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Groton Community Calendar

Tuesday, April 11

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

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



"An animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language."

-Martin Buber

Wednesday, April 12

- Chamber Meeting, noon, at City Hall
- Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.
- School Breakfast: Egg omelets.
- School Lunch: Nachos.
- Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
- Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.
- St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.
- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.

Thursday, April 13

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

said China's irresponsible acts have caused "instability in Taiwan and the region."

- The U.S. has officially designated Wall Street Journal journalist Evan Gershkovich as being "wrongfully detained" by Russia and called for his immediate release.
- Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is considering measures that would expose people who aid undocumented immigrants to felony charges and will require hospitals to begin tracking how much money is spent on immigrants.
- Dozens of civilians are reportedly dead after the Myanmar military launched a deadly air attack in the Sagaing region as part of the country's ongoing civil war.
- The Italian Coast Guard is leading rescue efforts for nearly 1,200 migrants from two overcrowded boats off the coast of Sicily.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reversed course on the firing of Defense Minister Yoav Gallant following massive protests nationwide.
- The Shiveluch volcano on the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia's far east has erupted, blanketing several towns in ash and potentially disrupting East Asian airspace.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, governors of Russia's Kursk and Belgorod oblasts, which border Ukraine, have cited security concerns in scrapping military parades next month.

- The Nashville Metropolitan Council voted unanimously to reappoint Democratic Rep. Justin Jones to the Tennessee House days after his expulsion over a gun protest.

- Leaked Pentagon documents have revealed sensitive discussions between South Korean officials on whether to aid Ukraine's war effort against Russia, though Seoul has said a "considerable amount" of the document is fabricated.

- The U.S. and the Philippines begin their biggest joint drills in about 30 years, a day after China completed its three-day exercises around Taiwan. President Tsai Ing-wen

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Groton CM&A Easter service moved to Dairy Queen

Sewer issues at the church resulted in the Easter service being relocated to the Groton Dairy Queen. Dale (pictured below putting a serving table away) and Joyce (bottom right with a cleaning bottle) were gracious enough to open up their business for the service. (Photos by Paul Kosel)



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A pancake breakfast was served at the Groton CM&A service at the Groton Dairy Queen. Alex Hughes is pictured serving up the pancakes and sausage. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Kayla Harms, Sierra Tunby and Larry Remington led the music at the Groton CM&A Service. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Tracy, girls 1600m relay take second at indoor track meet

Groton area placed second in two events at the indoor track meet held recently at the Barnett Center in Aberdeen. Keegen Tracy placed second in the 55 meter dash and the girls 1600m relay team placed second.

The next meet is another indoor meet at the Barnett Center. It will be the Aberdeen Roncalli Cavalier Relay meet scheduled for Friday, April 14, starting at 10 a.m. According to Coach Shaun Wanner, they are looking into the possibility of participating in meetings in the southern part of the state where most of the snow has already melted. Locally, track facilities are still filled with snow.

Boy's Division

55 Meter Dash: 2. Keegen Tracy, 6.98; 5. Andrew Marzahn, 7.09; 8. Ryder Johnson, 7.11; 13. Teylor Diegel, 7.19; 17. Korbin Kucker, 7.23; 31. Jacob Zak, 7.41; 31. Jacob Zak, 7.41

200 Meters: 4. Keegen Tracy, 24.77; 7. Ryder Johnson, 25.26; 8. Lane Tietz, 25.39; 13. Andrew Marzahn, 25.72; 14. Korbin Kucker, 25.85

400 Meters: 11. Cole Simon, 58.59; 24. Gage Sippel, 1:03.04

800 Meters: 35. Jayden Schwan, 2:32.35; 43. Jacob Lewandowski, 2:38.31; 67. Garrett Schultz, 3:10.57

1600 Meters: 19. Tristin McGannon, 5:45.06; 23. Blake Pauli, 5:47.07; 53. Nicholas Fernandez, 7:13.67

55m Hurdles - 39": 9. Colby Dunker, 10.28; 10. Caden McInerney, 10.69

4x400 Relay: 6. (Colby Dunker, Andrew Marzahn, Cole Simon, Lane Tietz), 4:01.41

Shot Put - 12lb: 3. Holden Sippel, 13.36m; 4. Caleb Hanten, 12.35m; 6. Logan Ringgenberg, 12.27m; 23. Karter Moody, 10.57m; 57. Drew Thurston, 7.79mSR

High Jump: 6. Keegen Tracy, 1.63m; 10. Tate Larson, 1.58m; 10. Korbin Kucker, 1.58m

Long Jump: 4. Jacob Zak, 5.57m; 19. Tristin McGannon, 5.03m; 34. Tate Larson, 4.55m

Triple Jump: 7. Jacob Zak, 11.01m; 15. Tristin McGannon, 9.67m

Girