in a portion of east Texas covered by MISO but in Entergy Texas' service area. The estimated cost at the time was \$115 million. The next year, the Texas legislature passed the right of first refusal law, effectively allowing Entergy, which has three million electric customers in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, to take over construction of the line.

"The Texas utilities lost a legitimate competitive bidding process so they ran to their state legislature and passed a right of first refusal," said Segner, the LS Power executive.

Then, in 2020, Entergy issued a request for proposals for a 1,200-megawatt combined cycle gas power plant in the same "load pocket" (a term for a part of the electric grid where the transmission system doesn't have enough capacity to meet demand and requires local power generation) that would have been served by the transmission line. Entergy later decided it would "self build" the project, which is expected to cost about \$1.2 billion.

"If you don't build transmission, you end up with load pockets. Entergy's now using those load pockets to justify *billions* in gas unit installations instead of spending *millions* on transmission," tweeted Simon Mahan, executive director of the Southern Renewable Energy Association, a nonprofit trade association that unsuccessfully urged FERC to deny MISO's request to terminate the transmission line project.

SREA sees a disturbing trend, noting that a similar transmission project in Entergy's Louisiana service territory, the Waterford-Churchill line, was also canceled after its cost-benefit analysis was "eradicated by local bottom-up transmission projects as well as the \$870 billion Entergy-built St. Charles (gas power plant)."

SREA said Entergy "appears to be using an anti-competitive strategy of capturing, delaying, and/or canceling transmission projects with local generation assets at significant cost to local ratepayers, while at the same time, not resolving underlying load pocket problems."

Entergy rejects that argument.

The Orange County, Texas, plant "was needed to address a large and growing shortfall of generation for Entergy Texas," said company spokeswoman Kendra James, adding that growing electric demand and the retirement of older power plants from the 1970s were also factors.

"The OCAPS plant will address issues that the Hartburg-Sabine Junction Project could not, even under the most favorable assumptions for that transmission line," James said. "There is no reasonable argument that Hartburg-Sabine was a substitute for OCAPS."

Entergy, James added, has more than doubled its capital investment in transmission since 2014 to improve reliability, connect new customers and reduce congestion on its system.

"To provide reliable and affordable electric service, public utilities such as Entergy must invest in electric generation, transmission, distribution, and other aspects of the utility's business," she said. "Every investment decision we make is based on what we think is in our customers' best interests."

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

As future of abortion pill is weighed, Democrats in Congress see little they can do

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 5, 2023 3:21 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democrats appear lukewarm about pursuing reproductive rights legislation in a divided Congress, even as a federal judge in Texas considers overturning access to abortion pills nationwide.

Interviews by States Newsroom with Democrats who control the Senate by a narrow margin found little optimism they could counter a ruling that could potentially overturn the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone after more than two decades, or change when and how it is used. The FDA is the federal agency that regulates everything from prescription drugs to certain foods to tobacco products.

The case in U.S. District Court for the North District of Texas has gained nationwide attention since the federal judge's ruling would apply to the entire country, possibly restricting access to medication abortion even in states where lawmakers or voters have kept abortion legal.

Democratic senators, while underlining their support for reproductive rights, did not seem to have a plan in mind if the judge ends access to medication abortion, which accounts for more than half of pregnancy terminations in the United States.

That would leave any federal response up to the White House and the FDA.

Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, chair of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said Democrats should "be as strong as we possibly can" in order to ensure that "the issue of abortion is a woman's issue, not a governmental issue."

When asked specifically what the Senate should do on medication abortion, Sanders replied, "I don't have an answer to that," adding that Democrats should "be as strong and vigorous as we can."

The ruling is expected any day in the lawsuit filed by anti-abortion medical organizations. It's likely the suit will eventually go before the same U.S. Supreme Court that struck down the constitutional right to an abortion last year in the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* ruling.

Senators pessimistic

Democratic senators who spoke to States Newsroom saw little future in Congress for a response to a ruling that affects access to medication abortion, part of a larger debate over reproductive rights that has stalled in Washington.

Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow, chair of the chamber's Democratic Policy & Communications Committee, said "we'll see" when asked if Senate Democrats would move a bill on medication abortion, if the judge rules to revoke access. The medication is FDA-approved for up to 10 weeks.

"It's very important that women have access to medication abortion, and so we'll have to see what our options are," Stabenow said.

Others saw the issue in the hands of states, where many led by Republicans have moved in the past year to restrict reproductive rights. "What we should do is what we're doing in Ohio, and that's a ballot issue," said Sen. Sherrod Brown.

"I'm not gonna get sucked into 'Will the House pass it?' because the House won't," Brown added. "They won't pass anything that's pro-women's rights ever with McCarthy and the House run by the far right."

Abortion rights groups in Ohio, Brown said, are trying to gather more than 400,000 signatures to get a ballot question in front of voters.

But Republican state lawmakers are trying to raise that threshold in an attempt to block the question from going before Ohio voters, a move Brown denounced.

"They want to change the constitution (so) that ballot issues now need 60% instead of 50 plus one," Brown said. "It's the most corrupt state government in the country."

Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine said Senate Democrats are unlikely to get the Republican backing they need to move their centerpiece abortion rights bill, known as the Women's Health Protection Act, through the 60-vote legislative filibuster.

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Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, brought that abortion rights bill to the Senate floor twice last year. Each time it was unable to garner the bipartisan backing needed to move past the 60-vote legislative filibuster.

Democrats also tried to pass legislation that would have guaranteed access to birth control, though Republicans blocked it from passing the U.S. Senate, arguing it went too far.

Kaine, who co-authored a bipartisan abortion rights bill last year with Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins, Alaska GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Arizona independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, said that bill also isn't likely to get the votes needed to move toward passage in the Senate.

There should be bipartisan support to protect access to the abortion pill, Kaine said, though he added getting enough support would be an uphill climb.

"I'm sure there'd be a little bit of bipartisan support in the Senate on it, but whether we could get 10 or nine, that'd be a lift," Kaine said, referring to the number of Republicans needed to get at least 60 votes for the bill to move to final passage.

"But I think we may make an effort on that because when you actually get a bill like that ready, you might be surprised at some who will vote yes," Kaine said.

Looking for opportunities

Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly said Democrats' main abortion rights bill would ensure access to medication abortion, though he said if the judge overturns access to the abortion pill throughout the country, Democrats may need to look for a different path.

"I think the bill we have would address that, but we've got to look for opportunities to ... restore these rights," Kelly said, noting that he has "two daughters and a granddaughter that now have fewer rights than my grandmother had."

Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse said he believes Democrats should try to protect access to medication abortion if the Texas federal judge moves to restrict access.

"Depending on what the judge does, yeah," he said.

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden said he supports establishing abortion access in "black letter law" while calling on the FDA to ignore any changes or restrictions the federal judge may place on medication abortion.

"The first thing we've got to do is to make sure that people realize that the Food and Drug Administration has the authority to ignore the ruling that is coming out from this judge in Texas, who ... after all the states' rights discussion is going to say, on a national basis, that he wants to override the FDA," Wyden said.

Michigan Sen. Senator Gary Peters, chair of Senate Democrats' campaign arm, said he didn't know if Democrats would move abortion access legislation to the floor.

"We'll see how things evolve in the coming months. But, you know, it's pretty clear where everybody is on that issue, and there's no question it will be on the ballot again next year," Peters said. "Voters will have an opportunity to make their voice heard."

Minnesota Sen. Tina Smith and Missouri Rep. Cori Bush introduced legislation in early February intended to bolster protections for medication abortion, including for access via telehealth and without an in-person dispensing requirement.

The measure, which has garnered fewer than 30 co-sponsors, would also bolster protections for certain certified pharmacies to dispense mifepristone through the mail.

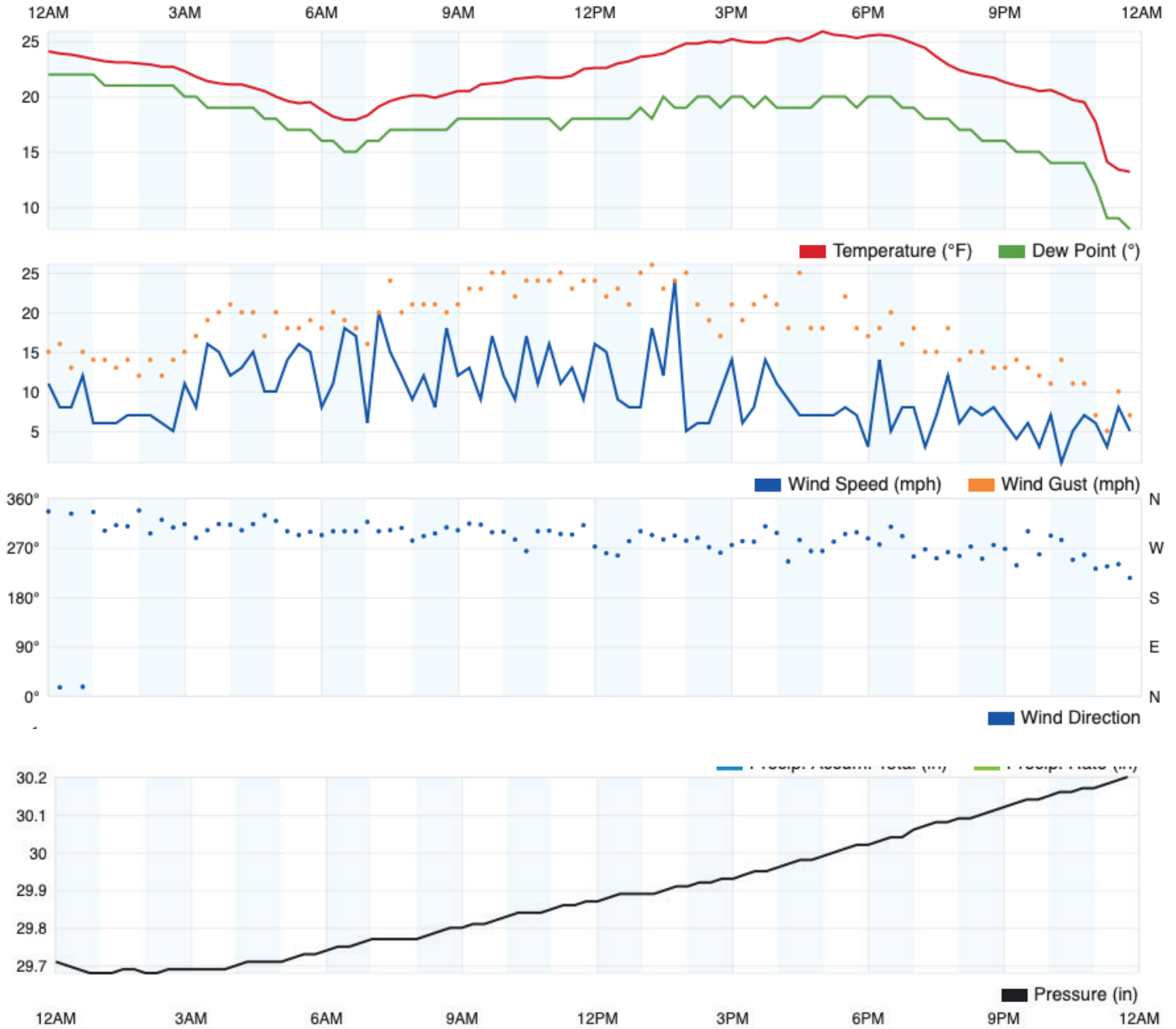
Smith said in a written statement announcing the bill's introduction that it would be "a critical step to protect what remaining access exists to reproductive health care."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Increasing Clouds	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 29 °F	Low: 9 °F	High: 34 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 40 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 40 °F



A Warm-up on the Way!

April 6, 2023
4:38 AM

A milder airmass will gradually develop across the region, with increasing temperatures expected through the upcoming weekend

	4/6 Thu		4/7 Fri				4/8 Sat				4/9 Sun				4/10 Mon				4/11 Tue				4/12 Wed				Maximum
	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	6pm	
Aberdeen	29	30	15	23	34	33	25	34	40	39	30	34	41	39	32	38	47	45	40	48	56	54	43	45	51	50	56
Britton	26	25	14	24	32	31	25	33	37	37	30	33	38	37	30	36	44	43	40	47	54	52	41	44	49	48	54
Eagle Butte	33	31	23	24	35	34	25	30	43	43	34	43	56	54	41	50	62	62	48	57	70	68	52	50	59	57	70
Eureka	29	27	18	22	32	30	25	31	37	36	29	35	42	40	34	39	46	44	40	47	55	54	43	45	50	47	55
Gettysburg	29	30	18	23	33	32	26	31	37	37	30	34	43	42	35	40	51	50	43	52	65	63	46	49	57	55	65
Kennebec	37	38	23	30	43	42	29	37	50	48	36	43	55	53	38	49	65	64	50	61	75	73	54	56	67	66	75
McIntosh	29	28	22	24	33	32	24	29	40	40	31	42	54	52	38	48	62	60	46	54	67	65	48	47	55	54	67
Milbank	30	31	17	23	35	35	28	34	42	42	36	39	44	42	36	42	50	48	43	53	59	57	45	51	57	55	59
Miller	33	31	17	24	35	34	26	34	41	40	32	36	43	42	35	43	54	53	47	55	65	63	48	51	58	56	65
Mobridge	32	33	21	26	37	36	27	34	43	43	32	40	52	49	38	46	59	57	45	54	67	65	47	49	57	55	67
Murdo	39	37	25	31	41	39	28	34	48	47	36	43	55	54	39	51	67	66	51	62	75	73	53	54	66	65	75
Pierre	37	35	24	28	40	39	29	35	46	45	35	40	53	52	39	47	62	62	50	60	74	73	53	54	65	63	74
Redfield	32	33	16	23	36	35	27	35	41	39	30	34	42	40	32	39	51	50	43	51	60	59	44	48	54	52	60
Sisseton	29	28	15	22	33	32	26	33	40	39	33	37	40	40	34	40	46	44	42	50	57	55	44	48	53	51	57
Watertown	30	31	18	26	35	34	30	36	45	44	36	40	48	44	37	44	53	52	44	53	60	59	47	51	57	55	60
Webster	28	29	16	24	32	31	28	34	39	39	32	36	41	39	33	40	48	47	42	49	55	54	44	46	51	49	55
Wheaton	28	26	12	23	34	33	24	33	40	39	32	35	40	38	30	37	44	42	36	47	54	52	40	45	52	50	54



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The forecast tries to take into account how much the wind and sunshine and melting snow each day will impact how warm each day gets. Considerable warmth over multiple days could melt quite a bit of the snow on the ground.

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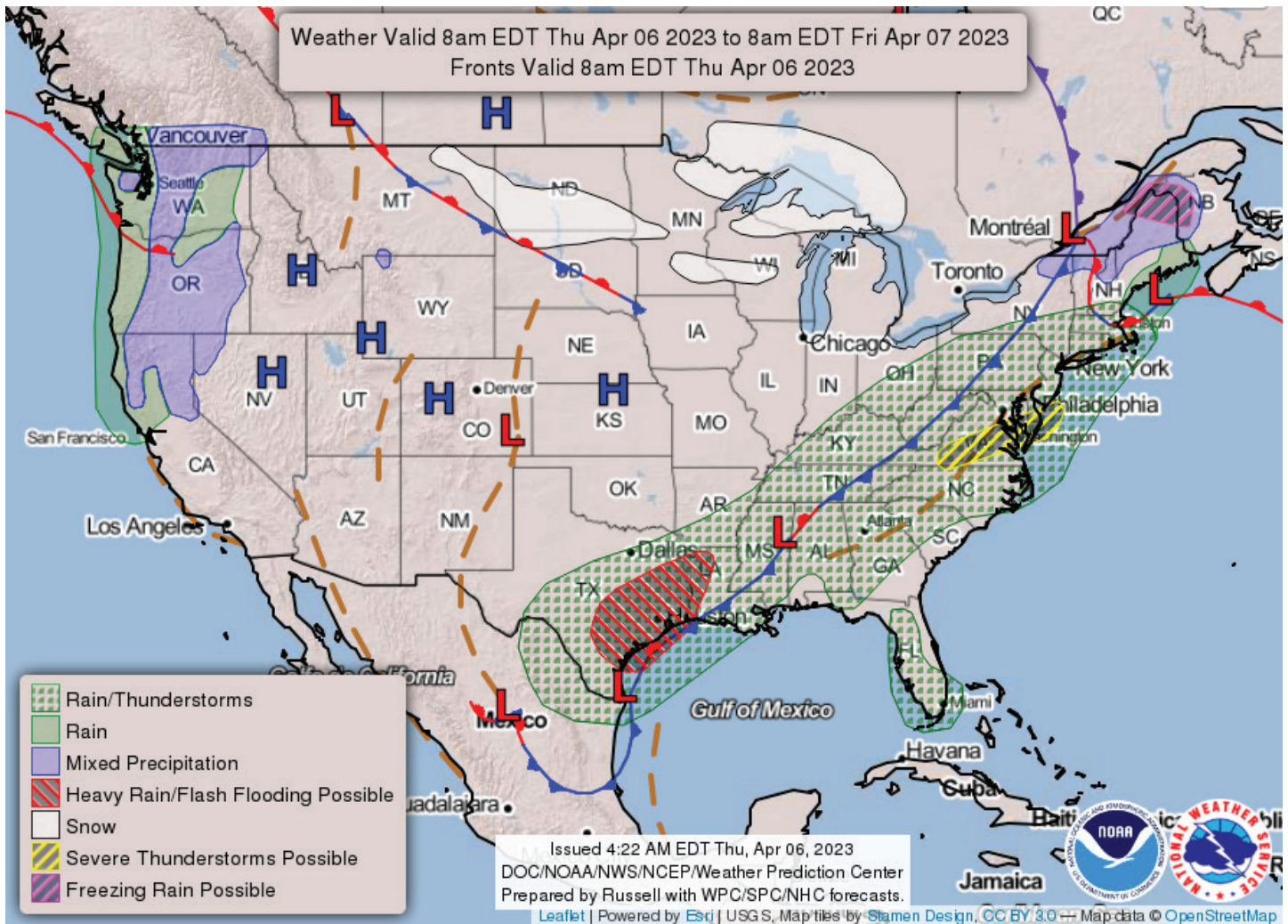
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 26 °F at 4:57 PM
Low Temp: 13 °F at 11:26 PM
Wind: 28 mph at 10:31 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 06 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 85 in 1991
Record Low: 5 in 2018
Average High: 53
Average Low: 28
Average Precip in April.: 0.26
Precip to date in April.: 0.48
Average Precip to date: 2.32
Precip Year to Date: 4.41
Sunset Tonight: 8:08:01 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59:43 AM



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Today in Weather History

April 6, 1959: Dust storms impacted much of the state of South Dakota beginning on the 6th and on into the 7th. The preceding drought period had left a little moisture in the soil, so the fall-plowed fields in exposed locations eroded severely. Strong winds on the 6th and 7th lifted the loose soil, creating areas of blowing dust. In the localities, visibility was less than a quarter mile for short periods. Some observers stated that it was the worst dust event since the 1930s.

April 6, 2006: Severe thunderstorms the morning of the 6th produced large hail up to 1.75 inches in diameter near Miller in Hand County. Later on, heavy rains of 3 to 6 inches fell causing flash flooding across parts of Spink, Clark, and Day counties. Many county and township roads were flooded with several of the roads damaged or thoroughly washed out. Areas around Frankfort, Doland, Turton, Conde, Crandall, Raymond, Butler and Bristol were most affected. Many roads were closed. Also, several basements were flooded, and sewers were backed up.

April 6, 2008: An area of low pressure moving across South Dakota spread heavy snow of 6 to 15 inches across much of central, north central, and northeast South Dakota. Also, strong winds gusting to 25 to 40 mph caused some blowing and drifting snow. Many activities were canceled and roads became treacherous. Many vehicles went into the ditch, and several accidents also occurred. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Mission Ridge, Isabel, Mellette, and Britton, 7 inches at Faulkton, Andover, Columbia, Timber Lake, and Eureka, 8 inches at Bath, Selby, Mobridge, and Leola, 9 inches at Hosmer, 10 inches at Ipswich, 11 inches at Mound City, and 6 miles east of Hayes. Locations with a foot or more of snow included 12 inches at Roscoe and Elm Lake, 13 inches at Eagle Butte, Onaka, and 23 miles north of Highmore, and 15 inches at Bowdle.

1909: American explorer Robert Peary and five others reached what they determined to be the North Pole on this day. Historical analysis suggests he fell a few miles short of achieving his goal.

1936 - A tornado outbreak in the Deep South resulted in a total of 446 deaths and eighteen million dollars damage. It was a "Tale of Two Cities". During the evening of the 5th a tornado hit Tupelo MS killing 216 persons, injuring 700 others, and causing three million dollars damage. The next morning the paths of two tornadoes met about 8:30 AM and cut a swath four blocks wide through Gainesville GA killing 203 persons, injuring 934, and causing thirteen million dollars damage. Eight to ten feet of debris filled the streets following the storm. At least 70 persons died in the Cooper Pants Factory, the greatest tornado toll of record for a single building. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1973: On this date through the 8th, a major spring snowstorm dumped 11.6 inches of snow across Denver, Colorado. Most of the heavy wet snow of 10.1 inches fell on the 7th when temperatures remained in the 20s. The low temperature of 5 degrees on the 8th was a new record low for the date and the lowest for so late in the season.

1990 - Snow developed in the northeastern U.S. for the second time in the month. In Virginia, a heavy wet snow blanketed northern and central sections of the Shenandoah Valley, and eastern foothills, with up to 12 inches reported around Harrisonburg. Heavy snow also blanketed the high elevations of West Virginia, with 10 inches reported at Snowshoe. An inch of snow at Syracuse NY raised their total for the winter season to a record-tying 161.3 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Thunderstorms erupted and produced severe weather including 32 reports of tornadoes, most of which touched down in Mississippi and Louisiana. Between 20 and 25 homes were destroyed and 7 people were injured. Mississippi governor Haley Barbour declared a state of emergency (CNN).

2007: In Cleveland, Ohio on the 6th to the 9th: The opening-season series between the Indians and Minnesota Twins is wiped out by a snowstorm and a cold snap. The Indians led 4-0 when their home opener Friday on the 6th was called off by umpires because of heavy snow. The grounds crew who tried to make the field playable with backpack blowers and brooms spent more time on the field than the players during nearly three hours of stoppages. About a foot of snow remained on the ground Monday afternoon the 9th.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

HIDDEN BY MASKS

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.04.23

1 37 45 62 64 4

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$414,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 46
DRAW: Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.05.23

23 28 38 39 41 2

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,100,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 46
DRAW: Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.05.23

6 13 17 25 33 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 16 Mins 49
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.05.23

13 27 28 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 46
DRAW: Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.05.23

12 30 46 52 59 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 45
DRAW: Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.05.23

3 5 9 42 52 11

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$186,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 45
DRAW: Mins 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Judge weighs request to toss Chasing Horse's sex abuse case

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A former "Dances With Wolves" actor accused of sexually abusing Indigenous women and girls in the U.S. and Canada for two decades has asked a judge in Nevada to toss out a sweeping indictment against him in state court.

Nathan Chasing Horse, 46, claims the sexual encounters with two women identified as victims in the Nevada case were consensual. One of them was younger than 16 — the age of consent in Nevada — when she says the sexual abuse began.

Clark County District Court Judge Carli Kierny said Wednesday that she would issue her decision before the end of the week. She could deny Chasing Horse's request or dismiss some or all of the charges, although she didn't offer any indication as to how she might rule during her questioning of state prosecutors and Chasing Horse's public defender.

A Clark County jury indicted Chasing Horse, 46, in February on charges of sexual assault of a minor, kidnapping, child abuse, lewdness and drug trafficking. He has been in custody at a county jail since Jan. 31, when he was arrested by SWAT officers near the home he shared with his five wives in North Las Vegas.

He also faces sexual abuse charges in Canada and the U.S. District Court in Nevada, as well as on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana.

Prosecutors and police say Chasing Horse, who is known for his portrayal of Smiles a Lot in Kevin Costner's Oscar-winning film, marketed himself to tribes nationwide as a self-proclaimed medicine man who possessed healing powers and could communicate with higher beings. They accuse of him using his position to lead a cult known as The Circle, gain access to vulnerable girls and women and take underage wives.

The alleged crimes, according to court documents, date to the early 2000s and occurred in Canada and multiple U.S. states, including Nevada, Montana and South Dakota.

Clark County prosecutor Stacey Kollins told the judge Wednesday that Chasing Horse's claims were offensive, pointing to the age that one of the victims says the abuse began.

"She's taken at 14 because her mom is ill, and she's told that her virginity is the only pure part of her left and she has to sacrifice this to maintain her mom's health," Kollins said. "And to gloss over that by calling it transactional and saying there's no proof of non-consent, that's taking a lot of license to meet with the facts."

As Kollins spoke, the mother of one of the victims cried in the courtroom gallery, which was packed with Chasing Horse's supporters.

Public defender Kristy Holston argued the 19-count indictment was an overreach by the Clark County district attorney's office and that some evidence presented to the grand jury — including a definition of grooming — had tainted the state's case.

"It's not the same as a lack of consent," she said, adding that "a sex worker, for instance, doesn't desire sex with the client. But their motive for doing it is for something other than desire."

Outside the courtroom, Holston declined to further comment, while Kollins did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking additional comment.

Chasing Horse is currently scheduled to stand trial May 1 in the state case. He has pleaded not guilty and invoked his right to a trial within 60 days of his indictment.

He is due back in state court Monday morning for a hearing on another motion asking the judge to grant him three trials. Chasing Horse and his attorneys have argued that the sexual assault allegations and the drug trafficking charge contained in the state's indictment are unrelated.

Missouri tornado kills 5 in latest wave of severe weather

By JIM SALTER and SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

GLEN ALLEN, Mo. (AP) — A tornado ripped through southeastern Missouri before dawn on Wednesday, killing five people and causing widespread destruction as the third in a series of deadly massive storms over the past two weeks struck the nation's heartland.

Forecasters are keeping a wary eye out for more extreme weather as this year's early severe storm season continues. The storms have spawned dozens of tornadoes, mainly in the South and Midwest, that have killed at least 63 people. Just last weekend, confirmed or suspected tornadoes in at least eight states laid waste to neighborhoods across a broad swath of the country.

The Missouri tornado touched down around 3:30 a.m. Wednesday and moved through a rural area of Bollinger County, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of St. Louis. Trees were uprooted, homes turned into piles of splinters, and one building was flipped on its side.

Five people were killed and five were injured, State Highway Patrol Superintendent Eric Olson said at a news conference. Residents in the village of Glen Allen said at least some of the victims were members of a family who lived in a trailer along a state highway.

Little was left of the trailer Wednesday beyond its concrete pads and an axle. A large stuffed animal was lodged in the branch of a downed tree, and furniture, clothing and kitchenware were scattered in a field.

Olson said 12 structures were destroyed and dozens more damaged.

The damage was concentrated around Glen Allen and the small rural community of Grassy, which are separated by a hunting area, said Bollinger County Sheriff Casey Graham in a Facebook post. He didn't immediately release the victims' names.

Charles Collier, 61, said he saw the coroner's van drive by with its lights on in Glen Allen, where he owns a storage facility.

"That was a sad, sad sight -- knowing there was bodies in there," said Collier. "I was just numb, thinking about all these other people, what they're going through."

Josh Wells said that the tornado tore half of the roof off his Glen Allen home and pushed in his bedroom wall. Luckily, he fled beforehand with his son to his sister's home because it has a basement.

"We all ran down and huddled against the wall and my brother-in-law made it down just seconds before we heard the roaring sound of the wind and debris crashing around us," he said.

While his sister's home held up, the area reeked of gas because a propane unit was damaged.

Midwest tornadoes have typically occurred later in the spring, but this year's early spate of severe weather continues a trend seen over the past few years, said Bill Bunting, chief of forecast operations at the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

"Although we will likely have several relatively quiet days after the current weather system has moved east of the U.S., we are entering the time of the year where the potential for severe weather increases and much more of the U.S. becomes at risk," Bunting said in an email.

Typically, 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, experts say.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson toured the storm damage area Wednesday and said President Joe Biden had called to assure him of federal help. Local agencies anticipate months of recovery efforts, he said.

"I will tell you, I just know because I grew up in a little small town, these small towns, these counties and these cities will come together to help one another out," Parson said.

Justin Gibbs, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Paducah, Kentucky, said the tornado remained on the ground for roughly 15 minutes, traveling an estimated 15-20 miles (24-32 kilometers).

Based on early data, the tornado received a preliminary EF-2 rating, packing wind speeds of 130 mph (228 kph).

Gibbs noted that tornadoes are especially dangerous when they touch down late at night or early in the morning, as this one did.

"It's definitely a nightmare from a warning standpoint," Gibbs said. "It's bad anytime, but it's especially bad at 3:30 in the morning."

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A phone weather alert awakened Bobby Masters, who said debris was slamming his Glen Allen home as he took shelter in his basement with his family. He recalled hearing a roar as the tornado passed.

"I had never heard a tornado before. They say it sounds like a freight train and that is exactly what it sounds like," he said. "The good Lord spared us, our family and our house."

Keith Lincoln, 56, also was awakened by a phone alert. He huddled in a bathtub with his wife and 18-year-old daughter and prayed: "Just save us and the house." Lincoln spent the afternoon patching his roof but was thankful his prayer was mostly answered.

Chris Green, 35, found a small black dog dead in the debris. "I can't just leave it here," he said as he and his father buried the animal.

The area is rural, with residents mostly farming, cutting timber or working construction jobs, said Larry Welker, Bollinger County's public administrator. The county's population is around 10,500. The battered communities are tiny, little more than a few scattered homes and businesses.

The storms moving through the Midwest and South had threatened some areas still reeling from the deadly bout of bad weather last weekend. At one point, the Storm Prediction Center said up to 40 million people were at risk in an area that included Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit and Memphis, Tennessee.

In central Illinois, authorities said five people were hurt and about 300 homes were without power due to a tornado that struck in Fulton County on Tuesday evening. Chris Helle, who directs the county's Emergency Services Disaster Agency, said one of the people injured was in critical condition.

Helle said the damage was concentrated near the town of Bryant, about 200 mile (322 kilometers) southwest of Chicago. Helle said numerous homes were destroyed, but he credited people for listening to advance warnings and taking shelter.

Officials said another tornado touched down Tuesday morning in the western Illinois community of Colona. Local news reports showed wind damage to some businesses there.

McFetridge reported from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press writers Margaret Stafford in Liberty, Missouri, Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, Trisha Ahmed in Minneapolis and Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed to this report.

Challenge to Biden 'Cost of Carbon' policy dismissed

By KEVIN MCGILL and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A lawsuit that Louisiana and other Republican-leaning states filed challenging figures the Biden administration uses to calculate damages from greenhouse gasses was dismissed Wednesday by a federal appeals court.

The unanimous decision by three judges on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans was the latest defeat for states challenging the Biden "cost of carbon" policy. It leaves the administration to continue using a damage cost estimate of about \$51 per ton of carbon dioxide emissions as it develops environmental regulations. That estimate is under review by the administration and could increase.

The Biden cost estimate had been used during former President Barack Obama's administration. President Joe Biden restored it on his first day in office after the administration of former President Donald Trump had reduced the figure to about \$7 or less per ton.

A federal judge in Louisiana had ordered a halt to the administration's approach early last year after the states filed a lawsuit. The states said the policy threatened to drive up energy costs while decreasing state revenues from energy production.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans blocked the judge's order and the Supreme Court declined to intervene.

On Thursday the appeals court dismissed the case, saying the challenging states had no standing to sue because they had not shown that the regulations caused the economic harms their lawsuit cited.

"Plaintiffs contemplate harms that are several steps removed from — and are not guaranteed by — the challenged Executive Order," wrote Judge Jacques Wiener, appointed to the court by former President

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George H.W. Bush, on behalf of a panel that also included Obama appointee Stephen Higginson and Trump appointee Cory Wilson.

The \$51 per ton estimate was established in 2016 and used to justify major rules such as the Clean Power Plan — former President Barack Obama's signature effort to address climate change by tightening emissions standards from coal-fired power plants — and separate rules imposing tougher vehicle emission standards. However, the Clean Power Plan never took effect after being blocked by federal courts.

Now, the administration is reviewing the \$51 per ton estimate. The Environmental Protection Agency in September proposed a cost roughly four times higher than the Obama figure.

Researchers have said for years that the damage done by every ton of carbon dioxide that comes out of a smokestack or tailpipe far exceeds \$51. A study last year in the journal *Nature* concluded the price should be \$185 per ton — 3.6 times higher than the U.S. standard.

A 2017 report from the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine said current carbon pricing calculations were inadequate. Researchers began calculating damages from carbon emissions in the 1980s and before 2017, the last updates to the modelling were in the early to mid 1990s.

The other states whose officials sued are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota, Texas, West Virginia and Wyoming.

Brown reported from Billings, Montana. Associated Press reporter Matthew Daly, in Washington, contributed to this report.

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 4, 2023.

Editorial: Legislative Fear And The Commerce Veto

The failure of South Dakota lawmakers to override Gov. Kristi Noem's veto of an interstate commerce bill last week may have been a sign of fear, according to a state Chamber of Commerce official, but it also may have been an indication of a lack of urgency and understanding of an issue that will become more pressing during next year's legislative session.

Last week, Dave Owen, president of the South Dakota Chamber of Commerce and Industry, was in Yankton to review what had happened in the 2023 legislative session. That also included assessing the votes that had been sustained in Pierre just three days before.

One of those vetoes killed House Bill, 1193, which would have revised the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) regulating finance and trade. The bill has been endorsed nationally, and states have been working to align themselves with the new policy. It's a situation that comes up from time to time and usually passes with few problems.

But not this time.

The bill was targeted for defeat by some conservative lawmakers because they believed "the measure would create government overreach and invade personal freedoms and privacy," the Press & Dakotan reported. These included cryptocurrency issues and worries that it would allow the federal government to create its own digital currency.

"At the last minute, concerns came up over cryptocurrency and whether bitcoin is or isn't money or whether government should begin to create a (system) that recognizes electronic transfer of money," Owen said. "The Uniform Commercial Code is an agreement that all states adopt that regulates how these exchanges are made. I think the opponents managed to confuse the commercial code with monetary policy."

The end result, Owen believed, was the stirring up of fear among lawmakers.

"(HB 1193) got 49 votes in the House, and then (on Veto Day), it got 30 and it needed 47 to override," he said.

"Facts can rarely conquer fear. Given the fact there is time (until next year) and the governor decided to oppose it, we couldn't get it past her (veto) and the fear that was struck up by the opponents — led

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by your representative (Julie Auch), by the way.”

At one point, Owen seemed to joke that the issue might pass as an un-debated consent item next winter, but he later added, “... my prediction is this will get studied and looked at next year. It will pass virtually without comment.”

Nevertheless, that leaves financial institutions sitting in limbo regarding the legislation.

“The disadvantage you’ve left the banking industry in, by not adopting it this year, is that they’re going to have less time to make the changes they need to make in their system programming and the ability to function under the new code,” Owen said. “They’ll still have six months, but if we don’t pass it next year, we start a process of falling out of exchanges.”

So, there will still be time to address the situation and align South Dakota with upcoming national policy, and that knowledge may have allowed legislators to pass on it amid political turbulence this winter.

However, the loss of so many votes on this issue — based, perhaps, on fears whipped up by the bill’s opponents — suggests that nothing on the matter can be taken for granted, which could be a real concern next session when the clock will be ticking.

Madison Daily Leader. April 2, 2023.

Editorial: Fighting for your future

It is now more important than ever to be a member of the South Dakota Corn Growers Association.

If you don’t feel the need to be part of a grassroots commodity group, take a few minutes to read this to find out why we need you in our corner.

I joined the South Dakota Corn Growers Association in 2014 and got elected to the board in 2019. Today I’m serving as the president. I didn’t expect to be in this role, but I’m sure glad this is where I ended up.

I’m a third-generation corn and soybean farmer from Madison. Just like my friends and neighbors who also farm, I believe this is a great way to make a living, and I’m proud to raise my four daughters understanding where their food and fuel comes from as well as the hard work that’s behind production agriculture. But believe me when I say that farmers are as a group shrinking in size in our great country, that is indeed a fact.

Why does all this matter?

When Congress starts laying out their policies that affect the agricultural community, who do you think they look to for direction? They look to commodity groups. This past January, U.S. Sen. John Thune hosted his Farm Bill Roundtable for all South Dakota commodity groups. This was our opportunity to provide our insight as to what we feel are important policy points specifically for South Dakota corn farmers. Important things like protecting crop insurance, increasing reference price and loan rates, modernizing the Farm Bill safety net through a mandatory base acre update, and increasing maximum loan rates for farm ownership programs at FSA. Did you know that more than 40% of the Representatives serving in the U.S. House of Representatives have never voted on a Farm Bill? And I guarantee you many have never stepped a foot on a farm. If we aren’t able to represent corn farmers uniquely in South Dakota, who would?

When a derecho destroyed our grain storage facilities in 2022, the SDCGA stepped up to get CCC funding for farmers who were devastated from this natural disaster. On March 9, the USDA announced that eligible farmers in South Dakota will be able to apply for a cost share to rebuild their on-farm storage.

These are just a couple of extremely important reasons why we need you as part of our organization. Simply put, the more members we have the more we can effectively engage in situations that not only affect us today but for generations to come.

It’s easy to join and it probably costs less than it would to spend a night out on the town, but it sure makes a lot bigger impact. Hope to see your name on the roster at our next annual meeting.

END

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Saudi, Iran restore ties, say they seek Mideast stability

By MALAK HARB Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Long-time Mideast rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia took another significant step toward reconciliation Thursday, formally restoring diplomatic ties after a seven-year rift, affirming the need for regional stability and agreeing to pursue economic cooperation.

The agreement was reached in Beijing during a meeting between the Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers, a month after China had brokered an initial reconciliation agreement between the two regional powerhouses.

The latest understanding further lowers the chance of armed conflict between the rivals, both directly and in proxy conflicts around the region. It could bolster efforts by diplomats to end a long war in Yemen, a conflict in which both Iran and Saudi Arabia are deeply entrenched.

Thursday's announcement also represents another diplomatic victory for the Chinese as Gulf Arab states perceive the United States slowly withdrawing from the wider region.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian laid out details of Thursday's agreement in a tweet, after his talks with Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud.

The minister wrote that Thursday marked the beginning of "official diplomatic relations ... economic and commercial cooperation, the reopening of embassies and consulates general, and the emphasis on stability, stable security and development of the region." Amirabdollahian said that the issues are "agreed upon and on the common agenda."

The official Iranian news agency, IRNA, said that in addition to reopening embassies in the two capitals, diplomatic missions would start operating in two other major cities — Mashhad in Iran and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. The report said both sides also agreed to study the prospects of resuming flights and official and private visits between the two nations, in addition to how to facilitate the visa process for their people.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the two foreign ministers signed a joint statement and expressed their determination to improve ties in line with their talks in Beijing last month.

Thursday's talks in Beijing marked the first formal meeting of senior diplomats from the two nations since 2016, when the kingdom broke ties with Iran after protesters invaded Saudi diplomatic posts there. Saudi Arabia had executed a prominent Shiite cleric with 46 others days earlier, triggering the demonstrations.

The warming of ties shows that "regional countries have the will and ability to take the lead" in maintaining peace, Mao said at the briefing.

She said China is ready to support both sides in fostering good relations, urging the international community to help the Middle Eastern countries resolve their differences.

"The colonial hegemonic tactics of stirring up contradictions, creating estrangement and division should be rejected by the people all over the world," she said.

Associated Press writers Kanis Leung in Hong Kong and Amir Vahdat in Tehran contributed.

China vows 'forceful' measures after US-Taiwan meeting

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China vowed reprisals against Taiwan after a meeting between the United States House speaker and the island's president, saying Thursday that the U.S. was on a "wrong and dangerous road."

Speaker Kevin McCarthy hosted Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen on Wednesday in a show of U.S. support for the self-ruled island, which China claims as its own, along with a bipartisan delegation of more than a dozen U.S. lawmakers.

The Biden administration maintains there is nothing provocative about the visit by Tsai, which is the latest of a half-dozen to the U.S. Yet, it comes as the U.S.-China relationship has fallen to historic lows, with U.S. support for Taiwan becoming one of the main points of difference between the two powers.

But the formal trappings of the meeting, and the senior rank of some of the elected officials in the delegation from Congress, could lead China to view it as an escalation. No speaker is known to have met

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with a Taiwan president on U.S. soil since the U.S. broke off formal diplomatic relations in 1979.

In response to the meeting, Beijing said it would take "resolute and forceful measures to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," in a statement issued early Thursday morning by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It urged the U.S. "not to walk further down a wrong and dangerous road."

In December, China's military sent 71 planes and seven ships toward Taiwan in a 24-hour display of force directed at the self-ruled island after China expressed anger at Taiwan-related provisions in a U.S. annual defense spending bill. China's military pressure campaign on Taiwan has intensified in recent years, and the Communist Party has sent planes or ships toward the island on a near-daily basis.

But as of Thursday afternoon, there was no overt sign of a large-scale military response.

"We will take resolute measures to punish the 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces and their actions, and resolutely safeguard our country's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said a statement from China's Taiwan Affairs Office Thursday morning, referring to Tsai and her political party as separatists.

Chinese vessels were engaged in a joint patrol and inspection operation in the Taiwan Strait that will last three days, state media said Thursday morning. The Fujian Maritime Safety Administration said its ship, the Haixun 06, would inspect cargo ships and others in the waters that run between Taiwan and China as part of the operation.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense said Wednesday evening it had tracked China's Shandong aircraft carrier passing southeast of Taiwan through the Bashi Strait. On Thursday morning, it tracked three People's Liberation Army navy vessels and one warplane in the area around the island.

U.S. Congressional visits to Taiwan have stepped up in frequency in the past year, and the American Institute in Taipei, the de facto embassy, announced the arrival of another delegation Thursday. House Foreign Affairs Committee head Michael McCaul of Texas is leading a delegation of eight other lawmakers for a three-day visit to discuss regional security and trade, according to a statement from AIT.

At their meeting Wednesday, Tsai and McCarthy spoke carefully to avoid unnecessarily escalating tensions with Beijing. Standing side by side at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in California, the two acknowledged China's threats against the island government.

"America's support for the people of Taiwan will remain resolute, unwavering and bipartisan," McCarthy said at a news conference later. He also said U.S.-Taiwan ties are stronger than at any other point in his life.

Tsai said the "unwavering support reassures the people of Taiwan that we are not isolated."

More than a dozen Democratic and Republican lawmakers, including the House's third-ranking Democrat, had joined the meeting.

Tsai said she and McCarthy spoke of the importance of Taiwan's self-defense, of fostering robust trade and economic ties and supporting the island government's ability to participate in the international community.

But she also warned, "It is no secret that today the peace that we have maintained and the democracy which we have worked hard to build are facing unprecedented challenges."

"We once again find ourselves in a world where democracy is under threat and the urgency of keeping the beacon of freedom shining cannot be understated," she said.

The United States broke off official ties with Taiwan in 1979 while formally establishing diplomatic relations with the Beijing government. As part of its recognition of China, the U.S. "One China" policy acknowledges that Beijing lays claim to Taiwan, but does not endorse China's claim, and the U.S. remains Taiwan's key provider of military and defense assistance.

Washington also has a policy of strategic ambiguity, where it does not explicitly say whether it will come to Taiwan's aid in the case of a conflict with China.

In Taiwan, Tsai's visit did not make a huge splash, though fellow politicians paid close attention.

Ko Wen-je, the former Taipei city mayor who's thought to have presidential aspirations, said he welcomed any exchange between Taiwan and international leaders.

"Taiwan hopes to have a greater space to operate globally, and the mainland shouldn't get flustered because of this," Ko wrote on his Facebook page. "It should show the attitude of a civilized nation and

stop its suppression by military force.”

Opposition lawmaker Johnny Chiang of the Nationalist party said that Tsai’s meeting with McCarthy was still within the guardrails of the “One China” policy because it showed that while Congress was relatively free to support Taiwan, the White House was more constrained, according to local media.

In August, then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi traveled to Taiwan to meet with Tsai. China responded with its largest live-fire drills in decades, including firing a missile over the island.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 after a civil war and have no official relations, although they are linked by billions of dollars in trade and investment.

Why are French workers angry about raising retirement age?

By THOMAS ADAMSON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Hundreds of thousands of people are expected to fill the streets of France Thursday for the 11th day of nationwide resistance to a government proposal to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64. The furious public reaction to the plan has cornered and weakened French President Emmanuel Macron.

France’s highest body on constitutional affairs will be considering the higher retirement age. The Constitutional Council is expected to issue a ruling this month and Macron’s opponents hope it will severely limit his proposal.

In many countries, raising the retirement age by two years wouldn’t throw the nation into such disarray. But the French public is overwhelmingly against pension reform, and unrelenting demonstrations against it have morphed into wider anger.

HOW ANGRY ARE PEOPLE?

Mounds of up to 10,000 tons of trash piled up on the streets of Paris during a weeklong strike by sanitation workers over a plan that would push their retirement age from 57 to 59 — lower than the national age because their jobs are physically harder.

“People are angry,” said Jerome Villier, a 43-year-old doctoral researcher in Paris. “It’s obvious.”

Many governments in the developed world are in similar situations. Population growth is down, people are living longer, medicine is better and benefits cost more. Democracies’ attempts to balance budgets by cutting benefits, particularly in countries with generous plans like France’s, put administrations at risk. Many agree that Macron that has made some fundamental missteps.

THE NUCLEAR OPTION

Fearing he might not get enough votes in parliament to pass the bill, Macron resorted to the “nuclear option” by using a special article of the French constitution allowing the government to force the bill through without a vote. That prompted outrage across France that further fueled discontent, diminished his popularity, and galvanized his critics’ image of him as a monarchical leader.

Macron lost his majority in parliament last year and his government survived two no-confidence votes last month — one by only a razor-thin nine votes — after he angered the nation by ramming the reform through parliament.

Experts say the protests show that Macron was re-elected because of antipathy for far-right contender Marine Le Pen more than enthusiasm for him. And even if the protests die down, the French president will still have sustained a political bloody nose and a permanent stain on his authority.

“I’m worried for France. Because people really hate Macron — we hate him — and we’re only at the beginning, we have four more years,” said insurance salesman Mohamed Belmoud, 28. “He continued being top-down. The French need to see more compromise.”

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The pensions law needs a green light from the Constitutional Council on April 14. The Paris trash collectors’ union has called for fresh strikes April 13, with other unions pledging to keep resisting until the controversial law is canceled. Some predict the French public’s enthusiasm — and resources — for protests and strikes is dwindling.

“Going on strike is an expensive affair so you can’t do it forever,” said Jean-Daniel Levy, deputy director

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of Harris Interactive polling. And diminished spending power is a real issue, leaving many unable to afford to strike more, he said.

Others say violence seen in the nationwide protests, with dozens of demonstrators and police hurt, has turned off regular people.

"The demonstrations have become more violent as they've gone on. That means many in France are now staying away," Luc Rouban, research director of the CNRS at Sciences Po.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THESE PROTESTS?

France's highest constitutional court is made up of judges called "the wise ones" and presided over by former Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius. If it decides that part or all of the law is out of step with the constitution, or the scope of the law's intentions, the council can strike it down. The "wise ones" will also rule on whether the law's critics can move ahead with their attempts to force a nationwide referendum on the pension change.

While the council is meant to rule on purely constitutional grounds, experts say it tends to take public opinion into account.

"Polls still show that an overwhelming majority of the French are against the pension reforms, so one likely scenario is that the council could scrap parts of the bill," said Dominique Andolfatto, professor of political sciences at the University of Burgundy.

"There's a certain hatred in the air that we've rarely seen against a French leader," he said. "This is uncharted water."

Rockets fired from Gaza raise tension as Passover begins

By SAM McNEIL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Palestinian militants fired a barrage of rockets early Thursday, setting off air raid sirens in southern Israel, as violence erupted for the second day in a row during a sensitive period of overlapping holidays.

The Israeli military said seven rockets launched from the Gaza Strip all exploded in midair. No group claimed responsibility for the barrage.

The barrage came after another tense night at Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where Israeli police clashed with Muslim worshippers attempting to stay overnight.

Since Ramadan began March 22, scores of Muslims have repeatedly tried to stay overnight in the mosque, a practice that is typically permitted only during the last 10 days of the monthlong holiday. Israeli police have entered nightly to evict the worshipers, but on Tuesday the scene erupted in violence.

Worshippers threw stones and firecrackers at police, who responded with beatings that left dozens bloody and the arrest of hundreds.

On Wednesday, the Israeli police made no arrests but did detain and question some Palestinians, a spokesperson said.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said it was not allowed into the compound Wednesday, but dozens were injured from from beatings, rubber bullets and stun grenades, including an ambulance driver.

Israeli newspaper Haaretz said protests on Wednesday night drew hundreds in communities across Israel's north, home to many of Israel's Palestinian citizens, who make up one-fifth of its 9.6 million people. Police said they arrested five protesters in the large town of Um al-Fahm.

The rocket fire raised fears of a wider conflagration as Jews began the week-long Passover holiday, hundreds of Christians in the Old City gathered for Holy Thursday at the Holy Sepulcher to mark the Last Supper, and Muslims marked the Ramadan holy month.

Al-Aqsa is the third-holiest site in Islam and stands on a hilltop known to Jews as the Temple Mount, which is the holiest site in Judaism. Conflicting claims over it have spilled into violence before, including a bloody 11-day war two years ago between Israel and Hamas, the Islamic militant group that rules Gaza.

Muslim leaders around the Middle East criticized the Israeli actions in Al-Aqsa.

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose country recently reconciled with Israel and restored full diplomatic ties, condemned the violence in a television interview late Wednesday.

"Interventions and threats against the historical status and spirituality of Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as the Palestinians' right to life and religious beliefs must come to an end," Erdogan told Turkey's 24 TV. "We will continue to stand by our Palestinian brothers and sisters under all circumstances and protect what is sacred to us. Israel should know this."

Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group condemned the storming of the mosque, calling it "a flagrant violation of believers in Jerusalem" that violated religious, moral and human values.

The Islamic Waqf authorities, which manage the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, said 199 Jewish worshipers entered the site on Thursday morning without incident.

Associated Press writers Suzan Fraser in Ankara, Turkey and Bassem Mroue in Beirut, Lebanon contributed to this report.

GOP's DeSantis visits Whitmer's Michigan, the 'anti-Florida'

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Ahead of a highly anticipated presidential announcement, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis will visit Michigan for his first appearance this year in the state transformed by Democratic majorities under high-profile Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

The visit will put the contrasting leadership styles of the Republican and Democrat on display after they scored landslide 2022 reelection victories that vaulted them to be their parties' brightest emerging stars.

In Florida, DeSantis and the GOP-dominated Legislature have moved the state further right, waging a culture war on what the governor has called "woke" agendas. In Michigan, Whitmer has led the way on codifying abortion rights and advancing sweeping gun reform with Democrats in full control for the first time in decades.

Whitmer has been a top ally to President Joe Biden and a kind of proxy for his leadership in their party — and what's possible under Democrats. DeSantis is one of the top potential candidates looking to unseat Biden next year.

Thursday's visit is also one of DeSantis's first out-of-state appearances since former President Donald Trump was indicted. With all eyes on Trump and his charges, it has been difficult for those vying for the GOP nomination to gain much notice.

Trump frequently targets DeSantis — a similarity that the governor shares with Whitmer, who Trump labeled "that woman from Michigan" during his presidency. Recently, Trump has ramped up his DeSantis criticism, saying during a rally in Waco on March 25 that the Florida politician was disloyal and "dropping like a rock."

Potentially the fifth state to hold its Republican primary, Michigan could prove pivotal for the GOP presidential nomination winner. Michigan House Republican Speaker Bryan Posthumus flew to Florida in December to deliver a letter signed by 18 other state House Republicans encouraging DeSantis to run for president.

"When he becomes an actual candidate, I will be doing another letter saying we endorse you for President of the United States of America," Posthumus told The Associated Press.

DeSantis will first travel Thursday morning to central Michigan to speak at a Midland County GOP event. State Rep. Bill G. Schuette, a Midland-area Republican, said the county party wanted to hear more about DeSantis's perspectives and proposals, in comparison to Michigan, which Schuette described as the "anti-Florida."

In the three weeks since Florida's legislative session began, DeSantis has worked to expand the state's so-called Don't Say Gay law, ban diversity and equity programs at public universities and eliminate concealed carry restrictions. The state has also begun passing a six-week abortion ban backed by DeSantis.

"What Gov. DeSantis has done in Florida versus what Gov. Whitmer and the Democrats have done in Michigan is polar opposite," Posthumus said.

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DeSantis is also scheduled to speak at Hillsdale College, a small, Christian classical liberal arts college in southern Michigan. The school has become a model for DeSantis's transformation of a small liberal arts school, New College of Florida, that he says is indoctrinating students with leftist ideology and should be revamped into a more conservative institution.

DeSantis's Midland event is expected to draw over 200 demonstrators to rally outside, protest organizers said.

Michigan voters have overwhelmingly rejected Republicans in the seven years since Trump won the state. Democrats control the statewide offices of governor, attorney general and secretary of state in addition to holding majorities in the Legislature.

With full control of the Statehouse for the first time in 40 years, Michigan Democrats have prioritized further protecting reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights that are being rolled back in Republican-led states across the nation.

On Wednesday, Whitmer signed legislation outside of Detroit repealing a 1931 abortion ban after voters in November enshrined rights to the procedure in their constitution. She called out Florida and other Republican-led states for taking steps to pass "un-American, anti-free and, frankly, sickening," abortion laws.

"To all the women and girls and allies in states who don't value you or your rights, maybe you should come to Michigan," Whitmer said Wednesday.

Often saying that "bigotry is bad for business," the Michigan governor said the state's liberal measures will help attract socially-conscious businesses and new talent. Last month, Michigan became the first state in nearly 60 years to repeal a union-restricting law known as "right-to-work."

Business advocates disagree, saying that Florida proves otherwise. Florida, one of the first states to implement a "right-to-work" law that allows employees to opt out of paying union dues and fees, began advancing legislation last week that would ban automatic paycheck deductions for members.

Michigan has the 35th highest percent change in job growth over the past year at 2.1% while Florida was tied for second at 4.6%. Florida saw the largest population increase of any state from 2021 to 2022 — at 1.9% — while Michigan's population slightly decreased over the same period.

Brad Hershbein, a senior economist at the nonpartisan W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, said "most of these movements reflect long-term trends that are tied to climate and economics more than politics."

"Florida has been growing over decades, no matter which party controlled the governor's office, mostly because of its climate and zero income tax," Hershbein said.

Gun legislation, an increasingly polarizing issue following multiple school shootings to start the year, has also differed greatly in Michigan and Florida.

DeSantis and Republicans have begun rolling back restrictions that were implemented after the 2018 school shooting in Parkland. DeSantis signed a bill Monday that will allow carrying concealed guns without a permit. He has said he wants to allow people to openly carry guns.

"You don't need a permission slip from the government to be able to exercise your Second Amendment rights," DeSantis said at a Georgia gun store on March 30.

In Michigan, Democrats are close to passing an 11-bill gun safety package that Whitmer has said she will sign, including red flag laws and safe storage requirements. A Michigan State University shooting in February was the state's second school shooting in 15 months.

Associated Press writer Anthony Izaguirre in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

Idaho governor signs 'abortion trafficking' bill into law

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho Gov. Brad Little signed a bill into law Wednesday that makes it illegal for an adult to help a minor get an abortion without parental consent.

The law is the first of its kind in the U.S. and creates a new crime of "abortion trafficking," barring adults from obtaining abortion pills for a minor or "recruiting, harboring or transporting the pregnant minor"

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without the consent of the minor's parent or guardian.

Anyone convicted of breaking the law will face two to five years in prison and could also be sued by the minor's parent or guardian. Parents who raped their child will not be able to sue, though the criminal penalties for anyone who helped the minor obtain an abortion will remain in effect.

To sidestep violating a constitutional right to travel between states, Idaho's law makes illegal only the in-state segment of a trip to an out-of-state abortion provider.

Opponents have promised a legal battle.

"Yet again, Idaho's governor disregarded constituents and signed HB 242 into law, creating the nation's first crime of so-called 'abortion trafficking.' This legislation is despicable, and we're going to do everything in our power to stop it," Idaho State Director for Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates-West said Wednesday on Twitter.

Idaho is one of 13 states that already effectively ban abortion in all stages of pregnancy, and is one of a handful of states that already have laws penalizing those who help people of any age obtain abortions.

State leaders in Washington, Oregon and California have promoted the West Coast as a safe haven for abortion procedures, and lawmakers in Oregon and Washington are considering bills to shield abortion providers and patients from criminal liability. Oregon's bill would allow physicians to provide abortion to anyone regardless of age, and would bar them in certain cases from disclosing that information to parents.

Thirty-six states require parental involvement in a minor's decision to have an abortion, though most allow exceptions under certain circumstances like medical emergencies, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group supporting abortion rights.

Thousands still missing from 20 years of Iraq's turmoil

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Nawal Sweidan quietly folded her son's clothes and straightened the bedsheets in his room as she always used to do when he was out at work or at university. She still does it regularly, even though he hasn't been home for almost 10 years since he was taken away by militiamen.

Her son Safaa vanished in late July 2014. At around 1:30 a.m., just days before the holy month of Ramadan was to end and holiday celebrations were to begin, a group of men showed up at the family's doorstep and asked for Safaa, a law student and postal carrier in his early 20s.

"They told us they just wanted to question him and will return him soon," Sweidan said.

Twenty years after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, much of the conflict and sectarian bloodletting it unleashed has subsided. But those years left a legacy of thousands of people — or perhaps tens of thousands, like Safaa — who went missing, and their families feel forgotten as they seek answers about their loved ones' fates. As it tries to turn the page on Iraq's troubled past, the government has not established a commission to look into the missing — in part, rights workers say, because politicians are intertwined with armed groups involved in kidnappings and killings.

Sweidan's hometown, Mahmoudiya, was repeatedly an epicenter of sectarian violence over the past two decades. Situated along the main road that Shiite pilgrims take to reach the holy city of Karbala, it is a mixed town of Sunnis and Shiites. Residents say they generally coexisted before the 2003 invasion that toppled dictator Saddam Hussein.

Post-2003, it became part of the notorious "Triangle of Death" as Sunni and Shiite extremist groups targeted each other's communities with vicious killings and Sunni al-Qaida insurgents attacked American forces. Sweidan's daughter was killed in 2004 by a roadside bomb that tore through the town's marketplace.

Safaa disappeared amid another wave of sectarian reprisals and tit-for-tat kidnappings in 2014. At the time, the Islamic State group surged nearby and seized areas as close as 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Mahmoudiya, bringing a backlash from Shiite militias. Sweidan's family are Sunnis, and while Sweidan would not comment on who took her son, one relative said she believes it was Shiite militiamen.

For years, Sweidan looked through prisons across several cities and spoke to officials and whoever might give her clues. Whenever news came of prisoners being released after doing time, Sweidan would rush

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to the prison to see if her son was among them.

"Everywhere I looked, he just wasn't there," she said, struggling to hold back her tears. "So I've sat quietly ever since and decided to leave it in God's hands."

Sweidan's next-door neighbor, Nidal Ali, is Shiite and faces the same pain. Her son Ammar was kidnapped around the same time.

"They took him and said he will be back in five minutes," Ali said, holding a portrait of her son close to her chest. She believes his abductors were Sunni extremists. "They took six people from our area. They were all young and poor."

She, too, searched prisons and towns across the country and paid scammers who claimed they could get inside information about his whereabouts. Ammar was almost 40 when he was kidnapped, leaving behind his wife and five children. His youngest son, Mohammad, was a toddler at the time; now 11, he sat quietly next to his grandmother.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said it has received 43,293 cases of people who disappeared since 2003. Of those, more than 26,700 cases remain unresolved. That is far higher than the Iraqi government estimate of 16,000 Iraqis who have gone missing over the same period.

The ICRC numbers include more categories of missing and are likely more accurate than the government's, said Raz Salayi, Iraq researcher at international human rights organization Amnesty International. Neither estimate includes the missing from conflicts prior to 2003, or those who disappeared into Saddam's prisons.

The Geneva-based ICRC every year continues to receive requests from families asking for help in finding missing relatives. In 2022, it received almost 1,500 new requests.

"It probably is just the tip of the iceberg and doesn't represent the real numbers of the missing," said Sara al-Zawqari, a spokesperson at the ICRC's Baghdad.

Iraqi families are not the only ones left without answers in a region where several countries have been torn apart by war and sectarian strife. The fate of over 17,000 missing during Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war remains unknown. The Lebanese government formed a national commission in 2020, under pressure as a growing number of relatives died without learning their loved ones' fates. In Syria's conflict, now in its 13th year, families of the disappeared are urging the United Nations to open an independent inquiry into as many as 100,000 missing people.

Salayi, the Amnesty researcher, said the Iraqi government's lack of initiative towards the missing is unsurprising, given political parties' links with militias accused of kidnappings and tit-for-tat violence over the years.

"How can a government that allows perpetrators of gross human rights violations to run for office hold itself accountable?" Salayi said. "There is no logic to it."

An Iraqi Justice Ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to reporters, would say only that political tensions and sectarian sensitivities are obstacles for any state inquiry into the missing.

Sweidan, Ali and other relatives of those missing said their loved ones could be among the large numbers of people swept up in mass arrests carried out over the years in response to militant and sectarian violence. They hold out hope for answers if the government grants amnesty to those long held without charge or evidence, but the authorities have not been cooperative.

Mass graves are regularly found, but it can take years to identify remains, said al-Zawqari of the Red Cross. In a further complication, there are multiple eras of mass graves. Remains of people missing since the war with Iran in the 1980s continue to be discovered. "The more time passes, the more challenging the search becomes," she said.

There haven't been any leads about Safaa's whereabouts, but Sweidan believes that he is alive and that it's only a matter of time until they are reunited.

"Sometimes, when I am asleep, I hear his voice saying 'Mama', and I wake up."

___ Associated Press writer Qassim Abdul-Zahra in Baghdad contributed to this report.

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LIV and let live: Masters still about who wins green jacket

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Masters Chairman Fred Ridley sat among 33 champions in green jackets at golf's most exclusive dinner. It was a time to celebrate Scottie Scheffler as the most recent winner, to share laughs, memories and even a few tears.

That's how it is every year at Augusta National.

"I would not have known that anything was going on in the world of professional golf other than the norm," Ridley said on the eve of a Masters unlike any other. "So I think — and I'm hopeful — that this week might get people thinking in a little bit different direction and things will change."

There's a full menu of activity at this Masters.

Tiger Woods returns for his 25th appearance with hopes his course knowledge can compensate for battered legs as he pursues another green jacket. Rory McIlroy gets another crack at the one major that keeps him from the career Grand Slam. No one has won the Masters back-to-back since Woods in 2002, and with Scheffler the No. 1 player in the world, he has an excellent chance.

The forecast is for the weather to turn nasty on the weekend. The real storm has been brewing for the last 10 months since the launch of LIV Golf and the 18 players at the Masters who defected to the rival league for its Saudi riches.

There have been accusations that LIV Golf isn't serious competition with its 54-hole events, and even some name-calling — Fred Couples referred to Phil Mickelson as a "nut bag" — of LIV players for turning their backs on the tour that made them famous.

"Everyone thinks we suck now, so I want to play great," Harold Varner III said, a LIV player with "Golf Saudi" on his bag. Varner joined for the money. He makes no secret about that.

All that gets set aside on Thursday when the players — professional and amateur, PGA Tour loyalists and those with LIV — have one thing in common.

"We talk about all these issues in golf, but we are here this week — these 88 players — and that's all that's on their mind is playing for that green jacket," Ridley said. "It's a great symbol of celebration of this game. And we're looking forward to seeing someone donning it on Sunday afternoon."

Normalcy is hard to find these days.

The PGA Tour and LIV Golf are involved in an antitrust lawsuit — a case management conference before a federal judge is scheduled for Friday afternoon, about the time Woods should be headed to Amen Corner.

A London-based arbitration panel reportedly will rule this week in favor of the European tour's ability to sanction LIV players.

The large oak tree next to the Augusta National clubhouse is where all the VIPs across golf gather. Missing was Greg Norman, the CEO and commissioner of LIV Golf.

Norman stoked the debate by telling The Daily Telegraph if a LIV player won the Masters, the other 17 would be waiting for him behind the 18th green to celebrate. Norman won't be there because he says he wasn't invited.

"They only sent me a grounds pass last year and nothing, zilch, this time around," he said. "I'm disappointed because it's so petty, but of course I'll still be watching."

Ridley was quick to point that Norman, typically invited as a two-time British Open champion, showed up only twice in the last 10 years, once while doing radio commentary.

"We did not extend an invitation to Mr. Norman. The primary issue and the driver there is that I want the focus this week to be on the Masters competition, on the great players that are participating, the greatest players in the world," Ridley said.

That includes LIV players. Ridley made sure of that when he announced in December that while he's not happy with the fractured environment in golf, the Masters would honor players who qualified under the criteria.

By appearance, it certainly seems normal.

The players invited to take part in formal press conferences were the usual suspects — that included British Open champion Cameron Smith, the last big name to sign with LIV — though Phil Mickelson declined.

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The starting times had a mixture of PGA Tour and LIV Golf players, though none of the LIV players are part of the featured groups that will be streamed live.

Brooks Koepka played a practice round Tuesday with McIlroy, who has delivered some of the sharpest digs at LIV Golf over the last year. Koepka, a four-time major champion, last week became the first multiple winner at LIV Golf. McIlroy sent him a text to congratulate him and Koepka asked if he wanted to play a practice round.

Was it an indication of thawing relations between the rival circuits?

"I guess you could say that. It's more just two friends wanting to play together," Koepka said. "I just wanted to play with him, just compare my game. I know he's been playing well. It was good for me to see, and I think it's fun to be able to go play with these guys."

And then he was back to playing with LIV colleagues on Wednesday.

"Everything's been good, man," Koepka said. "We're still the same people."

The idea is to make this the same Masters as it's always been, and Ridley said he was happy to see the "tone has been really good here this week."

"Golf brings people together, and I'm equally hopeful this week Augusta can be the beginning of a path forward for our game," he said.

For now, all paths lead toward a green jacket. And that makes this Masters no different from so many others.

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

Peru ex-leader Toledo loses bid to stop extradition from US

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A U.S. appeals court panel on Wednesday denied an appeal by former Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo Manrique to stop his extradition to face charges he accepted millions of dollars in bribes as part of a mammoth corruption scandal in which four of Peru's ex-presidents have been implicated.

Toledo, 77, is accused of taking \$20 million in bribes from Odebrecht, a giant Brazilian construction company that has admitted to U.S. authorities that it bribed officials to win contracts throughout Latin America for decades. He had sought a stay on his extradition pending a legal challenge to the U.S. State Department's decision to send him back to Peru.

Toledo, who was Peru's president in 2001-2006, was arrested in July 2019 at his home in Menlo Park, California. He was initially held in solitary confinement at the Santa Rita Jail about 40 miles (60 kilometers) east of San Francisco, but was released in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. He has been under house arrest since then.

The judge in the extradition case, Thomas Hixson, revoked Toledo's bail Wednesday and ordered him to surrender to U.S. marshals in San Francisco by 9 a.m. Friday to be returned to jail, at the request of U.S. Attorney Ismail Ramsey. Ramsey said that the U.S. Marshals Service would move to turn him over to Peruvian authorities. But when that might happen was unclear.

The Odebrecht corruption scandal has shaken Peru's politics, with nearly every living former president now on trial or under investigation.

Former President Ollanta Humala is standing trial on charges that he and his wife received over \$3 million from Odebrecht for his presidential campaigns in 2006 and 2011. Both have denied any wrongdoing.

Ex-leader Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who left office in 2018, is under house arrest for similar charges.

Former leader Alan García, in office in 2006-2011, fatally shot himself in the head in 2019 as police arrived at his home to arrest him.

In his effort to stay the extradition order, Toledo argued that Peru hadn't submitted a charging document or shown probable cause. But the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco said in its ruling that Peruvian prosecutors have filed charging documents that are sufficient to support Toledo's extradition.

The three-member panel said statements made by two witnesses in the corruption case who testified against Toledo were enough "to establish probable cause in an extradition hearing."

"Toledo, moreover, admitted that \$21 million in bribe money was transferred into accounts under his former chief-of-security's control, \$17.5 million ended up in his mother-in-law's company, and \$500,000 was deposited in a bank account in his name or used to purchase real estate titled to him," the court wrote.

Toledo also argued that he shouldn't be sent back because it would mean waiting for up to three years in a Peruvian prison to be formally charged, which would put his life at risk because of his age and ill health.

The appeals court panel acknowledged that Toledo risks serious health effects if put in a Peruvian prison where conditions are dire. But the judges said they based their decision on the fact that Toledo was unlikely to succeed in challenging his extradition.

"The panel reaffirmed that the public interest will be served by the United States complying with a valid extradition application because proper compliance promotes relations between the two countries, and enhances efforts to establish an international rule of law and order," the court said.

Toledo has been a permanent legal resident in California, where he has ties going back to the 1970s, when he was a student at Stanford University. He was a visiting scholar at Stanford as recently as 2017, though the school has said it was an unpaid position. He was working on a book.

Bob Lee, Cash App founder, fatally stabbed in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Bob Lee, a technology executive who created Cash App and was currently chief product officer of MobileCoin, was fatally stabbed in downtown San Francisco early Tuesday, according to the cryptocurrency platform and police.

The San Francisco Police Department said in a statement that officers responded to a report of a stabbing near the city's Embarcadero waterfront at 2:35 a.m. Tuesday. They found Robert Lee, 43, suffering from apparent stab wounds.

"Officers rendered aid and summoned medics to the scene" but Lee died at a hospital, police said.

"This investigation is still in the early stages. Because of this we are not commenting on evidence, nor will we speculate on the circumstances surrounding this horrific crime," Police Chief Bill Scott said in the statement.

MobileCoin confirmed Lee's death Wednesday in response to an email from The Associated Press.

"Our dear friend and colleague, Bob Lee passed away yesterday at the age of 43, survived by a loving family and collection of close friends and collaborators," MobileCoin CEO Josh Goldbard said in a statement.

Lee was fatally stabbed in the densely populated Rincon Hill neighborhood of San Francisco, near Google's office and Oracle Park, home to the San Francisco Giants. The neighborhood is a mix of offices and modern condo buildings.

His death further enflamed debate over public safety in San Francisco and its moribund downtown, which has not yet bounced back from the pandemic. Twitter's owner Elon Musk took to the social media site to post that "violent crime in SF is horrific and even if attackers are caught, they are often released immediately" and tagged the city's district attorney.

San Francisco suffers from property crime more than violent crime such as murder, rape, robbery and assault.

In a statement, San Francisco Mayor London Breed called the homicide "a horrible tragedy" and said that the city is prioritizing public safety.

"I'm confident that when the police make an arrest in cases like this, our district attorney will do what's necessary to hold any individuals accountable for their actions," she said.

Goldbard said Lee was "made for the new world."

"From large contributions to Android at google, to being the first CTO of Square, in that time creating Cash App, and working with us here at Mobilecoin, Bob surely had an impact that will last far beyond his short time on earth," Goldbard said.

Lee came to MobileCoin as an early stage investor and advisor, then became chief product officer and

helped launch the Moby app, Goldbard said. Lee was the chief technology officer at digital payments company Square in 2013 when it launched a money transfer application now known as Cash App.

Among the tech leaders to share their devastation about Lee's death was venture capitalist Wesley Chan, co-founder of FPV Ventures. Chan said he befriended Lee more than a decade ago when they both worked at Google, at a time when software engineers like Lee were helping to build the Android smartphone operating system before its 2008 release.

"He was an incredibly iconic founder in the tech world," Chan said by phone Wednesday. "He wrote large parts of Android when he was at Google. He became the CTO of Square and helped build Cash App. His resume reads something like a Fortune cover article."

But Chan said Lee was also generous in helping to coach and champion other engineers and tech entrepreneurs who'd call on him for advice. And he was modest about his key role in developing successful products, such as the widely used Cash App.

"With everything that Bob worked on, it was always a pleasant surprise," Chan said. "That's one of the things I loved about him. He was always humble about it, he'd say, 'Oh, I don't know if it's going to work or not, but we'll try.'"

Prominent venture capitalist Ron Conway, founder of the San Francisco-based investment firm SV Angel, tweeted Wednesday that Lee's loss was an immense tragedy.

"Deepest condolences to Bob's family and to the entire tech community," Conway said. "Remembering fondly when Bob gave an inspiring talk at our CEO Summit. We've lost a great innovator, intelligence, and spirit. Praying a suspect is apprehended swiftly."

The police statement did not provide any details on the circumstances of the stabbing.

"This is an open and active investigation. For that reason we are not releasing further information," Officer Niccole Pacchetti, a public information officer, said in an email. "We will provide further details when they become available."

Are robot waiters the future? Some restaurants think so

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

MADISON HEIGHTS, Mich. (AP) — You may have already seen them in restaurants: waist-high machines that can greet guests, lead them to their tables, deliver food and drinks and ferry dirty dishes to the kitchen. Some have cat-like faces and even purr when you scratch their heads.

But are robot waiters the future? It's a question the restaurant industry is increasingly trying to answer.

Many think robot waiters are the solution to the industry's labor shortages. Sales of them have been growing rapidly in recent years, with tens of thousands now gliding through dining rooms worldwide.

"There's no doubt in my mind that this is where the world is going," said Dennis Reynolds, dean of the Hilton College of Global Hospitality Leadership at the University of Houston. The school's restaurant began using a robot in December, and Reynolds says it has eased the workload for human staff and made service more efficient.

But others say robot waiters aren't much more than a gimmick that have a long way to go before they can replace humans. They can't take orders, and many restaurants have steps, outdoor patios and other physical challenges they can't adapt to.

"Restaurants are pretty chaotic places, so it's very hard to insert automation in a way that is really productive," said Craig Le Clair, a vice president with the consulting company Forrester who studies automation.

Still, the robots are proliferating. Redwood City, California-based Bear Robotics introduced its Servi robot in 2021 and expects to have 10,000 deployed by the end of this year in 44 U.S. states and overseas. Shenzhen, China-based Pudu Robotics, which was founded in 2016, has deployed more than 56,000 robots worldwide.

"Every restaurant chain is looking toward as much automation as possible," said Phil Zheng of Richtech Robotics, an Austin-based maker of robot servers. "People are going to see these everywhere in the next year or two."

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Li Zhai was having trouble finding staff for Noodle Topia, his Madison Heights, Michigan, restaurant, in the summer of 2021, so he bought a BellaBot from Pudu Robotics. The robot was so successful he added two more; now, one robot leads diners to their seats while another delivers bowls of steaming noodles to tables. Employees pile dirty dishes onto a third robot to shuttle back to the kitchen.

Now, Zhai only needs three people to do the same volume of business that five or six people used to handle. And they save him money. A robot costs around \$15,000, he said, but a person costs \$5,000 to \$6,000 per month.

Zhai said the robots give human servers more time to mingle with customers, which increases tips. And customers often post videos of the robots on social media that entice others to visit.

"Besides saving labor, the robots generate business," he said.

Interactions with human servers can vary. Betzy Giron Reynosa, who works with a BellaBot at The Sushi Factory in West Melbourne, Florida, said the robot can be a pain.

"You can't really tell it to move or anything," she said. She has also had customers who don't want to interact with it.

But overall the robot is a plus, she said. It saves her trips back and forth to the kitchen and gives her more time with customers.

Labor shortages accelerated the adoption of robots globally, Le Clair said. In the U.S., the restaurant industry employed 15 million people at the end of last year, but that was still 400,000 fewer than before the pandemic, according to the National Restaurant Association. In a recent survey, 62% of restaurant operators told the association they don't have enough employees to meet customer demand.

Pandemic-era concerns about hygiene and adoption of new technology like QR code menus also laid the ground for robots, said Karthik Namasivayam, director of hospitality business at Michigan State University's Broad College of Business.

"Once an operator begins to understand and work with one technology, other technologies become less daunting and will be much more readily accepted as we go forward," he said.

Namasivayam notes that public acceptance of robot servers is already high in Asia. Pizza Hut has robot servers in 1,000 restaurants in China, for example.

The U.S. was slower to adopt robots, but some chains are now testing them. Chick-fil-A is trying them at multiple U.S. locations, and says it's found that the robots give human employees more time to refresh drinks, clear tables and greet guests.

Marcus Merritt was surprised to see a robot server at a Chick-fil-A in Atlanta recently. The robot didn't seem to be replacing staff, he said; he counted 13 employees in the store, and workers told him the robot helps service move a little faster. He was delighted that the robot told him to have a great day, and expects he'll see more robots when he goes out to eat.

"I think technology is part of our normal everyday now. Everybody has a cell phone, everybody uses some form of computer," said Merritt, who owns a marketing business. "It's a natural progression."

But not all chains have had success with robots.

Chili's introduced a robot server named Rita in 2020 and expanded the test to 61 U.S. restaurants before abruptly halting it last August. The chain found that Rita moved too slowly and got in the way of human servers. And 58% of guests surveyed said Rita didn't improve their overall experience.

Haidilao, a hot pot chain in China, began using robots a year ago to deliver food to diners' tables. But managers at several outlets said the robots haven't proved as reliable or cost-effective as human servers.

Wang Long, the manager of a Beijing outlet, said his two robots have both have broken down.

"We only used them now and then," Wang said. "It is a sort of concept thing and the machine can never replace humans."

Eventually, Namasivayam expects that a certain percentage of restaurants — maybe 30% — will continue to have human servers and be considered more luxurious, while the rest will lean more heavily on robots in the kitchen and in dining rooms. Economics are on the side of robots, he said; the cost of human labor will continue to rise, but technology costs will fall.

But that's not a future everyone wants to see. Saru Jayaraman, who advocates for higher pay for res-

restaurant workers as president of One Fair Wage, said restaurants could easily solve their labor shortages if they just paid workers more.

"Humans don't go to a full-service restaurant to be served by technology," she said. "They go for the experience of themselves and the people they care about being served by a human."

AP researcher Yu Bing contributed from Beijing.

Future of Borges estate in limbo as widow doesn't leave will

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — The rights to the works of the late Jorge Luis Borges, considered Argentina's most internationally significant author of the 20th century, have fallen into limbo because his widow died last month without a will.

The revelation this week surprised the country's literary circles, because Borges' wife, Maria Kodama, devoted much of her life to fiercely protecting his legacy. She set up a foundation under the writer's name, but did not detail plans for what should happen after she died, even though she was battling breast cancer.

"If there really is no will, it's surprising," said Santiago Llach, a writer who is a specialist on Borges' work. He said the announcement by Kodama's longtime lawyer, Fernando Soto, that there was no will "generated buzz on social media and elsewhere."

Borges died in 1986 at age 86 and left Kodama, a translator and writer whom he had married earlier that year, as his only heir. They never had children. She died March 26, also aged 86.

A day after Soto made his announcement, five of Kodama's nephews went to court Tuesday to declare themselves her heirs, seeking to get ownership to all of her possessions, including the rights to Borges' works and what are thought to be several valuable manuscripts.

Soto said he did not know that Kodama hadn't arranged for a will to be drawn up. "It's amazing," he said.

"She didn't like to talk about those issues," the lawyer added. "She didn't talk about her death."

Soto said he once asked Kodama about what would happen with Borges' rights after her death and "she told me she had everything arranged and it would be 'someone stricter than me.'"

He recalled that Kodama said she would call on universities in Japan and the United States to "take care of the works," but didn't say what schools she had in mind. Soto noted she often gave talks at both Harvard University and the University of Texas.

Borges' widow led a life apart from her family.

"She denied the existence of her family," Llach said. "I have writer friends who knew her nephews and asked about them and she denied their existence. It was quite striking."

Soto said he was "surprised to find out she had nephews," adding that "it was a big relief because I didn't want the state to keep everything."

According to Argentine law, if there is no will and no natural heirs, a person's estate is taken over by the state.

Some people have raised the possibility that a Kodama will may be found once an inventory of all her possessions is carried out, but Soto said he considers that as "absolutely impossible."

"She would have never done that, she would have never written a will on her own," he said.

Llach said that if in fact there is no will, the question becomes whether "it was just a simple oversight, a punk gesture of 'I don't give a damn about all of that,' or perhaps also a way of repairing a non-relationship with her nephews and family."

Philippines tries to bring back small fish key to rural diet

By JOEAL CALUPITAN and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

TANAUAN, Leyte, Philippines (AP) — The Philippines, a nation made up of thousands of islands, is home to about 1.6 million people who work in fisheries, and the majority of those fishers are small-scale harvesters who collectively catch almost half of the nation's fish.

Years of market pressures, lack of fisheries management and unchecked overfishing from larger commercial fishers have led to a decline in small fish such as sardines that rural coastal communities in the country of about 110 million people depend on. Data is not available on the state of many fish stocks, but the conservation group Oceana has said more than 75% of the nation's fishing grounds are depleted.

The problem of overfishing is especially detrimental to the country's poorest people, many of whom earn their livings by fishing, said Ruperto Aleroz, an anti-poverty activist who has spent decades harvesting small fish like sardines and round scad from the waters around the archipelago. The small fish are important to the diet in parts of the Philippines where other sources of protein are not available, he said. The fish are used in traditional dishes such as kinilaw, a raw fish dish similar to ceviche.

"We fisherfolk are the second to the poorest in our country" behind only farmers, Aleroz said.

This story was supported by funding from the Walton Family Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

The challenge overfishing poses to people who earn their living from the sea and who count on fish for protein in their diet is being experienced throughout the world. As overfishing is impacting kinilaw in the Philippines, it's effecting traditional dishes and ways of life in places such as the Bahamas, where scientists and government officials worry the commercial fishing of conch, a marine snail central to the diet and identity of the island nation, may soon no longer be feasible. And in Senegal, overfishing has largely wiped out white grouper, long the basis for the national dish of thieboudienne.

Aleroz blames years of poor fishing management and unsustainable fishing practices for taking away both a way of life and a key source of protein for some of his nation's poorest people.

"It is threatening the local food source. We can't feed our family. And it's worsening poverty of artisanal fishers," he said. "The overfishing worsens economic depression among us."

Recently, the country has begun to make strides in rebuilding fisheries with spawning closures, said Mudjekeewis Santos, a scientist with the Philippines Department of Agriculture's National Fisheries Research and Development Institute.

"And the communities are happy that happened, because their catch increased," he said. "Fish don't care about jurisdiction, and they're being decimated."

But there is much work left to be done, Santos said.

Non-governmental organizations such as the Environmental Defense Fund are working with the Philippines government to adopt science-based, sustainable fishing practices, said Edwina Garchitorea, who leads those efforts for EDF in the country.

The problem goes beyond small fish. The loss of small, ocean-going fish such as anchovies is also devastating for larger fish, which eat the small fish, she said.

Garchitorea and others blamed the over-exploitation of larger fish species to meet international demand, which she said increased fishing pressure on the smaller fish stocks that live closer to the coast.

"We've systematically reduced every type of fish in the ocean," she said.

Whittle reported from Portland, Maine.

Violence erupts at Jerusalem holy site for a 2nd night

By ISABEL DeBRE and FARES AKRAM Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Violence resumed for a second straight night in Jerusalem on Wednesday when Palestinian worshippers barricaded themselves inside Al-Aqsa Mosque at the Old City's sensitive compound and Israeli police used force to remove dozens of worshippers.

The unrest was less intense than the previous night. But the situation remained combustible as Muslims marked the Ramadan holy month and Jews began the weeklong Passover holiday. Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip renewed their rocket fire at Israel, raising fears of a wider conflagration.

The Palestinian Red Crescent reported at least six people were injured in the latest violence. The Islamic Waqf authorities, which manages the compound, said police fired stun grenades and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds.

The Israeli police said that "dozens of law-breaking juveniles" had fomented chaos, throwing rocks and other objects at officers and compelling police to act to restore "security, law and order."

More Palestinians had gathered in the mosque, responding to calls by Waqf to pray inside overnight. At one of the mosque entrances, police officers could be seen escorting dozens of Palestinians out of the compound. Residents and shoppers milled around, watching social media videos on their phones showing the renewed clashes that had happened just meters away.

Early on Wednesday, Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque, firing stun grenades at Palestinians who hurled stones and firecrackers in a burst of violence during a sensitive holiday season. Palestinian militants in Gaza responded with rocket fire on southern Israel, prompting repeated Israeli airstrikes.

The violence had calmed by early Wednesday morning, but in the evening, Palestinian militants fired two more rockets from Gaza, with one falling short inside Gaza and the other falling near the security fence separating Gaza from Israel, the Israeli military said. There were no reports of casualties.

The mosque sits in a hilltop compound sacred to both Jews and Muslims, and conflicting claims over it have spilled into violence before, including a bloody 11-day war between Israel and Hamas, the Islamic militant group that rules Gaza. Al-Aqsa is the third-holiest site in Islam and stands in a spot known to Jews as the Temple Mount, which is the holiest site in Judaism.

Palestinian militant groups warned that further confrontation was coming, but a Palestinian official said the Palestinian Authority was in contact with officials in Egypt, Jordan, the United States and at the United Nations to de-escalate the situation. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief the media.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the country was working to "calm tensions" at the holy site.

People who were detained at the compound and later released said police used batons, chairs, rifles and whatever else they could find to strike Palestinians, including women and children, who responded by hurling stones and setting off firecrackers that they'd brought to evening prayers for fear of possible clashes. Outside the mosque's gate, police dispersed crowds of young men with stun grenades and rubber bullets.

Medics from the Palestinian Red Crescent said that at least 50 people were injured. Israeli police said they were not immediately able to confirm the reports and videos showing officers beating Palestinians but said 350 were arrested. They added that one officer was injured in the leg.

Separately, the Israeli military said one soldier was shot and moderately wounded in the occupied West Bank.

Most of the Palestinians arrested from Al-Aqsa were released from detention by the early afternoon, said lawyer Khaled Zabarqa, who represents several of them. But he said that some 50 Palestinians, many of them from the occupied West Bank, were still detained and would have their cases heard at the Ofer military court on Friday. He put the total number of arrested at 450.

U.N. Mideast envoy Tor Wennesland said he was "appalled by the images of violence" at Al-Aqsa, condemning the beating and mass arrests of Palestinians as well as reports of Palestinians stockpiling firecrackers and rocks.

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. ambassador, expressed "outrage and condemnation" at the attack,

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telling reporters at U.N. headquarters: "It is the right of the Palestinian Muslim worshippers to exercise their religious duties and prayers in this holy month of Ramadan, and in any other time in this holy Aqsa Mosque."

Crowds of Palestinians gathered around a police station in Jerusalem on Wednesday, waiting anxiously for their loved ones to trickle out of detention. Amin Rishq, a 19-year-old from east Jerusalem, said that after being beaten and forced to lay on the floor of the mosque with dozens of others, his hands zip-tied behind his back, he was taken to the police station where he said he did not have access to a toilet, medical attention or water for over six hours.

"They treated us like animals," he said.

Since Ramadan began March 22, scores of Muslim worshippers have repeatedly tried to stay overnight in the mosque, a practice that is typically permitted only during the last 10 days of the monthlong holiday. Israeli police have entered nightly to evict the worshippers.

Tensions have been further heightened by calls from Jewish ultranationalists to carry out a ritual slaughter of a goat in the compound, as happened in ancient times.

Israel bars ritual slaughter on the site, but calls by Jewish extremists to revive the practice, including offers of cash rewards to anyone who even attempts to bring an animal into the compound, have amplified fears among Muslims that Israel is plotting to take over the site.

Netanyahu repeated Wednesday that he's committed to preserving the longstanding arrangement at the compound. He described the worshippers who locked themselves in the mosque as "extremists" who prevented Muslims from entering the mosque peacefully.

Over a hundred religious Jews filtered through the site on Wednesday during regular morning visiting hours, as small crowds of Muslims gathered around them shouting, "God is greater!"

Jews are permitted to visit the compound, but not pray there, under longstanding agreements. But such visits, which have grown in numbers in recent years, have often raised tensions, particularly because some Jews are often seen quietly praying.

After some 80,000 worshippers attended evening prayers at the mosque on Tuesday, hundreds of Palestinians barricaded themselves inside overnight to pray. Some said they wanted to ensure religious Jews didn't carry out animal sacrifices. After they refused to leave, Israeli police moved into the mosque.

Israeli police said "several law-breaking youths and masked agitators" brought fireworks, sticks and stones into the mosque, chanting insults and locking the front doors. "After many and prolonged attempts to get them out by talking to no avail, police forces were forced to enter the compound," police said.

Moayad Abu Mayaleh, 23, said he blocked a door of the mosque with hundreds of others to prevent the police from entering before they broke in.

"We can't let them get away with this," he said, shouting insults at Israeli police as he left the station.

In the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian leadership denounced the attack on the worshippers as a violation that "will lead to a large explosion."

Palestinian militants responded to the events by firing a barrage of rockets from Gaza into southern Israel, setting off air raid sirens in the region as residents prepared to begin the weeklong Passover holiday.

The Israeli military said a total of five rockets were fired, and all were intercepted. Israel responded with airstrikes that the army said hit Hamas weapons storage and manufacturing sites.

"We don't want this to escalate," said Lt. Col. Richard Hecht, an army spokesman. But he said that if the rocket fire persisted, "we will respond very aggressively."

The Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad called for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Israel to gather around the Al-Aqsa Mosque and confront Israeli forces. Palestinians must be prepared "for the inevitable confrontation in the coming days," said Ziyad al-Nakhala, leader of Islamic Jihad.

As violence unfolded in Jerusalem, the Israeli military reported fighting in a Palestinian town in the occupied West Bank. It said residents of Beit Umar, near the volatile city of Hebron, burned tires, hurled rocks and explosives at soldiers. It said one soldier was shot by armed suspects, who managed to flee.

It said later in the day that Palestinians opened fire at a checkpoint near the northern West Bank city

of Jenin, leaving no casualties.

Israeli-Palestinian violence has surged over the last year, as the Israeli military has carried out near-nightly raids on Palestinian cities, towns and villages and as Palestinians have staged numerous attacks against Israelis.

At least 88 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire this year, according to an Associated Press tally. Palestinian attacks against Israelis have killed 15 people in the same period.

Israel says most of the Palestinians killed were militants. But stone-throwing youths and bystanders uninvolved in violence were also among the dead. All but one of the Israeli dead were civilians.

Akram reported from Gaza City, Gaza Strip. Associated Press writers Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

Senegal struggles with loss of fish central to diet, culture

By GRACE EKPU and PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — In Senegal, the national dish of thieboudienne is entwined in the country's history and culture. It's a rich dish of fish, rice and vegetables that literally brings people together - traditionally eaten in communal fashion around a single dish.

But the preferred species for the dish is white grouper, and the fishery has collapsed in the face of aggressive fishing by locals and foreign poaching. And there are few other fish to turn to, as overfishing has "greatly diminished" other species in Senegal, where one in six people work in the fisheries sector, according to a report from the United States Agency for International Development.

Overfishing like that which has threatened thieboudienne is seen across the planet. In the Bahamas, scientists and government officials are working to save conch, a marine snail central to the island nation's identity. In the Philippines, overfishing has depleted small fish such as sardines used in the traditional raw dish of kinilaw.

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In Senegal, fish and seafood represent more than 40% of the animal protein intake in the diet, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

In Dakar, the capital and largest city, nutritionist Codou Kébé said the loss of grouper means more than just the loss of a national symbol. It has led to the loss of a key protein for the nation's residents.

The lack of grouper has also made other fish more expensive, Kébé said. Kébé placed the blame squarely on overfishing, which she said has robbed the nation of the generations-old food resource.

"The sea no longer supports the weight that is loaded on it, which has made the fish flee," Kébé said. "This is the work of the boats with their nets, which are numerous in the sea."

The collapse of white grouper has attracted the attention of international organizations, which have sought to use improved data collection to help bring back the fish. However, they acknowledge it's a tough task. The published findings of the International Symposium on Marine Fisheries, held in Dakar in June 2022, state that the fish "can hardly be found off the coast of Senegal where it has become extremely rare."

The repercussions of the loss of the fish are felt both locally and far away. In the U.S., nothing reminds Pierre Thiam of his homeland like thieboudienne.

Thiam, a chef based in New York City and San Francisco who has introduced diners in the U.S. to the dish, is afraid the current generation will be the last to experience it.

"We need to have our thieboudienne every day, because it's a daily meal. And it's not the same dish as it was when I was a kid," Thiam said. "It's not just having access to that dish every day, the way it's supposed to be served - it's losing tradition." ____ Whittle reported from Portland, Maine.

Party switch gives GOP veto-proof control in North Carolina

By GARY D. ROBERTSON and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A Democratic state lawmaker in North Carolina announced Wednesday that she is jumping to the Republican Party, giving the GOP veto-proof majorities in both the state's legislative chambers that should make it easier to enact conservative policies over the opposition of Gov. Roy Cooper.

Whether the switch by Charlotte-area Rep. Tricia Cotham will soon result in further abortion restrictions in the nation's ninth-most populous state remains unclear, given her support for abortion rights during her earlier stint in the General Assembly.

"I am still the same person, and I am going to do what I believe is right and follow my conscience," Cotham said in a news conference at state GOP headquarters at which she announced she would soon switch her party registration.

"The party that best represents me and my principles and what's best for North Carolina is the Republican Party," she added.

Cotham's switch means Republicans now hold the 72 seats required in the 120-seat House to hold a veto-proof majority. Republicans already held the 30 Senate seats necessary to override vetoes.

Until Wednesday, Republicans were one seat shy of a similar advantage in the House following gains during the November elections. Cooper, a Democrat who is term-limited from seeking reelection in 2024, made blocking veto-proof majorities a top priority in last fall's campaigns.

Angry Democrats said Cotham should resign, because the voters in her liberal-leaning district expected her to support the party's agenda.

Cotham's decision is "a deceit of the highest order. It is a betrayal to the people of Mecklenburg County with repercussions not only for the people of her district but for the entire state of North Carolina," state Democratic Party Chair Anderson Clayton said in a news conference at which activists held "RESIGN" signs.

Before Wednesday, House Speaker Tim Moore argued that Republicans held a "working supermajority" in his chamber since the new two-year session, with a few Democrats like Cotham joining GOP legislators in advancing high-profile issues.

Now, Moore said Wednesday, "we have an outright supermajority. It makes it a little bit easier, by the way."

Cotham, a former teacher and assistant principal who served in the House for nearly 10 years through 2016 before returning in January, switched because, she said, the Democratic Party and her Democratic colleagues were no longer willing to accept different viewpoints.

Cotham, 44, has significant Democratic roots. Her mother, Pat, serves on the Mecklenburg County commission and has been a Democratic National Committee member. Her ex-husband is a former chair of the North Carolina Democratic Party.

The "modern-day Democratic Party has become unrecognizable to me," Cotham said. "If you don't do exactly what the Democrats want you to do, they will try to bully you. They will try to cast you aside."

Cotham said the turning point for her to consider a switch came when people started criticizing her for using the American flag and praying-hands emojis on social media and on her vehicles.

"It's been very clear to me this was about control on Day One at the legislature," she said. "They picked the wrong chick for that."

House Minority Leader Robert Reives said later Wednesday that Cotham's allegations of mistreatment within the Democratic Party "just didn't happen."

Top Republicans welcomed Cotham to the fold after working with her for several years. "I told her we'd always have your back because we're friends first," said Rep. Jason Saine, a Lincoln County Republican.

Moore already appointed Cotham this year to co-chair the House K-12 education committee, making her one of the few Democrats to hold top committee posts.

The speaker declined to get into specifics about what legislation he thinks can now succeed with Cotham's switch. But House Republicans have this year revived previously vetoed measures that would force sheriffs to cooperate with federal immigration agents and block the counting of mailed absentee ballots received after Election Day.

Republicans also are interested in further abortion restrictions following last year's U.S. Supreme Court

decision overturning Roe v. Wade.

North Carolina bans nearly all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy, and Republicans have been meeting privately to discuss two options. One would prohibit abortions after the first trimester — 12 or 13 weeks of pregnancy — with new exceptions for rape and incest. Another would ban them once an ultrasound first detects fetal cardiac activity, typically about six weeks after fertilization.

In 2015, Cotham spoke out in House floor debate against a bill that extended the waiting period before someone can receive an abortion in North Carolina from 24 hours to 72 hours, saying it was about “perpetuating shame and about politicians wanting to play doctor.” She has also been a supporter of LGBTQ rights.

“I’m not going to be pigeonholed into any one particular issue,” she said Wednesday, not addressing a specific topic. “And I made that very clear in our conversations that there are just some things I’m not changing on.” That result may require Moore to count on remaining moderate Democrats to complete overrides.

Democratic activists said Cotham still owes it to the public to speak out clearly on critical issues.

“Hurt voters deserve to know right now where she stands on abortion access in this state,” said Cameron Pruette with the LGBTQ Democrats of Mecklenburg County. “Will she protect trans kids?”

Cooper’s office didn’t provide a statement Wednesday, referring instead to one released Tuesday. While it quoted the governor as saying her decision was “disappointing,” he expressed hope in Cotham’s future voting.

“She should still vote the way she has always said she would vote when these issues arise, regardless of party affiliation,” Cooper said.

Last week, the legislature overrode a Cooper veto for the first time since 2018 when it enacted, over his objections, a bill eliminating the state’s pistol permit purchase system.

Cotham was one of three House Democrats who were absent last week during the override votes on the gun bill. The absences meant Republicans were able to meet, on their own, the necessary three-fifths threshold.

Missouri tornado kills 5 in latest wave of severe weather

By JIM SALTER and SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

GLEN ALLEN, Mo. (AP) — A tornado ripped through southeastern Missouri before dawn on Wednesday, killing five people and causing widespread destruction as the third in a series of deadly massive storms over the past two weeks struck the nation’s heartland.

Forecasters are keeping a wary eye out for more extreme weather as this year’s early severe storm season continues. The storms have spawned dozens of tornadoes, mainly in the South and Midwest, that have killed at least 63 people. Just last weekend, confirmed or suspected tornadoes in at least eight states laid waste to neighborhoods across a broad swath of the country.

The Missouri tornado touched down around 3:30 a.m. Wednesday and moved through a rural area of Bollinger County, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of St. Louis. Trees were uprooted, homes turned into piles of splinters, and one building was flipped on its side.

Five people were killed and five were injured, State Highway Patrol Superintendent Eric Olson said at a news conference. Residents in the village of Glen Allen said at least some of the victims were members of a family who lived in a trailer along a state highway.

Little was left of the trailer Wednesday beyond its concrete pads and an axle. A large stuffed animal was lodged in the branch of a downed tree, and furniture, clothing and kitchenware were scattered in a field.

Olson said 12 structures were destroyed and dozens more damaged.

The damage was concentrated around Glen Allen and the small rural community of Grassy, which are separated by a hunting area, said Bollinger County Sheriff Casey Graham in a Facebook post. He didn’t immediately release the victims’ names.

Charles Collier, 61, said he saw the coroner’s van drive by with its lights on in Glen Allen, where he owns a storage facility.

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"That was a sad, sad sight -- knowing there was bodies in there," said Collier. "I was just numb, thinking about all these other people, what they're going through."

Josh Wells said that the tornado tore half of the roof off his Glen Allen home and pushed in his bedroom wall. Luckily, he fled beforehand with his son to his sister's home because it has a basement.

"We all ran down and huddled against the wall and my brother-in-law made it down just seconds before we heard the roaring sound of the wind and debris crashing around us," he said.

While his sister's home held up, the area reeked of gas because a propane unit was damaged.

Midwest tornadoes have typically occurred later in the spring, but this year's early spate of severe weather continues a trend seen over the past few years, said Bill Bunting, chief of forecast operations at the National Weather Service Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma.

"Although we will likely have several relatively quiet days after the current weather system has moved east of the U.S., we are entering the time of the year where the potential for severe weather increases and much more of the U.S. becomes at risk," Bunting said in a email.

Typically, 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, experts say.

Missouri Gov. Mike Parson toured the storm damage area Wednesday and said President Joe Biden had called to assure him of federal help. Local agencies anticipate months of recovery efforts, he said.

"I will tell you, I just know because I grew up in a little small town, these small towns, these counties and these cities will come together to help one another out," Parson said.

Justin Gibbs, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Paducah, Kentucky, said the tornado remained on the ground for roughly 15 minutes, traveling an estimated 15-20 miles (24-32 kilometers).

Based on early data, the tornado received a preliminary EF-2 rating, packing wind speeds of 130 mph (228 kph).

Gibbs noted that tornadoes are especially dangerous when they touch down late at night or early in the morning, as this one did.

"It's definitely a nightmare from a warning standpoint," Gibbs said. "It's bad anytime, but it's especially bad at 3:30 in the morning."

A phone weather alert awakened Bobby Masters, who said debris was slamming his Glen Allen home as he took shelter in his basement with his family. He recalled hearing a roar as the tornado passed.

"I had never heard a tornado before. They say it sounds like a freight train and that is exactly what it sounds like," he said. "The good Lord spared us, our family and our house."

Keith Lincoln, 56, also was awakened by a phone alert. He huddled in a bathtub with his wife and 18-year-old daughter and prayed: "Just save us and the house." Lincoln spent the afternoon patching his roof but was thankful his prayer was mostly answered.

Chris Green, 35, found a small black dog dead in the debris. "I can't just leave it here," he said as he and his father buried the animal.

The area is rural, with residents mostly farming, cutting timber or working construction jobs, said Larry Welker, Bollinger County's public administrator. The county's population is around 10,500. The battered communities are tiny, little more than a few scattered homes and businesses.

The storms moving through the Midwest and South had threatened some areas still reeling from the deadly bout of bad weather last weekend. At one point, the Storm Prediction Center said up to 40 million people were at risk in an area that included Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit and Memphis, Tennessee.

In central Illinois, authorities said five people were hurt and about 300 homes were without power due to a tornado that struck in Fulton County on Tuesday evening. Chris Helle, who directs the county's Emergency Services Disaster Agency, said one of the people injured was in critical condition.

Helle said the damage was concentrated near the town of Bryant, about 200 mile (322 kilometers) southwest of Chicago. Helle said numerous homes were destroyed, but he credited people for listening to advance warnings and taking shelter.

Officials said another tornado touched down Tuesday morning in the western Illinois community of

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Colona. Local news reports showed wind damage to some businesses there.

McFetridge reported from Des Moines, Iowa. Associated Press writers Margaret Stafford in Liberty, Missouri, Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, Trisha Ahmed in Minneapolis and Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed to this report.

In Bahamas, a struggle to save conch, and a way of life

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

FREEPORT, Bahamas (AP) — Tereha Davis, whose family has fished for conch from waters around the Bahamas for five generations, remembers when she could walk into the water from the beach and pick up the marine snails from the seabed.

But in recent years, Davis, 49, and conch fishers like her have had to go further and further from shore - sometimes as far as 30 miles - to find the mollusks that Bahamians eat fried, stewed, smoked and raw and are a pillar of the island nation's economy and tourism industry.

Scientists, international conservationists and government officials have sounded the alarm that the conch population is fading due to overfishing, and a food central to Bahamians' diet and identity could cease to be commercially viable in as little as six years.

"When I was a child, we never had to go that far to get conch," said Davis, speaking at a Freeport market where she sold her catch. "Without conch, what are we supposed to do?"

Conch's potential demise reflects the threat overfishing poses around the world to traditional foods. Such losses are among the starkest examples of how overfishing has changed people's lives - how they work, what they eat, how they define themselves.

The overfishing challenges faced by Bahamians are mirrored in places as disparate as Senegal, where overfishing has taken away white grouper, long the basis for the national dish of thieboudienne, and the Philippines, where it has depleted small fish such as sardines that are used in kinilaw, a raw dish similar to ceviche.

No longer a theoretical threat, overfishing has wiped out once abundant species and taken off the table forever beloved culturally important dishes. And it's a worsening problem - the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has stated that more than a third of the world's fish stocks are overfished, and the rate of unsustainable fishing is rising.

Governmental organizations and advocacy groups are working to stop illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing that has expedited the loss of species. They blame poaching, poor regulations and lack of enforcement of existing laws. Regulators, such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the U.S., have said cutting down on illegal fishing is critical to prevent losing beloved food options.

The loss of such foods jeopardizes the availability of protein and iron in people's diets in poor countries and alters the course of culture in rich and poor nations, said Richard Wilk, a professor emeritus in the Indiana University Department of Anthropology who has studied food cultures. Nations that fail to control overfishing run the risk of repeating the mistakes of countries such as Japan, where the herring fishery collapsed in the middle of the 20th century, costing jobs, reducing access to a traditional wedding food and leaving the country dependent on foreign supplies, he said.

But the toll is heaviest in developing nations and poorer communities.

"The way that environmental changes and overfishing affect people and cuisine is different for subsistence fishers, who may end up going hungry, or local marketers, like the women who smoke fish on the beaches in West Africa," Wilk said.

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Few countries are as synonymous with a seafood as the Bahamas is with conch. Queen conch, the key

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food species, is a marine snail that reaches up to a foot in length and can live for 30 years. The shells are conical with multiple protruding spines, and all parts except the shell are edible, with a flavor sometimes compared to both clams and salmon.

The shellfish appears prominently at the top of the national coat of arms and conch is widely recognized as the national dish. Conch shells and symbols of the shellfish are everywhere: A giant statue of a conch shell greets tourists at Lynden Pindling International Airport in the capital city of Nassau. Dishes, spoons and art made from conch shells are for sale at street markets. Flags, T-shirts and hats depicting conch sell briskly to visitors. Conch shells serve as paperweights, bowls, musical instruments and Christmas ornaments.

While conch can be pricey in the U.S. and elsewhere, it's so ubiquitous in the Bahamas that finding a filling meal of conch for less than \$10 is not difficult. That is less than the price of many meats on the island, and conch is also found for sale at most grocery stores for eating at home. In rural parts of the Bahamas, nearly two-fifths of the population eats conch weekly, according to one 2021 study.

The country of about 400,000 is home to 9,000 conch fishers - fully 2% of the population, and the number appears to be holding steady even as conch declines, according to a study in the journal Fisheries Management and Ecology. The meat of the conch itself is worth millions per year at the docks, and it's also a key driver of tourism to the islands, in addition to being an important export item to the U.S. and many other countries where conch is a delicacy.

Divers typically harvest conch by hand, preferably in nearshore waters from a small boat and without gear any more sophisticated than a mask, snorkel and flippers. Sometimes working in fairly deep waters of 20 or 30 feet, divers can take home as many as 1,000 conchs in a single trip. Many fish for other species, such as snapper, but identify first as conch fishers. And for many, fishing is both a family tradition and a ticket to middle class life on the chain of islands, where the cost of living is a bit higher than in the U.S.

The conchs are often cracked open with a hammer on the beach soon after they're harvested, the meat swiftly removed and the shells discarded. It's typical to see discarded shells piled 8 feet high on the shoreline, and some communities have special shell dumping sites where mountains of empty shells reach to the sky. Some of the shoreline shell piles are solid enough that they're used as jetties or boat docks.

Sherica Smith, 44, owns Shabo's, a popular conch stand on Grand Bahama Island. She too remembers a time when "you could walk out there and get conch." She motioned to the ocean behind her stand, where people fishing conch now must head to sea in boats to dive for the shellfish.

According to numerous government authorities and conservation agencies, queen conch has declined precipitously in some of the nation's fishing grounds. A 2011 survey of the Exuma Cays, a critical fishing area, found that the density of adult conch had declined by nearly 91% on the islands' shelf over a 20-year period, according to documents from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The depletion of conch followed years of heavy nationwide harvesting - fishers who harvested about 1.7 million pounds of conch in the 1970s were up to more than 14 million pounds by 2006, the documents state. The loss of conch intensified on several fishing grounds around the country starting in the 1990s.

Even Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park, established in the 1950s as the first marine protected area in the Bahamas, is not immune to the loss of conch because fishing pressure that occurs outside of it limits the number of young conch moving into the park, the Food and Agriculture Organization found.

A 2022 report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration stated that queen conch "shows a negative trend over time and the decrease can largely be attributed to overfishing."

The overfishing of conch is so dire that one estimate shows conch could disappear commercially in less than half a generation, said Lester Gittens, senior officer with the Bahamas Department of Marine Resources. A 2019 report from the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago said the queen conch fishery could disappear as soon as 2029 without a reduction in harvesting.

Andrew Kough, a biologist with the Shedd Aquarium who has researched conch in Bahamian waters, said one challenge the shellfish face is the lack of enforcement of existing laws that restrict fishing by for-

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eign vessels. Industrialized fishing fleets from other nations have overexploited some of the areas where conch grow, he said. Many Bahamian conch fishers say the poaching is coming from other nations that harvest conch but are subject to stricter restrictions than Bahamian fishers, such as the nearby nations of the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. Driven by tough laws in their home countries or depleted conch in their national waters, the poachers turn to illegal fishing in the Bahamas.

Poaching is especially problematic on Cay Sal Bank, an underwater habitat between Cuba, Florida and the Bahamas, Kough said.

Poachers "have been operating under the assumption that they won't be caught," Kough said. "Enforcement is extremely challenging out there."

The Bahamas' national association with conch is also a large part of what has caused its decline, said Lindy Knowles, senior science officer with Bahamas National Trust, a non-profit that manages national parks. Tourist demand for the shellfish has led to its depletion in many areas of the country, Knowles said.

The demand for conch has made it difficult for the shellfish to reproduce fast enough to sustain the population, Knowles said.

The problem of overfishing is worsened by the warming climate, which has brought unpredictable weather that disrupts and damages conch fishing grounds and habitats. The conchs gather in large groups to feed and breed on seagrass beds, some of which have been severely damaged by storms such as Hurricane Maria in 2017. Herds in those areas have thinned, scientists have said.

The growing acidification of the warming ocean is also a threat to conchs because it can cause their shells to deteriorate. The problem is linked to climate change, and is a growing concern for many kinds of shellfish.

And the warming of the seas has also interfered with conch's migration patterns. The shellfish move, slowly, with the use of a single foot, to deeper water in the winter, and return to shallower waters in summer to spawn. However, "increasing water temperature due to climate change is likely to alter the timing and duration of the queen conch reproductive season," according to a 2022 study in the journal PLOS One.

Environmentalists and locals in the Bahamas have also said the worsening storms can cause mass conch die-offs, and has caused them to wash up on sand banks.

In the Bahamas, conservationists want to learn from mistakes in the U.S., which taught the hard lesson that once conchs disappear, it's very difficult to bring them back.

Nearly 60 years ago, the once-vibrant Florida conch fishery fell victim to overfishing. Conch was once abundant off the Florida Keys, and Key West still carries the nickname the "Conch Republic."

Conch harvesting dates to long before the European settlement of Florida, as Indigenous groups fished for the shellfish millennia ago. It grew to become a commercial enterprise, and reached the point of unsustainability in the middle of the 20th century.

Commercial harvesting of conch, which accelerated after World War II, was banned in Florida in 1975, and even recreational taking of conch was stopped a decade later. The state began attempting to rehabilitate the conch population with a research program in the mid-1980s, but it remains off limits to all harvesters.

The loss of Florida conch is one factor that has led to the U.S. becoming the world's biggest importer of conch meat, and that has in turn put pressure on Bahamian fishers to harvest more. Since the Florida ban, the Bahamian harvest increased from about 4 million pounds in the mid-1970s to more than 8 million pounds in the mid-2010s.

Scientists are still hopeful about the possibility of one day rebuilding Florida's conch population, but it remains in bad shape, according to reports published by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

One reason conchs have been difficult to restore in Florida is the mollusk's life cycle. Conchs take three to four years to reach reproductive age, and they're very sensitive to water quality, sometimes failing to reproduce if conditions are not ideal.

Conch also tend to be dependent on a strong local population in a given habitat, Kough said. Other marine species can sometimes replace a lost population with a new population that moves in from else-

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where, but this has proven trickier for Florida's conch.

"Once they're gone, they tend to stay gone," Kough said.

In the Bahamas, the government has explored new conservation measures, such as stricter rules about minimal harvesting size, to reduce fishing pressure and let conchs reproduce.

The government has also pursued more aggressive enforcement of existing laws. And the Bahamas National Trust is working to equip fishers with tools to help them physically measure conchs to ensure they're big enough to harvest.

The U.S. is considering listing conch under the Endangered Species Act, which could halt imports of it into the country, the largest importer in the world.

Reducing the fishery by half over the next three years, as a new proposal promises to do, is one way to potentially stave off the loss of conch, Knowles said.

Previous efforts to more strictly regulate the conch fishery were often not aggressive enough, Knowles said.

One new rule on the table is a change in how the lip of the conch's shell is measured. Current rules say the conch must have a well-formed flaring lip to be considered an adult. However, that doesn't necessarily mean the conch is mature, and a more effective law would provide more specific guidance about how thick the lip must be, conservationists said.

Another possibility touted by conservationists would reduce the amount of conch that is exported, as international demand is a big driver of fishing pressure. Still another proposal calls for a closed season on conch. But many local fishers strongly oppose that idea.

Kough, of the Shedd Aquarium, has led field work in the Bahamas to try to help craft new management strategies for the conch. Aquaculture has been attempted over the years to try to reduce the need for the wild conch harvest, but it has never panned out, he said.

That means protecting the areas of ocean where baby conchs grow is especially important, Kough said.

"It's going to depend heavily on properly managing the wild populations," he said.

The potential loss of conch would be a particularly crushing blow for rural parts of the country that rely on it for protein, said Jewel Beneby, a science officer with the Bahamas National Trust.

"It is a source of protein in the Bahamian diet," Beneby said. "People eat conch all the time, they love it, it's a delicacy, it's part of our culture. But it's also a protein source."

Many fishers of conch, such as Davis, acknowledge that there are less conch than there used to be. But there is also much opposition to the possibility of new restrictions on the fishery. Even the possibility of a closed season draws ire.

"I don't want to see putting a season on the conch, or banning it," Davis said. "The government are putting more emphasis on coming down on us. But there's not so much focus on poachers."

Smith, the owner of the conch stand and a fisher for conch as well, said she thinks the concern over the disappearance of conch is overhyped. Like many members of the fishery, and many residents of the Bahamas, she thinks fishers will just need to exert more effort to keep up with demand.

"Conch is going to be here forever. Imagine how far the depths of the sea are," Smith said. "Every time, the conch has come back."

Others in the Bahamas, such as Davis' father, Leroy Ginton, 67, have tried to find new ways to make money with conch. Ginton, a longtime conch fisher, has created a studio to make conch art in his backyard, just steps from where his daughter heads to sea to harvest the shellfish. It's in McLean's Town, Grand Bahama Island, not far from the ruins of an old church made with crushed conch shells that succumbed to time and storms.

Ginton's hope is that encouraging more use of conch shells could help reduce fishing pressure. If fishers can get more money out of each individual conch by selling or using the shells, they might not need to harvest so many to make a living, he said.

He realizes it could be hard to convince others to take fewer conch, but he also believes they might not have a choice.

"All Bahamians need to realize, don't mind the fast buck. Because when the material is gone, the money is gone, too," Glinton said.

Conservationists such as Knowles say it's important that the Bahamian government succeeds in its efforts to reduce overharvest of the shellfish.

"There is no Bahamas without conch," Knowles said.

Indiana, Idaho governors sign bans on gender-affirming care

By ARLEIGH RODGERS Associated Press/Report for America

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Republican governors in Indiana and Idaho have signed into law bills banning gender-affirming care for minors, making those states the latest to restrict transgender health care as Republican-led legislatures continue to curb LGBTQ+ rights this year.

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb signed legislation Wednesday that will prohibit transgender youth from accessing medication or surgeries that aid in transition and mandate those currently taking medication to stop by the end of the year.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little had signed legislation Tuesday evening that criminalizes gender-affirming care for youth.

More than a dozen other states are considering bills that would prohibit transgender youth from accessing hormone therapies, puberty blockers and transition surgeries, even after the approval of parents and the advice of doctors. Other proposals target transgender individuals' everyday life — including sports, workplaces and schools.

"Permanent gender-changing surgeries with lifelong impacts and medically prescribed preparation for such a transition should occur as an adult, not as a minor," Holcomb said in a statement about the Indiana bill.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana filed a lawsuit rapidly after Holcomb signed the Indiana legislation — something the group had promised to do after Republican supermajorities advanced the ban this session. The American Civil Liberties Union of Idaho announced Wednesday it also planned to sue over that state's new law.

The Indiana ACLU filed the lawsuit on behalf of four transgender youth and an Indiana doctor who provides transgender medical treatment. It argues the ban violates the U.S. Constitution's equal protection guarantees as well as federal laws regarding essential medical services.

"The legislature did not ban the various treatments that are outlined," said Ken Falk, the ACLU of Indiana legal director. "It only banned it for transgender persons."

Under the Indiana law that takes effect July 1, doctors who offer gender-affirming care to minors would be disciplined by a licensing board. And under the Idaho law set to go into effect next January, providing hormones, puberty blockers or other gender-affirming care to people under age 18 would be a felony crime.

"In signing this bill, I recognize our society plays a role in protecting minors from surgeries or treatments that can irreversibly damage their healthy bodies," Little wrote. "However, as policymakers we should take great caution whenever we consider allowing the government to interfere with loving parents and their decisions about what is best for their children."

Supporters of the legislation have contended the banned care is irreversible or carries side effects. They argue that only an adult — and not a minor's parent — can consent to the treatments.

But opponents say such care is vital and often life-saving for trans kids, and medical providers say most of the procedures are reversible and safe. Transgender medical treatments for children and teens have also been available in the U.S. for more than a decade and are endorsed by major medical associations.

"When I started hormone therapy, it made me feel so much better about myself," said Jessica Wayner, 16, at an Indiana House public health committee hearing last month.

At least 13 states have laws banning gender-affirming care for minors: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Utah, South Dakota and West Virginia.

Federal judges have blocked enforcement of Alabama and Arkansas' laws.

The GOP-led Kansas Legislature on Wednesday also overrode Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's veto of a bill to ban transgender athletes from girls' and women's sports from kindergarten through college.

Nineteen other states have imposed restrictions on transgender athletes, most recently Wyoming.

The Arkansas Senate also sent a bill Wednesday to Republican Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders that would require parental approval for Arkansas teachers to address transgender students using their preferred name and pronouns. It also would prohibit schools from requiring teachers to use the pronouns or name a student uses.

In some states where Democrats control the legislature, lawmakers are enshrining access to gender-affirming health care. Democratic New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham signed a bill Wednesday that protects providers of gender-affirming health care against potential civil and criminal prosecution.

Dr. Molly McClain, who provides gender-affirming health care to patients of all ages, said the new legislation sends a message to people exploring their identity in ways that may not conform to gender norms.

"It says you are seen, you are safe, you are precious, and your access to health care will be protected here," said McClain, who teaches medicine at the University of New Mexico. "I think that that sends a huge message to trainees" in the medical field.

Associated Press writers contributed to this report — Tom Davies in Indianapolis; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Morgan Lee in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and Rebecca Boone in Boise, Idaho.

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Report details 'staggering' church sex abuse in Maryland

By LEA SKENE, BRIAN WITTE and SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — More than 150 Catholic priests and others associated with the Archdiocese of Baltimore sexually abused over 600 children and often escaped accountability, according to a long-awaited state report released Wednesday that revealed the scope of abuse spanning 80 years and accused church leaders of decades of coverups.

The report paints a damning picture of the archdiocese, which is the oldest Roman Catholic diocese in the country and spans much of Maryland. Some parishes, schools and congregations had more than one abuser at the same time — including St. Mark Parish in Catonsville, which had 11 abusers living and working there between 1964 and 2004. One deacon admitted to molesting over 100 children. Another priest was allowed to feign hepatitis treatment and make other excuses to avoid facing abuse allegations.

The Maryland Attorney General's Office released the findings of their yearslong investigation during Holy Week — considered the most sacred time of year in Christianity ahead of Easter Sunday — and said the number of victims is likely far higher. The report was redacted to protect confidential grand jury materials, meaning the identities of some accused clergy were removed.

"The staggering pervasiveness of the abuse itself underscores the culpability of the Church hierarchy," the report said. "The sheer number of abusers and victims, the depravity of the abusers' conduct, and the frequency with which known abusers were given the opportunity to continue preying upon children are astonishing."

Disclosure of the redacted findings marks a significant development in an ongoing legal battle over their release and adds to growing evidence from parishes across the country as numerous similar revelations have rocked the Catholic Church in recent years.

Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, in a statement posted online, apologized to the victims and said the report "details a reprehensible time in the history of this Archdiocese, a time that will not be covered up, ignored or forgotten."

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"It is difficult for most to imagine that such evil acts could have actually occurred," Lori said. "For victim-survivors everywhere, they know the hard truth: These evil acts did occur."

Also on Wednesday, the state legislature passed a bill to end a statute of limitations on abuse-related civil lawsuits, sending it to Gov. Wes Moore, who has said he supports it. The Baltimore archdiocese says it has paid more than \$13.2 million for care and compensation for 301 abuse victims since the 1980s, including \$6.8 million toward 105 voluntary settlements.

Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown, who took office in January, said the investigation shows "pervasive, pernicious and persistent abuse." State investigators began their work in 2019; they reviewed over 100,000 pages of documents dating back to the 1940s and interviewed hundreds of victims and witnesses.

ABUSE RECALLED AS A 'LIFE SENTENCE'

Victims said the report was a long-overdue public reckoning with shameful accusations the church has been facing for decades.

Jean Hargadon Wehner said she was abused in Baltimore as a teen by A. Joseph Maskell, a priest who served as her Catholic high school's counselor and chaplain. She said she reported her abuse to church officials in the early '90s, when her memories of the trauma finally surfaced about two decades after she was repeatedly raped.

"I expected them to do the right thing in 1992," she told reporters Wednesday. "I'm still angry."

Maskell abused at least 39 victims, according to the report. He denied the allegations before his death in 2001 and was never criminally charged. The Associated Press typically doesn't name victims of abuse, but Wehner has spoken publicly to draw attention to the issue.

Kurt Rupperecht, who also experienced abuse as a child, said he was in his late 40s when he pieced together his traumatic memories. He said the realization brought him some relief because it explained decades of self-destructive behavior and mental health challenges, but also left him overwhelmed with anger and disbelief.

Rupperecht said his abuser was assigned to the Diocese of Wilmington, which covers some counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

"We're here to speak the truth and never stop," he said after the news conference. "We deal with this every day. It is our life sentence."

The Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests, known as SNAP, noted the report lists more names of abusers than have been released publicly by archdiocese officials. The organization called on the archbishop to explain the discrepancies.

Other investigations involving the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware, which both include parts of Maryland, are ongoing.

ARCHDIOCESE TOOK STEPS TO PROTECT THE ACCUSED

The Baltimore report says church leaders were focused on keeping abuse hidden, not on protecting victims or stopping abuse. In some situations, victims ended up reporting abuse to priests who were abusive themselves. And when law enforcement did become aware of abuse allegations, police and prosecutors were often deferential and "uninterested in probing what church leaders knew and when," according to the report.

The nearly 500-page document includes numerous instances of leaders taking steps to protect accused clergy, including allowing them to retire with financial support rather than be ousted, letting them remain in the ministry and failing to report alleged abuse to law enforcement.

In 1964, for instance, Father Laurence Brett admitted to sexually abusing a teenager at a Catholic university in Connecticut.

He was sent to New Mexico under the guise of hepatitis treatment and then to Sacramento, where another teenage boy reported being abused by Brett, the report said. He was later assigned to Baltimore, where he served as chaplain at a Catholic high school for boys and abused over 20 victims.

After several students accused him of abuse in 1973, Brett was allowed to resign, saying he had to care for a sick aunt. School officials didn't report the abuse to authorities and dozens more victims later came

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forward. He never faced criminal charges and died in 2010.

The report largely focuses on the years before 2002, when an investigation by the Boston Globe into abuse and coverup in the Archdiocese of Boston led to an explosion of revelations nationwide. The nation's Catholic bishops, for the first time, then agreed on reforms including a lifetime ban from ministry for any priest who commits even a single incident of abuse. While new national policies significantly improved the internal handling of reported abuse in the Baltimore archdiocese after 2002, significant flaws remained, according to the report.

Only one person has been indicted through the investigation: Neil Adleberg, 74, who was arrested last year and charged with rape and other counts. The case remains ongoing. Officials said he coached wrestling at a Catholic high school in the '70s, then returned to the role for the 2014-2015 school year. The alleged abuse occurred in 2013 and 2014 but the victim was not a student of the school, officials said.

COURT TO CONSIDER RELEASING MORE NAMES IN THE FUTURE

Lawyers for the state asked a court for permission to release the report and a Baltimore Circuit Court judge ruled last month that a redacted version should be made public. The court ordered the removal the names and titles of 37 people accused of wrongdoing — whose names came out during confidential grand jury proceedings — but will consider releasing a more complete version in the future.

Lawmakers' passage of a bill to end the state's statute of limitations Wednesday came after similar proposals failed in recent years. Currently, victims of child sex abuse in Maryland can't sue after they turn 38. The bill would eliminate the age limit and allow for retroactive lawsuits.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore has long faced scrutiny over its handling of abuse allegations.

In 2002, Cardinal William Keeler, who served as Baltimore archbishop for nearly two decades, released a list of 57 priests accused of sexual abuse, earning himself a reputation for transparency at a time when the nationwide scope of wrongdoing remained largely unexposed. That changed, however, when a Pennsylvania grand jury accused Keeler of covering up sexual abuse allegations while serving as bishop of Harrisburg in the 1980s.

Associated Press reporter Stefanie Dazio contributed to this report from Los Angeles. Peter Smith contributed from Pittsburgh. Witte reported from Annapolis and Brumfield reported from Silver Spring.

LSU's Reese on White House flap: 'We'll go to the Obamas'

By The Associated Press undefined

First lady Jill Biden's walk-back of her suggestion that runner-up Iowa should join NCAA women's basketball champion LSU for a visit to the White House didn't sit well with Tigers star Angel Reese.

Prompted by a discussion of Biden's comments during her Wednesday appearance on "The Paper Route Podcast," Reese said the Tigers should celebrate their title with former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama rather than President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden.

Jill Biden, at an appearance in Denver on Monday, had praised Iowa's sportsmanship and congratulated both teams. She also said that as part of the longstanding tradition of having champions visit the White House, Iowa should come as well "because they played such a good game."

The Tigers defeated Iowa 102-85 for the title in Dallas on Sunday.

Reese on Monday called Jill Biden's suggestion "a joke."

Joe Biden invited LSU and men's champion Connecticut to the White House on Tuesday with no mention of Iowa. Vanessa Valdivia, a spokesperson for Jill Biden, said the first lady had meant no disrespect to LSU and that her comments were intended to applaud the historic game and all women athletes.

"I'm not gonna lie to you, I don't accept the apology because of, you said what you said. I said what I said. And like, you can't go back on certain things that you say," Reese told podcast hosts Brandon Marshall and Ashley Nicole Moss.

"I mean, you felt like they should've come because of sportsmanship, right?" Reese added. "They can have that spotlight. We'll go to the Obamas. We'll see Michelle. We'll see Barack."

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Some social media commenters noted the racial dynamics involved, saying that only winners should be rewarded with a White House visit and that hosting both teams would detract from the achievement by LSU's team, which is predominantly Black. The Iowa team is largely white. Others noted the important role of Black women in Democratic Party politics.

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

Reese faced criticism on social media for waving her hand in front of Iowa star Caitlin Clark's face while staring down Clark during the game. Clark, The Associated Press Player of the Year, made a similar gesture to no one in particular during Iowa's victory over Louisville in the Elite Eight.

Reese said she didn't think LSU, had it lost to Iowa, would have gotten the same praise from Jill Biden as the Hawkeyes did.

"If we were to lose, we would not be getting invited to the White House," she added. "I remember she made a comment about both teams should be invited because of sportsmanship. And I'm like, 'Are you saying that because of what I did?' Stuff like that, it bothers me because you are a woman at the end of the day. White, Black, it doesn't matter, you're a woman, you're supposed to be standing behind us before anything."

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

Kansas bans transgender athletes from women's, girls' sports

By JOHN HANNA AP Political Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kansas is banning transgender athletes from girls' and women's sports from kindergarten through college, the first of several possible new laws restricting the rights of transgender people pushed through by Republican legislators over the wishes of the Democratic governor.

The Legislature on Wednesday overrode Gov. Laura Kelly's third veto in three years of a bill to ban transgender athletes, and came a day after state lawmakers passed a broad bathroom bill. Nineteen other states have imposed restrictions on transgender athletes, most recently Wyoming.

The Kansas law takes effect July 1 and is among several hundred proposals that Republican lawmakers across the U.S. have pursued this year to push back on LGBTQ rights. Kansas lawmakers who back the ban are also pursuing proposals to end gender-affirming care for minors and restrict restroom use.

The measure approved by Kansas lawmakers Tuesday would prevent transgender people from using public restrooms, locker rooms and other facilities associated with their gender identities, and bars them from changing their name or gender on their driver's licenses. Kelly is expected to veto that.

"It's a scary time to be raising a trans child in Kansas," said Cat Poland, a lifelong Kansas resident and mother of three who coordinates a Gay-Straight Alliance at her 13-year-old trans son's school about 40 miles (65 kilometers) northwest of Wichita. "We may face the very real threat of having to move, and it's heartbreaking."

The ban demonstrates the clout of religious conservatives, reflected in the 2022 platform of the Kansas Republican Party — "We believe God created man and woman" — and echoes many Republicans' beliefs that their constituents don't like any cultural shift toward acceptance.

"I wish it was 1960, and, you know, little Johnny's a boy and Mary's a girl, and that's how it is, period," Republican state Rep. John Eplee, a 70-year-old doctor, said during a committee discussion of the bathroom bill.

LGBTQ-rights advocates say its part of a national campaign from right-wing traditionalists to erase transgender, non-binary, gender-queer and gender-fluid people from American society.

Alex Poland, an eighth-grade cross-country runner who hopes to play baseball next year, said legislators are pursuing "bills against children" who "haven't done anything to harm anyone."

Alex, who lobbied for trans rights with his mother at the Statehouse last week, said it's good for trans

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kids' mental health to play on teams associated with their gender identities, and that most other kids just don't care.

It's largely adults who "care so much about what the trans kids are doing," Alex said.

Kelly told reporters in the Kansas City area that she believes legislators eventually will regret voting for "this really awful bill."

"It breaks my heart and certainly is disappointing," Kelly said.

The first state law on transgender athletes, in Idaho in 2020, came after conservatives retrenched from the national backlash over a short-lived 2016 bathroom law in North Carolina. In Kansas, conservatives' biggest obstacle has been Kelly, who narrowly won reelection last year after pitching herself as a political centrist.

Conservative Republicans in Kansas fell short of the two-thirds majorities in both legislative chambers needed to override Kelly's vetoes of the transgender athlete bills in 2021 and 2022. But this year, the House voted 84-40 to override her veto, exactly the two-thirds majority needed. The vote was 28-12 in the Senate, one more than a two-thirds majority.

Supporters of the ban could not have overridden Kelly's veto this year but for the only Democrat to side with them against the governor. Rep. Marvin Robinson, of Kansas City, told reporters that he had wanted to "meet in the middle" but found the debate "all or none out there." He said he prayed for guidance before the vote.

Two LGBTQ Democratic lawmakers from the Kansas City area were especially upset because they believed Republicans were gloating over the House vote.

Rep. Heather Meyer stood up, opened her jacket and displayed a "Protect Trans Youth" T-shirt before making a rude gesture as she left the chamber. Rep. Susan Ruiz yelled at GOP members, briefly cursing at them before being told she was out of order.

"We're tired of putting up with it, and I'm tired of putting up with it," she said later. "There needs to be some respect."

Across the U.S., supporters of such bans argue that they keep competition fair. Track and field last month barred transgender athletes from international competition, adopting the same rules that swimming did last year.

Supporters argue that they're also making sure cisgendered girls and women don't lose the scholarships and other opportunities that didn't exist for them decades ago.

"Over the past 50 years, females have finally been able to celebrate our differences and create a division that enabled us to achieve athletic endeavors similar to our male counterparts," Caroline Bruce McAndrew, a former Olympic swimmer and member from the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame from Wichita, testified to lawmakers.

LGBTQ-rights advocates acknowledge that arguments about competition resonate outside Republicans' conservative base because of the longstanding assumption that men and boys are naturally stronger than women and girls.

They're also frustrated that the debate often focuses on whether transgender athletes have or can win championships.

Hudson Taylor, a three-time All-American collegiate wrestler said youth sports should be about learning discipline, "healthy habits," and having fun in a supportive environment. He founded and leads the pro-LGBTQ group Athlete Ally.

"There's been a professionalization of youth sports over the last 40 years," Taylor said. "So often, the legislators and people who oppose trans-athlete inclusion really go directly to the most elite, top talent, Olympic-hopeful athletes."

The Kansas measure bans transgender athletes from women's and girls' teams starting in kindergarten, even though sports and other extra-curricular activities aren't overseen by the Kansas State High School Activities Association until the seventh grade.

That's one reason LGBTQ-rights advocates are skeptical that the true issue is fair competition. Another is the scarcity of transgender female athletes.

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The state association said three transgender girls competed in sports in grades 7-12 this year, two of them seniors. Taylor said transgender athletes in college likely number fewer than 500. The NCAA says about 219,000 women play collegiate sports.

The international track and field ban doesn't affect a single transgender female athlete.

Cat Poland, the Kansas mother with a trans son, said: "They just keep taking the next, the next step, the next step, until where are trans people supposed to go? Where can they exist to be safe and live happy and fulfilling lives?"

Follow John Hanna on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/apjdhanna>

Publisher drops children's illustrator for anti-trans notes

By MARK THIESSEN and BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — A children's book illustrator from Alaska known for drawing mother-baby animal pairs like sea otters and wolves was dropped by his publisher this week after authorities allege he posted transphobic notes threatening children.

Mitchell Thomas Watley, 47, will have a preliminary hearing April 11 in Juneau on a single count of terroristic threatening for allegedly placing notes in businesses that included an assault rifle superimposed over the transgender flag. The text on the notes read: "Feeling Cute Might Shoot Some Children."

The notes were found during a period of heightened rhetoric and laws targeting transgender people across the country and came just days after a shooting at a Christian school in Nashville that left six dead. Social media accounts and other sources indicate that the shooter identified as a man; police said the shooter "was assigned female at birth" but used male pronouns on a social media profile.

After the Nashville shooting, a false and baseless online narrative emerged that claimed there's been a rise in transgender or nonbinary mass shooters in recent years. Some pundits and political influencers on social media went further, falsely suggesting that movements for trans rights are radicalizing activists into terrorists.

Court documents show that Watley referenced the Nashville shooting suspect after his arrest. Watley, who lives in the small coastal city of Juneau 575 miles (923 kilometers) southeast of Anchorage had his \$10,000 bail paid by his wife, according to online records.

"Officers spoke to Mitchell, who said (in essence) that he was in fear of the recent transgender school shooter and took it upon himself to print out and distribute these leaflets," the criminal complaint said.

Online records didn't list an attorney for Watley. A man who didn't identify himself answered the door at the couple's home and said there would be no comment.

In Juneau, booksellers removed the books Watley illustrated for his wife, Sarah Asper-Smith. Their publisher, Sasquatch Books, owned by Penguin Random House, said Wednesday it has ended its publishing relationship with Watley and will discontinue selling their books.

Watley is best known as the illustrator for three children's books written by his wife, including "I Would Tuck You In" and "You Are Home With Me." The books for children ages 1 to 5 feature mother animals snuggling their young and trying to make them feel safe with loving, affirmative statements like "wherever you may be, you will always have a home with me."

Juneau merchants began removing Asper-Smith's books from their shelves this week, but only the ones with illustrations by her husband. She does not face charges.

Pat Race with Alaska Robotics Gallery, a downtown Juneau store, said the shop has hosted gallery shows and book releases for Watley and carried his artwork for years.

"Whatever the motivation, we feel Mitch's actions were not consistent with our values or the values of our community," he said in a statement on social media. "In that light, we've decided to pull all of Mitch's books and artwork from our shelves."

Christy NaMee Eriksen, who owns Kindred Post, a store in downtown Juneau, has also removed the books. Eriksen said in a social media post the actions that Watley is accused of are "terrifying and transphobic."

"We have little patience for acts of disrespect, and we have no tolerance for hatred against marginalized

groups," Eriksen said. "Members of the trans community are our community."

Tori Weaver, a co-owner of Rainy Retreat Books in downtown Juneau, said the retailer pulled Watley's books, which she said were "incredibly" popular, particularly during the busy summer tourism months.

"We don't want to alienate any of our customers," she said.

The first of several notes was found in a grocery store Friday, which was International Day of Transgender Visibility. That discovery prompted Juneau schools to increase security, and some parents kept their children home. Another was found at the Alaska State Office Building. The last notes were found Sunday at a Costco, and police used the store's surveillance video to track the man who left the notes to his vehicle. Vehicle registration records led them to Watley, who was arrested Sunday, authorities said.

The incident also came as lawmakers across the country consider bills limiting the rights of transgender people, including in Alaska where a bill from Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy has garnered significant attention.

It would require parental permission before a student can use a different name or pronoun in school records; that sex ed classes require parental notice and permission and that schools must provide for locker rooms or restrooms based on "biological sex" or access to single-occupant facilities.

The bill remains in its first committee in the House. Senate leaders in a bipartisan majority of nine Democrats and eight Republicans have already indicated the bill isn't expected to advance on their side.

"The anti-trans rhetoric around the country has had an effect on hate crimes or attempted hate crimes like this one," said Caitlin Shortell, an Anchorage civil rights attorney and board member of Identity Inc., which offers community services and focused health care to the LGBTQ+ community.

She said transgender people rarely commit mass shootings and are more likely to be victims of violence.

"And we've seen nationwide, and in Alaska, initiatives to discriminate against trans people in the name of protecting children, and I link this to attempted crimes like the one that we averted in Juneau," Shortell said.

An LGBTQ leader in Juneau said this situation is a direct consequence of a national environment that is being directed by political and media leaders to target and dehumanize trans people.

"The expected result is death," said Emily Mesch, chair of SEAGLA, the Southeast Alaska LGBTQ Alliance.

"They're expecting that violence will come upon the trans community and some of us will die, and in exchange, some of them will get a couple thousand more votes," Mesch said. "And that's the deal with the devil that's being made, the environment and the dialogue that is happening on the national level."

Thiessen reported from Anchorage. AP Writer Claire Rush contributed from Portland, Oregon.

Dealer pleads guilty in death of actor Michael K. Williams

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A Brooklyn drug dealer pleaded guilty Wednesday to providing "The Wire" actor Michael K. Williams with fentanyl-laced heroin, causing his death.

Irvin Cartagena's plea to a charge of conspiring to distribute drugs was entered in Manhattan federal court. Sentencing was set by U.S. District Judge Ronnie Abrams for Aug. 18, when Cartagena will face a mandatory minimum of five years in prison and the possibility of as many as 40 years.

The famed actor, who also starred in films and other TV series including "Boardwalk Empire," overdosed in his Brooklyn penthouse apartment in September 2021. Authorities said he died hours after buying the heroin from Cartagena on a Brooklyn sidewalk in a deal that was recorded by a security camera.

Cartagena, 39, signed a plea agreement with prosecutors stipulating that the mix of heroin and fentanyl he sold Williams resulted in his death. His lawyer, Sean Maher, declined comment.

U.S. Attorney Damian Williams, who is not related to the actor, said in a statement that the sale occurred in "broad daylight in New York City, feeding addiction and causing tragedy."

"In doing so, he dealt the fatal dose that killed Michael K. Williams," Williams said.

Prosecutors said Cartagena and his alleged co-conspirators continued to sell fentanyl-laced heroin around residential apartment buildings in Brooklyn and Manhattan even after they learned of the actor's death.

Another defendant in the case pleaded guilty Tuesday.

Williams' death came despite an investigation by the New York Police Department that placed a paid informant making controlled heroin buys on the same block where Williams bought drugs.

The day after, the informant went back to buy more drugs from the same group and recorded a conversation in which some of them talked about Williams' overdose. One denied selling any drugs containing fentanyl.

Williams' "stick-up boy" character Omar Little on "The Wire" — a fictionalized look at the underpinnings of Baltimore that ended in 2008 but remains popular in streaming — was based on a real-life figure.

He created another classic character as Chalky White in HBO's "Boardwalk Empire" and also appeared in "12 Years a Slave," "Assassin's Creed" and other films.

In interviews, Williams had spoken about his battles with addiction.

Russian charged with war crimes: Ukrainian kids can go home

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Russia's commissioner for children's rights, who is being sought for war crimes for deporting children from Ukraine, told a U.N. meeting Wednesday that the children were taken for their safety and Moscow is coordinating with international organizations to return them to their families.

Ambassadors from Western countries boycotted the informal U.N. Security Council meeting, sending low-level diplomats instead. Diplomats from the United States, Britain, Albania and Malta walked out when the commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova, started to address the meeting by video link.

The International Criminal Court last month issued an arrest warrant for her and Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing them of abducting children from Ukraine.

Russia, which holds the rotating presidency of the Security Council this month, called the meeting to counter what it claims is disinformation about the Ukrainian children.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters before the session that the United States strongly opposed the briefing and joined the United Kingdom in blocking the United Nations from outside broadcast of the meeting.

Lvova-Belova should not be allowed "to have an international podium to spread disinformation and to try to defend her horrible actions that are taking place in Ukraine," Thomas-Greenfield said.

An Associated Press investigation, published in October, on Lvova-Belova's involvement in the abduction of Ukrainian found the open effort to put Ukrainian children up for adoption in Russia was well underway.

The exact number of Ukrainian children taken to Russia has been difficult to determine. A statement posted Wednesday on Twitter by Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, said more than 19,500 children had been seized from their families or orphanages and forcibly deported.

Russia's ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, said the aim of Wednesday's meeting was "to unmask the blatant double-standards of the West."

"Part of this propaganda campaign is the hushing up by the West of the fact that in European countries Ukrainian refugees are having their children taken away," he said. Videos were then shown of some women claiming their children had been taken in Europe.

Nebenzia also insisted that contrary to Western claims there have been "no forced adoptions." He said some Ukrainian children are in foster care and claimed there were "no obstacles" for them to maintain contact with their families in Ukraine.

The AP investigation found Russian officials deported Ukrainian children to Russia without their parents' consent, lied to them that they weren't wanted by their parents, used them for propaganda, and gave them Russian families and citizenship.

Since Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Lvova-Belova said Russia has taken in more than 5 million Ukrainians, including 700,000 children — all with parents, relatives or legal guardians except for 2,000 from orphanages in the eastern Donbas.

To date, she said, about 1,300 children have been returned to their orphanages, 400 were sent to Rus-

sian orphanages and 358 were placed in foster homes.

Lvova-Belova said there has been no official communication with Ukrainian authorities about the children, but she said her office has met with representatives of UNICEF, Refugees International and the Red Cross and provided all available information about the children. She said Russia was coordinating with the Red Cross on reunification.

Sarah Sheffer, vice president for strategic outreach at Refugees International, denied this. She said Russia has not consulted with her organization about the Ukrainian children.

UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is responsible for reuniting families, did not respond immediately to requests for confirmation of Lvova-Belova's comments.

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

Whitmer strikes 1931 abortion ban from Michigan law

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Mich. (AP) — A near-century old abortion ban that fueled one of the largest ballot drives in Michigan history was repealed Wednesday by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, just months after voters enshrined abortion rights in the state's constitution.

"Today, we're going to take action to make sure that our statutes and our laws reflect our values and our constitution," Whitmer said at a bill signing outside of Detroit.

The 1931 abortion ban made it a four-year felony to assist in an abortion. Roe v. Wade had made the law null and void until the landmark decision was overturned in June by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Courts blocked the ban from taking effect while a citizen-led initiative to enshrine abortion rights in the state's constitution received more signatures than any other ballot proposal in state history to put the question before voters. Voters overwhelmingly approved the proposal in last November's midterms, making the 1931 law unconstitutional and unenforceable.

The 1931 ban could have been enforced in the future had voters collected enough signatures to once again amend the state constitution and repeal abortion rights. Whitmer's signature Wednesday eliminated that possibility, erasing the law completely.

"We cannot allow archaic laws to remain on our books under the assumption that they'll never be used again," said Democratic state Rep. Laurie Pohutsky. "We don't know what the future will hold and we don't know what plans abortion opponents have."

Last month, the Michigan House and Senate — each with a two-seat Democratic majority — voted to send a repeal of the abortion ban to the governor. A majority of Republicans opposed the bill, speaking out ahead of the vote on the legality of abortion as a whole.

Pohutsky, who sponsored the legislation repealing the law, said at the event Wednesday that "this is far from the end of the story," and that the Democratic-controlled Statehouse will continue expanding access to reproductive health care.

Wednesday's signing marked another victory for abortion rights supporters in Michigan, who joined California and Vermont last November in enshrining abortion rights in their state's constitution. Kentucky, a reliably red state, rejected a ballot measure aimed at denying any state constitutional protections for abortion.

Voters in Wisconsin elected a Democratic-backed Milwaukee judge Tuesday to the state's Supreme Court, ensuring liberals will take over majority control of the court with the fate of the state's abortion ban on the line.

"Who would have thought two years ago, three years ago, five years ago, that we would be as Democrats looking to Michigan, Kansas, Wisconsin, Montana and Kentucky to be on the frontline of protecting reproductive freedom for women across this country," said Laphonza Butler, the president of EMILY's List.

Whitmer joined other speakers at the event in Birmingham in calling out Republican-led states for restricting abortion rights, saying laws in Texas and South Carolina were "un-American, anti-free and, frankly,

sickening.”

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has pushed for a six-week ban in his state, is scheduled to appear in Michigan on Thursday to speak at a Midland County GOP event before heading to southern Michigan to speak at Hillsdale College.

Brazil man kills 4 children with hatchet at day care center

By LAÍS MARTINS and LUCAS DUMPHREYS Associated Press

BLUMENAU, Brazil (AP) — A man with a hatchet burst into a day care center Wednesday in Brazil, killing four children, authorities said, in an attack that shook the country and put pressure on the government to curb a rising tide of violence.

At least four other children were wounded in the attack in Blumenau, a city of 366,000 in southern Brazil, near the Atlantic coast.

The assailant, who got inside by jumping over a wall, turned himself in at a police station, officials said. He did not appear to have any connection with the center, which offers nursery services, preschool education and after-school activities. The dead were between the ages of 5 and 7, authorities said.

Authorities were searching for a motive, the police detective leading the investigation, Ronnie Esteves, told television reporters.

Hours after the attack, the justice and education ministers pledged to invest in new violence-prevention efforts.

Valeria Aparecida Camilo, the mother of 5-year-old girl at the center, said she was working when a colleague saw the news. She called her husband, Gustavo, who rushed to the school and later learned that his daughter had survived.

“The moment I saw her, it was a relief,” Gustavo Camilo told The Associated Press outside the center. “But we feel sorry for everything that has happened, with the other kids who wound up dying.”

“They have no cruelty, they’re kids,” Valeria added. “They’re 5 years old. What did a 5-year-old do to this person?”

Franciele Chequeto said one of the girls killed was friends with her 7-year-old son, Gabriel.

“He wasn’t understanding,” Chequeto said. “I sat down and told him that he no longer will be able to see some of his little friends.”

The state’s civil police chief, Ulisses Gabriel, confirmed that the attacker was a 25-year-old man from neighboring Parana state. He will be charged with murder and attempted murder. Police believe the attack was an isolated act and not related to any other crimes, Gabriel said.

Images broadcast on networks showed weeping parents outside the private day care center called Cantinho do Bom Pastor.

The attack took place on the center’s playground, according to the local affiliate of television network Globo. NSC, the affiliate, showed a photo of the suspect with a closely shaved head. Police have yet to confirm his identity.

Blumenau’s mayor, Mário Hildebrandt, suspended classes and said he will declare a 30-day mourning period. Authorities said any reports of other attacks or threats against schools in the region were false.

School attacks in Brazil have happened with greater frequency in recent years. Last week, a student in Sao Paulo fatally stabbed a teacher and wounded several others in Sao Paulo.

Brazil has seen at least one past attack on a day care center. That attack also occurred in Santa Catarina state, in May 2021, when an assailant used a dagger to kill three children under 2 years old and two adults.

From 2000 to 2022, 16 attacks or violent episodes happened in schools, four of them in the second half of last year, according to a report from researchers led by Daniel Cara, an education professor at the University of Sao Paulo. The 12 researchers — comprised of psychologists, social scientists, public school educators, journalists and activists — prepared the report for the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Brazilian Justice Minister Flávio Dino told reporters in Brasilia that he was directing 150 million reais (\$30

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million) from the nation's public security fund to shore up school safety. That money will pay for both heightened policing and an expansion of a Brasilia-based team for the monitoring of deep-web communities, he said. Earlier Wednesday, Dino met with representatives from student associations.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Camilo Santana announced the creation of a group to address school violence. Santana will lead the group, which is scheduled to meet for the first time Thursday.

There is no single factor to explain the rise of such attacks, but a common denominator is what Cara calls "a crisis of perspective" regarding economic problems and the likelihood that each assailant endured situations of frustration and violence, including bullying and harassment.

"Given the lack of perspective and the way they were victimized," they get recruited by online communities and seek a way to take revenge on society, Cara told the AP by phone.

"They are usually young people who have a masculinist, misogynistic, racist discourse, who worship neo-Nazi and fascist symbols, and who navigate in communities where violence is glorified," Cara added.

Experts say April is a particularly sensitive month for school attacks as it concentrates the anniversaries of the 1999 Columbine school shooting in the U.S. and a shooting in a school in Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan area in 2011. These events are glorified in violent communities and can act as triggers for new attacks, Cara said.

"There are no words to console the families. Anyone who has lost a relative knows that there are no words," a teary-eyed President Lula said Wednesday at the outset of a ministerial meeting. He requested his ministers observe a minute of silence.

In 2019, a bacterial infection claimed the life of Lula's grandson, who was 7 years old — the same age as one of the victims in Blumenau.

Martins reported from Sao Paulo. Associated Press Writer David Biller in Rio de Janeiro also contributed to this report.

Amid polarization, minority party lawmakers face penalties

By SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma Republicans removed the state's only nonbinary legislator from House committees after the lawmaker provided refuge to a transgender rights activist. In Florida, two Democratic leaders were arrested for participating in a protest over abortion restrictions. And in Tennessee, three Democratic House members are facing expulsion for using a bullhorn in the House chamber to show support for demonstrators demanding gun control.

In an increasingly polarized political atmosphere, experts say these kinds of harsh punishments for minority party members standing up for principles they believe in are becoming more common, especially when acts of civil disobedience clash with the rigid policies and procedures of legislative decorum.

The modern-day division between Democrats and Republicans is at its highest level since immediately after the Civil War, said Scot Schraufnagel, a political science professor at Northern Illinois University who has studied and written about political incivility.

"I used to teach students that it's not as bad as it once was," Schraufnagel said. "It's as bad or worse than it's ever been, with the caveat that we don't have data from pre-Civil War era."

While many Republican leaders are loudly complaining about the arrest of former President Donald Trump on 34 felony criminal charges, it's members of the Democratic minority in GOP-led states who have been facing a crackdown for their political actions.

"Over the last few years, I feel like the extremism has increased and the polarization has gotten worse," said Oklahoma House Minority Leader Rep. Cyndi Munson, whose Democratic colleague Rep. Mauree Turner was formally censured by the GOP-controlled House after a transgender rights protester involved in a scuffle with Capitol police sought refuge in Turner's office.

"Obviously we're seeing this in Oklahoma ... this desire (for Republicans) to use their power to silence anyone who doesn't think like them. They seem to want to shut out and silence people who don't think

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exactly like they do.”

Turner, one of the few Black legislators in the Legislature and the first openly nonbinary and Muslim person elected to state office in Oklahoma, was told they could be restored to their committees if they apologized to the House and to the Capitol patrol. Turner said that won't happen.

“I can't apologize for loving the people of Oklahoma enough to fight for their rights,” Turner said this week.

Weeks later, when a Republican colleague was censured over an arrest for public drunkenness during which he tried to claim legislative immunity, Turner joined some other Democrats in voting against the punishment.

“I will not put people in a physical prison, I will not put people in a social prison,” Turner said, “and I sure as hell won't put them in a political prison.”

In Tennessee, Republicans will vote Thursday on whether to kick Democratic Reps. Gloria Johnson, Justin Jones and Justin Pearson out of their offices for taking to the front of the House and chanting back and forth with gun control supporters who packed the gallery days after The Covenant School shooting in Nashville that killed six people, including three children. Expulsions in the Tennessee General Assembly are extremely rare and typically center on criminal activity.

House Minority Leader Karen Camper described her Democratic colleagues' actions as “good trouble,” a nod to the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis' guiding principal on civil disobedience.

As scrutiny over the expulsion effort increased, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Tuesday criticized Republican lawmakers' focus on rebuking Democrats for protesting rather than addressing solutions to avoid another school shooting.

“What did the Republican legislators do? They're trying to expel these three Democratic legislators who joined in the protest,” Jean-Pierre said, adding that GOP members are “shrugging in the face of yet another tragic school shooting while our kids continue to pay the price.”

In Florida, Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book is not expected to face any legislative discipline after she and Democratic Party Chairwoman Nikki Fried were arrested and charged with trespassing for refusing to leave a protest in Tallahassee against a bill to ban abortions after six weeks.

Fried, who was Florida's agriculture commissioner and the only statewide elected Democrat before losing a campaign for governor last year, just took over a party that is at its lowest point in state history. Book said she realizes the Republican supermajority in the Legislature can pass whatever it wants regardless of what Democrats do.

“It's my charge to lead a group of 11 other Democrats ... and to get them excited every single day to fight a battle that a lot of times we know we're going to lose,” Book said.

Schraufnagel, the professor, said much of the incivility is a result of a political-agenda shift toward hot-button topics like abortion, gun restrictions and transgender rights.

“What's happened is that politicians have used social issues to try to drive wedges into the voting base of their opponents,” Schraufnagel said. “When we have intense polarization, which is the current era, and you add incivility to the mix, we're getting hyper-conflict that is not conducive to effective governance.”

Associated Press reporters Kimberlee Kruesi in Nashville, Tennessee, and Brendan Farrington in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

Novel treatment shows promise against rare cancer in kids

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

A novel treatment using supercharged immune cells appears to work against tumors in children with a rare kind of cancer, researchers reported Wednesday.

Nine of 27 children in the Italian study had no sign of cancer six weeks after the treatment, although two later relapsed and died.

The treatment — called CAR-T cell therapy — is already used to help the immune system fight leukemia and other cancers in the blood. This is the first time researchers have achieved such encouraging results in

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solid tumors, experts in the field said, and raises hopes that it can be used against other kinds of cancers. It's too soon to call it a cure for neuroblastoma, a nerve tissue cancer that often starts in infancy in the adrenal glands near the kidneys in the abdomen.

Standard treatment can be intense, involving chemotherapy, surgery and radiation, depending on the cancer's stage and other factors. The children in the study had cancers that had come back or were particularly hard to treat.

Eleven children were alive when the three-year study ended, including some who only partially responded to treatment and got repeat doses of the modified cells.

"Those kids were all destined to die without that therapy," said University of Pennsylvania's Dr. Carl June, a pioneer of CAR-T therapy who was not involved in the new research.

"No one's ever had patients responding like this before, so we just don't know what it's going to look like a decade from now," June said. "For sure, there are going to be more trials now based on these exciting results."

CAR-T cell therapy harnesses the immune system to create "living drugs" able to seek and destroy tumors. T cells from the patient's blood are collected and strengthened in the lab, then returned to the patient through an IV where they continue to multiply.

Six CAR-T cell therapies have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for blood cancers. Some early patients have been cured.

But success in solid tumors has been elusive. The latest study was done by researchers at the Vatican's Bambino Gesù pediatric hospital in Rome.

"They seem to have found a unique combination" to get the modified cells to multiply initially, then last a long time to continue their cancer-killing work, said Dr. Robbie Majzner of Stanford University School of Medicine, who was not involved in the new study.

Study co-author Dr. Franco Locatelli said they also added a safety switch to eliminate the cells if a patient had a severe reaction. When one patient had problems, they flipped the safety switch, showing that it worked, although later they determined the patient's problem was caused by a brain bleed unrelated to the CAR-T cells.

Many of the children had a side effect that is common with CAR-T therapy — an immune overreaction called "cytokine release syndrome." It can be serious, but was mild in most, the researchers reported.

They concluded that CAR-T therapy was "feasible and safe in treating high-risk neuroblastoma."

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.

NPR protests as Twitter calls it 'state-affiliated media'

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Twitter has labeled National Public Radio as "state-affiliated media" on the social media site, a move some worried Wednesday could undermine public confidence in the news organization.

NPR said it was disturbed to see the description added to all of the tweets that it sends out, with John Lansing, its president and CEO, calling it "unacceptable for Twitter to label us this way."

It was unclear why Twitter made the move. Twitter's owner, Elon Musk, quoted a definition of state-affiliated media in the company's guidelines as "outlets where the state exercises control over editorial content through financial resources, direct or indirect political pressures, and/or control over production and distribution."

"Seems accurate," Musk tweeted in a reply to NPR.

NPR does receive U.S. government funding through grants from federal agencies and departments, along with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The company said it accounts for less than 1% of NPR's annual operating budget. But until Wednesday, the same Twitter guidelines said that "state-financed media organizations with editorial independence, like the BBC in the UK or NPR in the United States, are

not defined as state-affiliated media for the purposes of this policy.”

NPR has now been removed from that sentence on Twitter’s website.

Asked for comment, Twitter’s press office responded with an automated poop emoji.

The move came just days after Twitter stripped The New York Times of its verification check mark.

“NPR and our member stations are supported by millions of listeners who depend on us for the independent, fact-based journalism we provide,” Lansing said. “NPR stands for freedom of speech and holding the powerful accountable.”

The literary organization PEN America, in calling for Twitter to reverse the move, underlined that NPR “assiduously maintains editorial independence.”

Liz Woolery, PEN America’s digital policy leader, said Twitter’s decision was “a dangerous move that could further undermine public confidence in reliable news sources.”

Pence won’t appeal order compelling grand jury testimony

By JILL COLVIN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A spokesman for Mike Pence said Wednesday that the former vice president will not appeal a judge’s order compelling him to testify in the Justice Department’s investigation into efforts by Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election.

The decision sets up a possible appearance by Pence in the coming weeks before a federal grand jury scrutinizing attempts by the former president and supporters before the riot at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, to undo Democrat Joe Biden’s victory.

Multiple Trump administration officials have testified in that investigation, as well as in a separate inquiry examining Trump’s possession of classified documents, but Pence would be the highest-profile witness to answer questions before a grand jury. His closed-door testimony could offer investigators a firsthand account of Trump’s state of mind in the pivotal weeks after he lost to Biden and further expose the rift in their relationship since the end of their administration.

The strain could grow as Pence approaches a likely 2024 run for the presidency and a challenge to Trump, who already is in the race for the Republican nomination.

After Pence was subpoenaed months ago by the Justice Department’s special counsel, lawyers for Trump objected on executive privilege grounds. But a federal judge in Washington last week rejected those arguments, forcing Pence to testify.

U.S. District Judge James Boasberg did give Pence a win by accepting arguments from Pence’s lawyers that, for constitutional reasons, he could not be questioned about his actions on Jan. 6. They had argued that because Pence was serving in his capacity as president of the Senate that day, he was protected from being forced to testify under the Constitution’s “speech or debate” clause, which is intended to protect members of Congress from questioning about official legislative acts.

“Having vindicated that principle of the Constitution, Vice President Pence will not appeal the judge’s ruling and will comply with the subpoena as required by law,” Pence spokesman Devin O’Malley said in a statement Wednesday.

The Trump team could still appeal the executive privilege ruling from Boasberg.

The Jan. 6 and classified records investigations are being led by Jack Smith, a former war crimes prosecutor who was named by the Justice Department in November to serve as special counsel. It is not clear when the investigations might end or whether anyone will be charged.

Pence has spoken extensively about Trump’s pressure campaign urging him to reject Biden’s victory in the days leading up to Jan. 6, including in his book, “So Help Me God.” Pence, as vice president, had a ceremonial role overseeing Congress’ counting of the Electoral College vote, but did not have the power to affect the results, despite Trump’s contention otherwise.

Pence has said that Trump endangered his family and everyone else who was at the Capitol that day and history will hold him “accountable.”

“For four years, we had a close working relationship. It did not end well,” Pence wrote, summing up their time in the White House.

Colvin reported from New York.

Paying for paradise? Hawaii mulls fees for ecotourism crush

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Repairing coral reefs after boats run aground. Shielding native forest trees from a killer fungus outbreak. Patrolling waters for swimmers harassing dolphins and turtles.

Taking care of Hawaii's unique natural environment takes time, people and money. Now Hawaii wants tourists to help pay for it, especially because growing numbers are traveling to the islands to enjoy the beauty of its outdoors — including some lured by dramatic vistas they have seen on social media.

"All I want to do, honestly, is to make travelers accountable and have the capacity to help pay for the impact that they have," Democratic Gov. Josh Green said earlier this year. "We get between nine and 10 million visitors a year, (but) we only have 1.4 million people living here. Those 10 million travelers should be helping us sustain our environment."

Hawaii lawmakers are considering legislation that would require tourists to pay for a yearlong license or pass to visit state parks and trails. They are still debating how much they would charge.

The governor campaigned last year on a platform of having all tourists pay a \$50 fee to enter the state. Legislators think this would violate U.S. constitutional protections for free travel and have promoted their parks and trails approach instead. Either policy would be a first of its kind for any U.S. state.

Hawaii's leaders are following the example of other tourism hotspots that have imposed similar fees or taxes like Venice, Italy, and Ecuador's Galapagos Islands. The Pacific island nation of Palau, for example, charges arriving international passengers \$100 to help it manage a sprawling marine sanctuary and promote ecotourism.

State Rep. Sean Quinlan, a Democrat who chairs the House Tourism Committee, said changing traveler patterns are one reason behind Hawaii's push. He said golf rounds per visitor per day have declined 30% over the past decade while hiking has increased 50%. People are also seeking out once-obscure sites that they have seen someone post on social media. The state doesn't have the money to manage all these places, he said.

"It's not like it was 20 years ago when you bring your family and you hit maybe one or two famous beaches and you go see Pearl Harbor. And that's the extent of it," Quinlan said. "These days it's like, well, you know, 'I saw this post on Instagram and there's this beautiful rope swing, a coconut tree.'"

"All these places that didn't have visitors now have visitors," he said.

Most state parks and trails are currently free. Some of the most popular ones already charge, like Diamond Head State Monument, which features a trail leading from the floor of a 300,000-year-old volcanic crater up to its summit. It gets 1 million visitors each year and costs \$5 for each traveler.

A bill currently before the state House would require nonresidents 15 years and older visiting forests, parks, trails or "other natural area on state land" to buy an annual license online or via mobile app. Violators would pay a civil fine, though penalties wouldn't be imposed during a five-year education and transition period.

Residents with a Hawaii driver's license or other state identification would be exempt.

The Senate passed a version of the measure setting the fee at \$50. But the House Finance Committee amended it last week to delete the dollar amount. Chair Kyle Yamashita, a Democrat, said the bill was "a work in progress." The bill has been scheduled for a House floor vote on Thursday.

Dawn Chang, chair of the state Board of Land and Natural Resources, told the committee that Hawaii's beaches are open to the public, so people probably wouldn't be cited there — and such details still need to be worked out.

Rep. Dee Morikawa, a Democrat on the committee, recommended that the state create a list of places that would require the license.

Green has indicated he's flexible about where the fee is imposed and that he's willing to support the

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Legislature's approach.

Supporters say there's no other place in the U.S. that imposes a similar fee on visitors. The closest equivalent may be the \$34.50 tax Alaska charges to each cruise ship passenger.

Hawaii's conservation needs are great. Invasive pests are attacking the state's forests, including a fungal disease that is killing ohia, a tree unique to Hawaii that makes up the largest portion of the canopy in native wet forests.

Some conservation work directly responds to tourism. The harassment of wildlife like dolphins, turtles and Hawaiian monk seals is a recurring problem. Hikers can unknowingly bring invasive species into the forest on their boots. Snorkelers and boats trample on coral, adding stress to reefs already struggling with invasive algae and coral bleaching.

A 2019 report by Conservation International, a nonprofit environmental organization, estimated that total federal, state, county and private spending on conservation in Hawaii amounted to \$535 million but the need was \$886 million.

At the Diamond Head trail recently, some visitors said the fee would make the most sense for people who come to Hawaii often or who might be staying for several weeks. Some said \$50 was too high, especially for those who view a walk through nature as a low-cost activity.

"For a large family that wants to have the experience with the kids, that would be a lot of money," said Sarah Tripp, who was visiting Hawaii with her husband and two of their three children from Marquette, Michigan.

Katrina Kain, an English teacher visiting from Puerto Rico, said she thought the fee would "sting" some people but would be fine so long as it was well-advertised.

"If tourists were informed about it, then they would be OK with it," she said. "If that was a surprise \$50 fee, it would be a pretty lousy surprise."

The legislation says proceeds would go into a "visitor impact fee special fund" managed by the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Carissa Cabrera, project manager for the Hawaii Green Fee, a coalition of nonprofit groups supporting the measure, said this would ensure the state has money for conservation regardless of budget swings.

Mufi Hanneman, president and CEO of the Hawaii Lodging and Tourism Association, which represents hotels, backs the bill but said Hawaii must carefully monitor how the money is used.

"The last thing that you want to see is restrooms that haven't been fixed, trails or pathways that haven't been repaved or what have you — and year in, year out it remains the same and people are paying a fee," Hannemann said.

Trump's bravado tested as legal woes overlap with campaign

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When Donald Trump stepped into a Manhattan courthouse Tuesday afternoon, his usual bravado was replaced with palpable anger and notable silence as the former president was reduced to a criminal defendant in custody.

By the time he returned to his Mar-a-Lago club hours later, he was ready to unleash.

"The only crime that I have committed is to fearlessly defend our nation from those who seek to destroy it," the first former president to be indicted told a crowd of hundreds of loyal supporters.

Trump made an unlikely transformation from reality television star to U.S. president by tapping into the grievance of Republican voters disillusioned with the political establishment. As he wages a comeback bid for the White House, Trump and his campaign hope his indictment will serve as a rallying cry that will galvanize the same voters. Already, he has raised millions of dollars off the news.

It's an approach that will test Trump's "all publicity is good publicity" adage as his decades-long history of bending the world to his will collides with cold legal reality.

Trump, the early frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, now faces the unprecedented prospect of mounting another campaign for the White House while simultaneously on trial for charges stemming from hush money payments to women during his 2016 campaign. He remains under investiga-

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tion in Georgia and Washington, raising the prospect of multiple trials in several jurisdictions, all unfolding as Republicans begin voting on their next nominee.

In the meantime, Trump's rivals for the Republican presidential nomination are struggling to emerge from his ever-growing shadow, even as the proceedings raise serious questions about Trump's viability in a general election.

"A lot of times you have a candidate who's in trouble, you create a diversion," said Trump campaign pollster John McLaughlin. "They're indicting Trump, Trump consumes all the headlines and media coverage."

While most defendants would see an arrest as an indignity to be handled quietly, Trump — a man who has always craved the media spotlight — seized the PR and fundraising opportunity, blasting out his itinerary and narrating a play-by-play on social media.

"Heading to Lower Manhattan, the Courthouse. Seems so SURREAL — WOW, they are going to ARREST ME. Can't believe this is happening in America. MAGA!" he wrote on Truth Social as his motorcade headed toward the courthouse, his every movement captured by news helicopters hovering overhead.

His campaign further hyped the appearance in fundraising solicitations. "My last email before my arrest," one read.

As he was behind closed doors at the courthouse being booked and fingerprinted, his campaign began advertising a "NEW ITEM" to donors: A t-shirt featuring a doctored black-and-white "mug shot" of Trump, complete with an exaggerated height chart and the words, "NOT GUILTY."

In reality, Trump was not subjected to a mug shot Tuesday — one of several exceptions from normal operating procedure made for the former president — underscoring the contrast between the image he hoped to project and his actual appearance as he faced 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first degree.

After being caught off guard by the charges, Trump appeared unmistakably livid as he left Trump Tower Tuesday afternoon and arrived at the lower Manhattan courthouse. He was stone-faced and silent as he entered the courtroom alone, pushing the door open himself.

"What do you expect his reaction was?" Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche said outside the courthouse immediately following the appearance. "He's frustrated, he's upset. But I'll tell you what: He's motivated. And it's not going to stop him. It's not going to slow him down."

During the hearing, Trump was subdued. He spent the proceeding mostly listening and spoke just 10 words in total, including "Not guilty," "Yes," "Thank you," and "I do." At one point, after a discussion about whether one of his lawyers might have a conflict of interest, Trump was told by the judge he had the right to conflict-free representation and was asked if he understood. Trump's response was so faint that the judge gestured to his ear, signaling he hadn't heard the answer. "Yes," Trump then offered.

Before the proceeding, Trump declined to speak to assembled reporters, as had been expected.

"He is angry," Barbara Res, a longtime former employee who was a vice president at the Trump Organization, said of the former president after watching the proceedings. "He has a look on his face and I've seen that look. That look is, 'I'm going to kill you.'"

Trump, according to people who had spoken to him in recent days, had seemed both resigned and angry as he processed the reality of the pending charges, which remained under seal until the hearing.

"He is angry. He is frustrated, but he is dedicated to defeating this," said U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Georgia Republican who appeared at a pro-Trump rally in New York across the street from the courthouse and joined the former president at Mar-a-Lago Tuesday night.

On Tuesday at the courthouse, he was described as resolute and calm — mad about the circumstances, but also pleased by his respectful treatment by court officers, U.S. Secret Service and staff from the District Attorney's office.

"The GREAT PATRIOTS inside and outside of the Courthouse on Tuesday were unbelievably nice, in fact, they couldn't have been nicer," Trump said in a statement. "Court attendants, Police Officers, and others were all very professional, and represented New York City sooo well. Thank you to all!"

Trump, after the hearing, flew straight back home to Florida, where he delivered a grievance-filled prime-time speech, again criticizing the prosecution and judge presiding over the case despite being admonished

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hours earlier about incendiary rhetoric.

Aides had assembled a crowd of hundreds of his most loyal supporters. The scene, in some ways, felt more like a campaign launch than the subdued announcement he held in the same room in November, with an amped-up crowd cheering him on. After his speech, he joined supporters at a reception on the Mar-a-Lago patio, where he mingled late into the night.

Indeed, Trump went so far as to insist the day had been a “great” one during an “emergency” prayer call after he left the courthouse.

“We’re winning. We had a great day today, actually, because it turned out to be a sham,” he said, according to audio.

Trump is due back in court in December for a hearing, though lawyers have asked that he be excused from attending because of the extraordinary security involved. Prosecutors asked the judge to set a trial for January — just weeks before the first votes will be cast in the 2024 Republican presidential primary. Trump’s lawyers said they felt a more realistic start date would be the spring — a time when Trump could theoretically have locked down the Republican nomination, or be in the midst of a bitter primary fight.

It remains unclear how the charges will reverberate long term, especially if Trump faces additional indictments in Georgia and Washington, where prosecutors are investigating his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election and his handling of classified documents. Trump has already alienated many swing voters, particularly suburban women, who abandoned him 2020.

A CNN poll conducted after news of the indictment became public, but before it was unsealed, found that, while 60% of U.S. adults approve of the decision to bring charges, a majority — about three quarters — believe the indictment was motivated, at least, in part by politics.

“In the short term, I think without a doubt that it will rally more right-of-center voters around President Trump,” said former Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who competed against Trump in the 2016 GOP primary. “Who would ever have thought that an indictment would be anything but a negative?”

McLaughlin, the Trump pollster, said he has found Republican primary voters are rallying around the former president.

“It’s making angry people even angrier,” he said. “They’ve got a candidate who is now the frontrunner for president.. and he’s being indicted for something they don’t understand.”

Associated Press writers Colleen Long in Washington, Michael R. Sisak and Jennifer Peltz in New York and Adriana Gomez Licon in Palm Beach, Florida contributed to this report.

DOJ tentatively settles over Texas church shooting for \$144M

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Justice Department announced Wednesday a tentative \$144 million settlement with families and victims of a 2017 mass shooting at a Texas church that was carried out by a former U.S. airman who was able to purchase firearms despite a criminal history.

More than two dozen people were killed when Devin Patrick Kelley opened fire during a Sunday service at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs. Authorities put the official death toll at 26 because one of the 25 people killed was pregnant in what remains the deadliest mass shooting in Texas history.

Kelley had served nearly five years in the Air Force before being discharged in 2014 for bad conduct, after he was convicted of assaulting a former wife and stepson, cracking the child’s skull. The Air Force has publicly acknowledged that the felony conviction for domestic violence — had it been put into the FBI database — could have prevented Kelley from buying guns from licensed firearms dealer.

U.S. District Judge Xavier Rodriguez had previously ruled that the Air Force was “60% liable” for the attack because it failed to submit Kelley’s assault conviction during his time in the Air Force to a national database. He ruled that Kelley was at fault for the rest.

The Justice Department said the settlement is still subject to court approvals.

“No words or amount of money can diminish the immense tragedy of the mass shooting in Sutherland

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Springs," said Vanita Gupta, associate attorney general for the Justice Department, in a statement. "Today's announcement brings the litigation to a close, ending a painful chapter for the victims of this unthinkable crime."

Jamal Alsaffar, a Texas attorney who has represented the Sutherland Springs victims in the lawsuit, noted that the settlement was not yet final and said the families have been fighting for justice.

"The Sutherland Springs families are heroes," Alsaffar said in a statement. "The country owes them a debt of gratitude. They have gone through so much pain and loss in the most horrific way."

The settlement would end a long-running lawsuit that was filed in 2018. When lawsuits are filed against federal agencies or programs, they are defended by attorneys with the Justice Department, which has separate divisions for criminal prosecutions and other responsibilities.

The settlement is less than the \$230 million that Rodriguez had ordered the government to pay families and the victims last year, but the Justice Department appealed that ruling.

Rodriguez said in 2021 that had the government done its job and entered Kelley's history into the database, "it is more likely than not that Kelley would have been deterred from carrying out the Church shooting."

Kelley was able to purchase four firearms after being discharged in 2014, three of which he carried into the church. After the shooting, the Air Force was blamed for not reporting his record to the FBI. The conviction would have been a red flag in the mandatory background check when Kelley tried to purchase a gun.

Kelley died of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound after he was shot and chased by two men who heard the gunfire at the church.

Blinken says WSJ reporter 'wrongfully detained' by Russia

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BRUSSELS (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday he has "no doubt" that Russia has wrongfully detained an American reporter for The Wall Street Journal who was arrested last week on spying allegations.

However, Blinken said a formal determination of Evan Gershkovich's wrongful detention has not yet been made, something that would elevate the priority of his case within the U.S. government. Blinken said the legal process for such a determination would be completed soon.

"In Evan's case, we are working through the determination on wrongful detention and there's a process to do that and it's something that we're working through very deliberately, but expeditiously as well," he said. "And I'll let that process play out."

"In my own mind, there's no doubt that he's being wrongfully detained by Russia and that's exactly what I said to Foreign Minister (Sergey) Lavrov when I spoke to him over the weekend and insisted that Evan be released immediately," Blinken told reporters at NATO headquarters in Brussels. "But I want to make sure, as always, because there is a formal process that we go through it and we will and I expect that to be completed soon."

In what was a rare call with Lavrov since Russia invaded Ukraine early last year, Blinken also urged him to immediately release another imprisoned American, Paul Whelan, who had already been determined to have been wrongfully detained.

When the U.S. government formally designates an American as wrongfully detained, it shifts supervision of the person's case to a specialized State Department section — the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs — that is focused on negotiating for the release of captives.

The designation empowers the government to use a variety of tools, including diplomacy, to secure the release of a captured American rather than simply waiting for a criminal case to make its way through the system.

"From my perspective, from the department's perspective there is no higher priority than the safety and security of American citizens around the world," Blinken said Wednesday.

Lawyers for Gershkovich, the son of immigrants from the Soviet Union who grew up speaking Russian at home in Princeton, New Jersey, have appealed his arrest. The Journal has adamantly denied the al-

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legations and demanded his release. U.S. officials have also called on Russia to free him, with President Joe Biden telling reporters on Friday that his message to Russia was: "Let him go."

The FSB, Russia's top security agency and a successor to the KGB, said Gershkovich was trying to obtain classified information about a Russian arms factory. He is the first U.S. correspondent to be held on spying accusations since the Cold War.

In its summary of Sunday's phone call, Russia's Foreign Ministry said Lavrov "drew Blinken's attention to the need to respect the decisions of the Russian authorities" about Gershkovich, who Moscow claims, without evidence, "was caught red-handed."

The Kremlin said Lavrov also told Blinken it was unacceptable for U.S. officials and Western news media to continue "whipping up excitement" and politicizing the journalist's detention. "His further fate will be determined by the court," Lavrov said.

Emma Tucker, the Journal's editor-in-chief, said it was "gratifying" and "reassuring" to learn of Blinken's call with Lavrov because it shows the U.S. government is taking the case "right up to the top."

U.S. consular officials have requested a visit with Gershkovich and said they were hopeful consular access could be arranged soon. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Wednesday the request is being considered and a decision will be made "taking into account existing consular practice and Russian legislation." She gave no indication of when a decision would be made.

Lawyers for Gershkovich met with him in a Moscow prison on Tuesday for the first time since his detention. They said "his health is good," according to The Journal.

Rep. Mike Turner, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, noted on Sunday that the government has advised U.S. citizens to leave Russia. "This is not unexpected, in that Russia is acting as an illegal state at this point. There are no laws or rules or no international norms that they are following," Turner, R-Ohio, told CNN's "State of the Union."

In alleging that U.S. officials and news media are hyping Gershkovich's detention, Russian officials are reprising a theme they used in the apprehensions of basketball star Brittney Griner and other U.S. citizens.

The Kremlin has said it prefers to resolve such cases quietly and has emphasized the need to follow Russia's judicial process. Often, that means the chance of progress in U.S. efforts to free its detained citizens isn't likely until formal charges are filed, a trial is held, a conviction is obtained and sentencing and appeals are completed.

Griner, who plays for the WNBA's Phoenix Mercury, was detained in February 2022 but was not classified as wrongfully held by the State Department until early that May. She was released in December in a prisoner swap.

More than 30 news organizations and press freedom advocates have written the Russian ambassador in the United States to express concern Russia is sending the message that reporting inside the country is criminalized.

Interactions between the top U.S. and Russian diplomats have been rare since Russia began its war in Ukraine in February 2022, though they did have a brief conversation last month on the sidelines of the Group of 20 conference of foreign ministers in India. It was the highest-level in-person talk between the two countries since the war began.

That interaction was their first contact since last summer, when Blinken talked to Lavrov by phone about a U.S. proposal for Russia to release Griner and Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive. Though Whelan was not included in the one-for-one swap that resulted in the release of Griner, U.S. officials said they remained committed to bringing him home.

Q&A: Lewis Capaldi feels 'naked' releasing new documentary

By BROOKE LEFFERTS Associated Press

Lewis Capaldi's first album went multiplatinum and led to chart-topping hits, sold-out stadiums, and a Grammy nomination for the singer-songwriter. Besting that with his sophomore album was daunting enough, but then he agreed to allow a Netflix documentary crew to follow him. Capaldi says, with his trademark

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wit, he wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

The result is "How I'm Feeling Now," a film that reveals the fear and anxiety that plagued the recording artist as he returned home to Scotland and tried to write new songs during the pandemic. Capaldi — who has more than 6 million Instagram followers — is known for funny, self-deprecating posts, so the film's depiction of his mental health struggles, complicated by a recent diagnosis of Tourette syndrome, may be a surprise to his fans.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Capaldi describes the release of the film — which drops Wednesday — as a necessary "catharsis," and discusses lessons learned and staying in his lane. Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: How does it feel, releasing the film and making yourself so vulnerable?

CAPALDI: It's a bit strange, to be honest. I didn't really even know that this film was going to be like this. When we started making it, it was going to be me being on tour in 2020 and playing all these festivals and sort of this triumphant thing and actually became quite a vulnerable thing. I feel quite naked. And can I tell you something? I don't look very good naked! (laughs)

So it's a bit of a weird one. But yeah, I'm excited for people to see it and I'm really proud of it. The stuff that I've addressed since seeing the film, it's just been a really cathartic experience all round and catharsis isn't always easy or painless.

AP: What did you learn about yourself in the process of making the film?

CAPALDI: It's a lot more tragic than I was expecting! I see what I see when I'm speaking to my parents or my friends or whatever. But I don't see how it affects them when I'm not around. I was like, 'I really need to get myself in order,' because it's not fair on other people for me to continue to sort of neglect my own mental health.

It was such a surreal experience watching it all back and it was a lot more depressing than I was expecting. I was surprised that I never died at the end. (laughs) I was like, wow, this is pretty real. But it's cool. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to make it.

AP: You had writer's block working on the second album — was that even harder with a film crew following you? Did you regret it?

CAPALDI: Oh, every single moment of making the documentary, I thought, 'Why did I agree to do this?!' Even on days they would just come round my house and found me puttering around for like b-roll footage. I was like, This is so f---ing annoying.

The only way I can describe how I feel ... the only way I've described fame in general is "embarrassing." If I was driving around my hometown or I was going to the pub and the cameras came ... If someone else was doing it, I would be like, 'Who does this guy think he is bringing a camera around here? Like he thinks people want to watch a film about his life!' And I'm like, 'No, I don't, honestly!'

I lead quite an ordinary life, which I think you can kind of see. I think the amazing thing is what (director Joe Pearlman) managed to pull together, that story of my mental health and the imposter syndrome.

AP: In the doc you get a diagnosis of Tourette syndrome. How are you managing that?

CAPALDI: I'm glad to have a diagnosis, because I thought I was dying, which is a big thing for me. I try not to learn too much about my Tourette's because then I find that it gets worse. The more I read about it, the worse it gets. Some days it's fine and some days it's a lot worse than others. But I just kind of have to get on with it, unfortunately. That's just how my life is.

AP: You personally and regularly respond to hundreds of fans on social media. Why is that important to you?

CAPALDI: A lot of people don't realize a lot of this job is sitting around waiting to do something, whether it's a gig, or waiting to do an interview. So it's not actually as cumbersome as people might think. People taking the time to comment ... It's nice to take the time to comment back, I guess. It's just something we've done since when we first started posting stuff and it was four comments on a post. And I know that it can be anywhere from four to 40,000. It's nice to have a little back-and-forth with people who are keen on the music and keen on things that I do.

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AP: Your social feeds are so funny — have people approached you about acting?

CAPALDI: I don't think I'd be able to do acting. We shot a music video recently for a song that I brought out called 'Pointless' that never actually made it out because I have a real problem looking at people's faces and it just feels so odd to me. It looked so stiff and weird. There was an agent once who asked me about films, but I won't be doing a Harry Styles anytime soon and conquering the world of acting.

I think for now I'm staying firmly in my lane. Unless the music work dries up, in which case I'll take the cash from anywhere.

No Russians, Belarusians expected at swimming worlds in July

LAUSANNE, Switzerland (AP) — No Russian or Belarusian athletes are expected to compete at this year's swimming world championships in Japan because the sport's governing body isn't expected to rule on their eligibility until it's too late for them to enter.

World Aquatics said Wednesday it will create a task force to look at how Russia and Belarus could return to swimming, diving and water polo as neutral athletes. The update is expected in July, the same month of the world championships in Fukuoka.

Entry deadlines for swimming and diving is June 27. For water polo, the entry deadline is July 3. The championships start on July 14.

Governing bodies like World Aquatics were asked by the International Olympic Committee last week to look at ways of reintegrating Russian and Belarusians with neutral status ahead of the 2024 Paris Games.

Swimming is one of the three biggest sports on the Olympic program. Track and field has already excluded Russia and Belarus from its world championships this year in August in Budapest, Hungary. The gymnastics world championships are scheduled for October in Antwerp, Belgium, with a decision on Russian and Belarusian participation still undecided.

The IOC has suggested athletes who have actively supported the war in Ukraine or are contracted to the military and national security agencies should be denied neutral status. Russia and Belarus should also stay excluded from team sports, the IOC said last week.

Most Olympics sports banned those countries from playing in or hosting international events within weeks of the invasion of Ukraine last year. Tennis and cycling have allowed athletes to continue with neutral status.

World Aquatics said its decision last year to exclude athletes and officials from Russia and Belarus remains in effect. Those countries both missed the 2022 worlds in Budapest.

At the previous world championships in 2019 — held in South Korea before the coronavirus pandemic — Russia placed third in the medals table behind China and the United States, winning 12 golds and 30 medals overall. Ukraine won seven medals, including one gold.

World Aquatics said its task force would include athletes and be led by Maureen Croes of Aruba, who is president of the Pan American regional swim body.

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

UN nuclear chief discusses Ukraine nuclear plant in Russia

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — The head of the U.N.'s atomic energy watchdog met with Russian officials in Kaliningrad on Wednesday for negotiations on the safety of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, currently held by Russian forces.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi's trip to the Russian exclave came a week after he visited the plant, which is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe.

"I met high level officials from several Russian agencies in Kaliningrad," Grossi said on Twitter. "I continue my efforts to protect the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant," he said, emphasizing that this was "in everyone's interest."

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The head of Rosatom, Alexey Likhachev, was among the officials Grossi met, according to a statement by Russia's state nuclear corporation. Likhachev informed Grossi of "the steps that are being taken by the Russian side to ensure the safe operation of the ZNPP," while expressing that the Russian side is "ready" to work on implementing initiatives put forward by Grossi.

The Kremlin's forces took over the plant after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy opposes any proposal that would legitimize Russia's control.

On his visit to the plant last week, Grossi said he was "trying to prepare and propose realistic measures that will be approved by all parties." The increasing combat makes it urgent to find a way to prevent a potentially catastrophic nuclear accident at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, he stressed.

Interruptions to the outside electricity supply due to the fighting required plant personnel to switch to emergency diesel generators six times during the 13-month war.

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

Johnson elected Chicago mayor in victory for progressives

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Brandon Johnson, a union organizer and former teacher, was elected as Chicago's next mayor Tuesday in a major victory for the Democratic Party's progressive wing as the heavily blue city grapples with high crime and financial challenges.

Johnson, a Cook County commissioner endorsed by the Chicago Teachers Union, won a close race over former Chicago schools CEO Paul Vallas, who was backed by the police union. Johnson, 47, will succeed Lori Lightfoot, the first Black woman and first openly gay person to be the city's mayor.

With about 91% of the vote counted, Johnson had 51.4% to 48.6% for Vallas. More votes will be counted as absentee ballots arrive in the mail.

Lightfoot became the first Chicago mayor in 40 years to lose her reelection bid when she finished third in a crowded February contest.

Johnson's victory in the nation's third-largest city capped a remarkable trajectory for a candidate who was little known when he entered the race last year. He climbed to the top of the field with organizing and financial help from the politically influential Chicago Teachers Union and high-profile endorsements from progressive Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. Sanders appeared at a rally for Johnson in the final days of the race.

Taking the stage Tuesday night for his victory speech, a jubilant Johnson thanked his supporters for helping usher in "a new chapter in the history of our city." He promised that under his administration, the city would look out for everyone, regardless of how much money they have, whom they love or where they come from.

"Tonight is the beginning of a Chicago that truly invests in all of its people," Johnson said.

Johnson, who is Black, recalled growing up in a poor family, teaching at a school in Cabrini Green, a notorious former public housing complex, and shielding his own young kids from gunfire in their West Side neighborhood.

He referenced civil rights leaders Martin Luther King Jr. and the Rev. Jesse Jackson and called his victory a continuation of their legacies. He also noted that he was speaking on the anniversary of King's assassination.

"Today the dream is alive," Johnson said, "and so today we celebrate the revival and the resurrection of the city of Chicago."

It was a momentous win for progressive organizations such as the teachers union, with Johnson winning the highest office of any active teachers union member in recent history, leaders say. For both progressives and the party's more moderate wing, the Chicago race was seen as a test of organizing power and messaging.

Johnson's win also comes as groups such as Our Revolution, a powerful progressive advocacy orga-

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nization, push to win more offices in local and state office, including in upcoming mayoral elections in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

Vallas, speaking to his own supporters Tuesday night, said that he had called Johnson and that he expected him to be the next mayor. Some in the crowd seemed to jeer the news, but Vallas urged them to put aside differences and support the next mayor in "the daunting work ahead."

"This campaign that I ran to bring the city together would not be a campaign that fulfills my ambitions if this election is going to divide us," Vallas said.

In a statement, Lightfoot also congratulated Johnson and said her administration will collaborate with his team during the transition.

Johnson and Vallas were the top two vote-getters in the all-Democrat but officially nonpartisan February race, which moved to the runoff because no candidate received over 50%.

On Tuesday, Johnson took many of the predominantly Black southern and western areas where Lightfoot won in February, along with the northern neighborhoods where he was the top-vote getter back then, according to precinct-level results released by election officials. Vallas did well in the northwest and southwest areas that are home to large numbers of city employees, just as he did in February.

The contest surfaced longstanding tensions among Democrats, with Johnson and his supporters blasting Vallas — who was endorsed by Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the chamber's second-ranking Democrat — as too conservative and a Republican in disguise.

Both candidates have deep roots in the Democratic Party, though with vastly different backgrounds and views.

After teaching middle and high school, Johnson helped mobilize teachers, including during a historic 2012 strike through which the Chicago Teachers Union increased its organizing muscle and influence in city politics. That has included fighting for non-classroom issues, such as housing and mental health care.

Vallas, who finished first in the February contest, was the only white candidate in that nine-person field. A former Chicago budget director, he later led schools in Chicago, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Among the biggest disputes between Johnson and Vallas was how to address crime. Like many U.S. cities, Chicago saw violent crime increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, hitting a 25-year high of 797 homicides in 2021, though the number decreased last year and the city has a lower murder rate than others in the Midwest, such as St. Louis.

Vallas, 69, said he would hire hundreds more police officers, while Johnson said he didn't plan to cut the number of officers, but that the current system of policing isn't working. Johnson was forced to defend past statements expressing support for "defunding" police — something he insisted he would not do as mayor.

But Johnson argued 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.

That plan is no sure thing, as some members of the City Council and the state Legislature — whose support would be needed — already have expressed opposition.

Resident Chema Fernandez, 25, voted for Johnson as an opportunity to move on from what he described as "the politics of old." He said he saw Vallas as being in line with previous mayors such as Rahm Emanuel, Lightfoot and Richard M. Daley, who haven't worked out great for places like his neighborhood on the southwest side, which has seen decades of disinvestment.

"I think we need to give the opportunity for policies that may actually change some of our conditions," Fernandez said.

Associated Press journalist Teresa Crawford in Chicago and chief elections analyst Chad Day in Washington contributed.

Ohio Republican lawmaker falsely claims to be MIT graduate

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A freshman state lawmaker in Ohio falsely claimed to have graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, according to the prestigious university, and he has stepped down from a House committee leadership post after that revelation.

Rep. Dave Dobos, a Columbus-area Republican, attended MIT in the 1970s and 1980 and studied economics but did not receive a degree, MIT's deputy director of media relations, Sarah McDonnell, told Cleveland.com, which first reported the discrepancy Tuesday.

House Speaker Jason Stephens has since accepted Dobos' resignation as vice chair of the Higher Education Committee.

"I have known Dave to be a hardworking member for his constituents. This is disappointing news," Stephens said in a statement.

Dobos had publicly described himself as an MIT graduate, including on his campaign website, as well as in his online biography for the Ohio House. By Tuesday evening, that biography had been changed to say that he "attended" the school.

Dobos has been involved with the MIT Club of Central Ohio, an alumni club of the university, and helped fundraise an MIT reunion, among other activities with the MIT Alumni Association, Cleveland.com reported. His studies at MIT made him eligible for the association, and graduation isn't a requirement, McDonnell said.

Dobos did not immediately respond to repeated requests for comment, nor did the MIT Club of Central Ohio.

Dobos, who years ago helped govern one of Ohio's largest school districts as president of the Columbus City Schools Board of Education, had faced scrutiny last fall for not initially disclosing that he had more than \$1 million in outstanding debts while he was running for office. State law requires that disclosure, which he made belatedly to an ethics committee.

Trump's day in court as criminal defendant: What to know

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — For the first time in history, a former U.S. president has appeared in court as a criminal defendant.

Donald Trump surrendered to authorities Tuesday after being indicted by a New York grand jury on charges related to hush money payments at the height of the 2016 presidential election.

Trump, a 2024 presidential candidate, pleaded not guilty to 34 felony charges in a Manhattan courtroom. He then flew home to Florida and spoke to a crowd of supporters at his home.

Here's what to know about Trump's day in court:

HUSH MONEY PAYMENTS RELATED TO 2016 ELECTION

Prosecutors unsealed the indictment against the former president Tuesday, giving Trump, his lawyers and the world their first opportunity to see them. Trump was charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records in the first degree. Prosecutors said Trump conspired to undermine the 2016 presidential election by trying to suppress information that could harm his candidacy, and then concealing the true nature of the hush money payments. The payments were made to two women — including a porn actor — who claimed they had sexual encounters with him years earlier, and to a doorman at Trump Tower who claimed to have a story about a child Trump fathered out of wedlock, according to the Manhattan district attorney's office.

DONALD J. TRUMP, DEFENDANT

Trump was only seen briefly outside the district attorney's office, where he surrendered to authorities and was booked and fingerprinted behind closed doors. Trump's mugshot was not taken, according to two law enforcement officials who could not publicly discuss details of the process and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

As the former president entered the courtroom, he briefly looked at a huddle of news cameras but did

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not stop to speak to reporters.

Inside the courtroom, Trump sat at the defense table with his hands in his lap and his lawyers at his side. He looked right at photojournalists who were briefly allowed into the courtroom as they snapped his photo. During the rest of the proceeding, he stayed still with his hands together and looked straight ahead. Trump only spoke briefly in court, telling the judge he was pleading "not guilty" and had been advised of his rights. The judge warned Trump that he could be removed from the courtroom if he was disruptive. Trump made no comment when he left court just under an hour later.

Trump's lawyer Todd Blanche said during the hearing that Trump is "absolutely frustrated, upset and believes that there is a great injustice happening" in the courtroom.

A 'SURREAL' DAY IN THE CITY WHERE HE GAINED FAME

Before he appeared in court, Trump made posts on his social media network complaining that the heavily Democratic area was a "VERY UNFAIR VENUE" and "THIS IS NOT WHAT AMERICA WAS SUPPOSED TO BE!" As his motorcade carried him across Manhattan, he posted that the experience was "SURREAL."

The Republican has portrayed the Manhattan case and three separate investigations from the Justice Department and prosecutors in Georgia, as politically motivated. In recent weeks, he has lashed out at Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, called on his supporters to protest and warned about "potential death and destruction" if he were charged.

TRUMP ADDRESSES SUPPORTERS

Appearing in front of several hundred supporters at his Florida home, Mar-a-Lago, Tuesday night, Trump repeated his claims that the investigation was politically motivated. He and attacked Bragg and the judge in the New York case, the judge's family and other prosecutors investigating him in other cases.

"The only crime that I have committed is to fearlessly defend our nation from those who seek to destroy it," Trump said.

BRAGG SPEAKS BRIEFLY

Bragg, speaking publicly for the first time since the indictment last week, held a brief news conference after the court proceedings in which he said the hush money scheme constituted "felony crimes in New York state — no matter who you are."

"We cannot and will not normalize serious criminal conduct," Bragg said. The Democratic prosecutor said accurate and true business records are important everywhere, but especially in Manhattan, because it's the financial center of the world.

Bragg was asked at the news conference why he was bringing the case now and if the timing was political. The district attorney said his office had "additional evidence" that his predecessor did not.

"I bring cases when they're ready," he said.

WARNINGS AND POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

The judge on Tuesday did not impose a gag order but warned Trump to avoid making comments that were inflammatory or could cause civil unrest. If convicted of any of the 34 felony charges, Trump could face a maximum of four years in prison, but he'd likely be sentenced to less.

That could be an issue for Trump, who has already singled out his case's judge and the judge's family and posted on his social media network on Wednesday that, "The people" are seeing "what is going on and they will not allow it to continue."

Trump lawyer Joe Tacopina pointed to the chaotic mix of media and protesters outside the courthouse as the former president was arraigned on Tuesday and said that it "was an insane scene" but "there was no violence."

"President Trump heard the judge," Tacopina told NBC's "Today Show" on Wednesday. "He's not doing anything to try to incite violence."

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Asked about Trump's comments about the judge, Tacopina responded, "It's not an attack on the judge, or certainly, his family."

"No one is suggesting that anything should happen to the judge or the family, and President Trump's comments did not, in any way, shape or form, incite violence against the judge or anyone else," he said.

TRIAL WHILE CAMPAIGNING FOR PRESIDENCY

Trump is due back in court in December, but his lawyers asked that he be excused from attending that hearing in person because of the extraordinary security required to have him show up. Prosecutors asked the judge to set a trial for January — weeks before the first votes will be cast in the 2024 Republican presidential primary. Trump's lawyers asked that it be pushed to the spring. The judge did not immediately set a date.

MIXED POLITICAL IMPACTS

Though he faces a swirl of legal challenges, Trump is running for president again and has sought to use the charges and other investigations to galvanize his supporters.

Most of the Republicans also running or eyeing campaigns have released statements supportive of Trump while slamming the investigations of him as politically motivated. Many Democratic elected officials have said little about the New York indictment, including President Joe Biden. Trump's legal troubles are only expected to bolster Democratic voters' opposition to him, but it's unclear whether some Republicans and independent voters will see the legal problems as too much baggage.

A NEW YORK CIRCUS

A crowd of Trump supporters, thronged by journalists, gathered Tuesday outside the Manhattan courthouse. Republican Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and George Santos of New York, who is facing multiple investigations over lies he told while running for office, were swarmed by cameras and reporters when they arrived and spoke mid-morning. A band of anti-Trump protesters appeared with a large banner saying, "Trump Lies All the Time."

Associated Press reporters Michael Balsamo and Colleen Long in Washington contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that no trial date has been set but prosecutors asked for the trial to start in January.

Veteran Spanish actress says surrogate baby is granddaughter

By CIARÁN GILES Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — A heated debate in Spain triggered by a 68-year-old celebrity who was reported to have used a surrogate mother in Miami to have a baby took a twist Wednesday when the woman announced in socialite magazine *iHola!* that the baby is actually the daughter of her son who died of cancer in 2020.

Actress and presenter Ana Obregón told *iHola!* that doctors had encouraged her son, Aless Lequio García, to preserve samples of sperm before he began treatment and that he expressed a desire just before dying to have a child. The samples, she said, were stored in New York.

Surrogate pregnancies are banned in Spain, although children from such pregnancies in other countries can be registered.

"This girl is not my daughter, but rather my granddaughter" Obregón told the magazine. "It was Aless' last wish to bring a child into the world."

Initial reports about the baby grabbed the attention of the Spanish media and the country's political parties, sparking criticism from the leftist coalition government. Many leading politicians and outlets of Spanish media refer to surrogacy as "womb renting."

Equality Minister Irene Montero of the leftist United We Can coalition partner said surrogate pregnancies

were “a form of violence against women.” The coalition’s Socialist party said legislation should be tweaked to prevent Spaniards using surrogates in other countries.

But Defense Minister Margarita Robles on Wednesday held off from criticizing Obregón, saying that while the law was clear in Spain, personal decisions should be respected.

The main opposition conservative Popular Party has said it is open to debate legalizing such pregnancies if there’s no payment involved.

Initially, the fact that the matter concerned 68-year-old Obregón seemed to generate as much controversy as that of surrogacy itself.

iHola! said the baby was born Mar. 20, and was conceived in June, when Obregón’s son would have turned 30.

Obregón, a biologist, is one of Spain’s biggest celebrities and has appeared on many TV shows, including an episode of “The A-Team.” She was once best known for her yearly start-of-summer magazine photo shoot in a new bikini.

Israeli strikes on Syria intensify, raise tensions with Iran

By BASSEM MROUE and JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Suspected Israeli airstrikes in Syria in recent weeks have killed two Iranian military advisers, temporarily put the country’s two largest airports out of service, and raised fears of regional escalation.

While Israel has fought a shadow war with Iran in Syria for years, it has intensified recently, with near-daily airstrikes attributed to Israel by Syrian officials over the past week.

The escalation of attacks comes after what appears to be a rare infiltration by an armed man from Lebanon into Israel and Iran’s reconciliation with regional rival Saudi Arabia last month. It also comes against the backdrop of a major domestic crisis in Israel over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government plan to overhaul the judiciary.

Israel, which has vowed to stop Iranian entrenchment in neighboring Syria, has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets in government-controlled parts of that country in recent years — but rarely acknowledges them. Since the beginning of 2023, Syrian officials have attributed 10 strikes on Syrian territory to Israel, including four airstrikes within five days as of Tuesday.

The United States, Israel’s closest ally, has had its own recent run-ins with Iranian forces in Syria. In late March, U.S. forces retaliated with airstrikes on sites in Syria used by groups affiliated with Iran’s Revolutionary Guard following a suspected Iran-linked drone attack that killed a U.S. contractor and wounded six other Americans in northeast Syria. An official with an Iranian-backed group in Iraq said the U.S. strikes killed seven Iranians.

The flareup between the U.S. and Iran did not escalate, but some fear the back-and-forth between Israel and Iran could.

Since the early years of Syria’s 12-year-old conflict, Iran has deployed hundreds of military advisers as well as thousands of Iran-backed fighters from countries including Iraq and Lebanon who helped tip the balance of power in President Bashar Assad’s favor. Iran-backed fighters are deployed in different parts of Syria.

Israel has long considered Iran to be its top enemy, citing Iranian calls for Israel’s destruction, its support for anti-Israel militant groups like Hezbollah and its nuclear program. Israel and Western countries say Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapons — a charge Iran denies.

Iran has blamed Israel for attacks on its territory, including the killings of some of its nuclear scientists and damage to nuclear installations.

The airstrikes in Syria reflect Israel’s concerns about fighters being deployed close to its northern border and fears that Iran is trying to transfer sophisticated weapons, such as guided missiles, to Hezbollah. Both Israel and Hezbollah have avoided an all-out war since their 34-day war in 2006 ended with a draw. Israel considers Hezbollah, which is believed to possess over 130,000 rockets and missiles, to be a major threat.

Lebanese military expert and former army general Hisham Jaber said Iran has about 1,800 military ad-

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visers in Syria, most of them deployed with Syrian troops.

The increase in strikes on Syria began with a Jan. 2 attack that temporarily put Damascus airport out of service, just after the most right-wing government in Israel's 74-year history took office.

The strikes continued despite mass protests in Israel, including open disagreement between Netanyahu and his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, over the government's controversial plans for a judicial overhaul. At one point, Netanyahu fired Gallant for criticizing the plan, but then backtracked and temporarily halted the push for the overhaul until parliament reconvenes in a month.

The two men have made a number of public appearances in recent days, alluding to military activity in Syria without overtly confirming it.

"We will not allow the Iranians and Hezbollah to harm us. We have not allowed it in the past, we won't allow it now, or anytime in the future," Gallant said this week. "When necessary, we will push them out of Syria to where they belong – and that is Iran."

Jaber, however, said he believes the recent strikes will not turn into a full-blown conflict, in part because the U.S. -- which is preoccupied with the ongoing war in Ukraine and its own tensions with China -- would try to discourage a regional war.

Strikes attributed to Israel in Syria in recent weeks have targeted both Iranian-linked figures and infrastructure.

They have hit the airports of Damascus and Aleppo, a move which was apparently intended to prevent the flow of arms shipments into Syria, but which also disrupted aid shipments after the deadly Feb. 6 earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey.

On Feb. 19, the first reported Israeli strikes after the earthquake targeted residential areas in Syria's capital Damascus, killing at least five people and wounding 15. Opposition activists said the strikes targeted Iranian-backed militias.

In mid-March, the Israeli army said its soldiers had killed an armed man suspected of entering the country from Lebanon and blowing up a car. The incident, which wounded one Israeli, unnerved Israelis. Officials suspect the man infiltrated from Lebanon and may have been dispatched by Hezbollah or directly by Iran.

A few days after the alleged infiltration, a commander with the Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad was shot dead outside his apartment building near Damascus in what the group described as an assassination by Israeli agents.

Last Tuesday, Netanyahu said Israel's intelligence agency Mossad helped Greece prevent a terrorist attack planned against at least one Jewish site in Athens. Greek authorities said two men described as being of Pakistani origin were arrested for allegedly planning an attack on a Jewish center.

On Friday, an Israeli strike on a southern suburb of Damascus killed two advisers from Iran's Revolutionary Guard. Hours later, Israel's air force shot down a drone that entered Israel from Syria and alleged that Iran was behind its launch.

Yoel Guzansky, an Iran expert and senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank, said Israel's stepped-up action in recent weeks could be in response to the recent alleged infiltration from Lebanon.

Guzansky noted that Iran rarely acknowledges the death of its officers and advisers as quickly as it did after Friday's attack. He said the swift public acknowledgement could signal that "Iran will avenge or respond to the Israeli attacks," possibly targeting Israelis abroad.

An official with an Iran-backed group in the region warned that if Israel continues with the strikes, Tehran and its allies will retaliate. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the issue with the media.

Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency quoted the Revolutionary Guard as saying that the killing of two Iranian advisers "will definitely not pass without retaliation."

Federman reported from Jerusalem.

Democrats' choice wins key Wisconsin Supreme Court race

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — A Democratic-backed Milwaukee judge won the high stakes Wisconsin Supreme Court race Tuesday, ensuring liberals will take over majority control of the court for the first time in 15 years with the fate of the state's abortion ban on the line.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Janet Protasiewicz, 60, defeated former Justice Dan Kelly, who previously worked for Republicans and had support from the state's leading anti-abortion groups.

The victory speaks to the importance of abortion as an issue for Democrats in a key swing state, with turnout the highest ever for a Wisconsin Supreme Court race that didn't share the ballot with a presidential primary.

In a jubilant scene at her victory party, the other three liberal justices on the court joined Protasiewicz on the stage and raised their arms in celebration.

Protasiewicz tried to downplay the importance of abortion as an issue in her victory, even though she and her allies, including an array of abortion rights groups including Planned Parenthood, made it the focus of much of her advertising and messaging to voters.

"It was really about saving our democracy, getting away from extremism and having a fair and impartial court where everybody gets a fair shot in the courtroom," Protasiewicz told The Associated Press after her win. "That's what it was all about."

The new court controlled 4-3 by liberals is expected to decide a pending lawsuit challenging the state's 1849 law banning abortion enacted a year after statehood. Protasiewicz said during the campaign that she supports abortion rights but stopped short of saying how she would rule on the lawsuit. She had called Kelly an "extreme partisan" who would vote to uphold the ban.

In addition to abortion, Protasiewicz's win is likely to impact the future of Republican-drawn legislative maps, voting rights and years of other GOP policies. It will also ensure that liberals will have the majority leading up to the 2024 presidential election and immediately after.

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 his roughly 21,000-vote loss in the state. The current court, under a 4-3 conservative majority, came within one vote of overturning President Joe Biden's win in the state in 2020, and both major parties are preparing for another close race in 2024.

Kelly is a former justice who has also performed work for Republicans and advised them on a plan to have fake GOP electors cast their ballots for Trump following the 2020 election even though Trump had lost.

Ahead of the vote, Protasiewicz called Kelly "a true threat to our democracy" because of his advising on the fake elector scheme.

Kelly had 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. He also had done legal work for Wisconsin Right to Life.

Kelly was endorsed by the state's top three anti-abortion groups, while Protasiewicz was backed by abortion rights advocates.

Kelly was appointed to the state Supreme Court by then-Gov. Scott Walker, a Republican, in 2016. He served four years before being defeated in 2020 on the same ballot as the Democratic presidential primary. Kelly was endorsed by Trump that year.

Trump did not endorse this year. Protasiewicz's endorsements included Hillary Clinton.

Kelly tried to distance himself from his work for Republicans, saying it was "irrelevant" to how he would work as a justice. He tried to make the campaign about Protasiewicz's record as a judge, arguing that she was soft on crime and accusing her of being "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 the party.

Protasiewicz said that while she anticipates many of the issues raised in the campaign will come before

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the court in the coming years, she pledged to be impartial and not beholden to Democrats and her liberal backers who poured an unprecedented amount of money into the race.

"I've told everybody on the entire time that I was running, despite the fact that I was sharing my personal values, every single decision that I will render will be rooted in the law," she said. "And that is the bottom line. They're independent and rooted in the law."

Kelly, in a statement after his loss, said Protasiewicz "made her campaign about cynical appeals to political passions, serial lies, and a blatant disregard for judicial ethics and the integrity of the court."

"I wish Wisconsin the best of luck," he said. "I think it will need it."

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 state Supreme Court upheld Republican-drawn maps in 2022. Those maps, widely regarded as among the most gerrymandered in the country, have helped Republicans increase their hold on the state Legislature to near supermajority levels, even as Democrats have won statewide elections, including Tony Evers as governor in both 2018 and 2022 and Biden in 2020.

Protasiewicz will serve a 10-year term starting in August replacing retiring conservative Justice Pat Roggensack.

Today in History: April 6, first modern Olympics begin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 6, the 96th day of 2023. There are 269 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 6, 1896, the first modern Olympic games formally opened in Athens, Greece.

On this date:

In 1862, the Civil War Battle of Shiloh began in Tennessee as Confederate forces launched a surprise attack against Union troops, who beat back the Confederates the next day.

In 1864, Louisiana opened a convention in New Orleans to draft a new state constitution, one that called for the abolition of slavery.

In 1909, American explorers Robert E. Peary and Matthew A. Henson and four Inuits became the first men to reach the North Pole.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I as the House joined the Senate in approving a declaration of war against Germany that was then signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1943, "Le Petit Prince" (The Little Prince) by Antoine de Saint-Exupery was first published by Reynal & Hitchcock of New York.

In 1945, during World War II, the Japanese warship Yamato and nine other vessels sailed on a suicide mission to attack the U.S. fleet off Okinawa; the fleet was intercepted the next day.

In 1954, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., responding to CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow's broadside against him on "See It Now," said in remarks filmed for the program that Murrow had, in the past, "engaged in propaganda for Communist causes."

In 1968, 41 people were killed by two consecutive natural gas explosions at a sporting goods store in downtown Richmond, Indiana.

In 1974, Swedish pop group ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest held in Brighton, England, with a performance of the song "Waterloo."

In 2008, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, speaking at a private fundraiser in San Francisco, spoke of voters in Pennsylvania's Rust Belt communities who "cling to guns or religion" because of bitterness about their economic lot; Democratic rival Hillary Rodham Clinton seized on the comment, calling it "elitist."

In 2014, legendary Hollywood actor Mickey Rooney, 93, died in North Hollywood.

In 2017, comedian Don Rickles, known for his biting insults, died in Beverly Hills, California at age 90.

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In 2020, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was transferred to the intensive care unit of a London hospital where he was being treated for COVID-19, after his condition deteriorated.

Ten years ago: Iran and six world powers failed to reach agreement during talks in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on how to reduce fears that Tehran might use its nuclear technology to make weapons. Militants killed six Americans, including diplomat Anne Smedinghoff, 25, and an Afghan doctor in a pair of attacks in Afghanistan, the deadliest day for the United States in the war in eight months.

Five years ago: Texas Republican congressman Blake Farenthold abruptly resigned, four months after announcing he wouldn't seek re-election amid sexual harassment allegations. Former Democratic Sen. Daniel Akaka of Hawaii died in Honolulu at the age of 93. Federal law enforcement authorities seized online classified site Backpage.com and its affiliated websites known for listing adult escort services. A South Korean court sentenced former President Park Geun-hye to 24 years in prison on charges including bribery and extortion stemming from a corruption scandal that removed her from office a year earlier. A transport truck collided with a bus carrying a junior hockey team in western Canada, killing 16.

One year ago: The mayor of the besieged Ukrainian port city of Mariupol said more than 5,000 civilians had been killed during the invasion by Russian troops. In response, the U.S. and its Western allies moved to impose new sanctions against the Kremlin over what they brand war crimes. European health officials investigated a rapidly evolving outbreak of salmonella in 134 children that appears linked to chocolate Easter eggs.

Today's Birthdays: Nobel Prize-winning scientist James D. Watson is 95. Actor Billy Dee Williams is 86. Actor Roy Thinnes is 85. Movie director Barry Levinson is 81. Actor John Ratzenberger is 76. Actor Patrika Darbo is 75. Baseball Hall of Famer Bert Blyleven is 72. Actor Marilu Henner is 71. Olympic bronze medal figure skater Janet Lynn is 70. Actor Michael Rooker is 68. Former U.S. Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., is 67. Rock musician Warren Haynes is 63. Rock singer-musician Black Francis (The Pixies) is 58. Actor Ari Meyers is 54. Actor Paul Rudd is 54. Actor-producer Jason Hervey is 51. Actor Zach Braff is 48. Actor Joel Garland is 48. Actor Candace Cameron Bure (buhr-RAY') is 47. Actor Teddy Sears is 46. Jazz and R&B musician Robert Glasper is 45. Actor Eliza Coupe is 42. Singer and guitarist Kenneth Pattengale (Milk Carton Kids) is 41. Actor Bret Harrison is 41. Actor Charlie McDermott is 33.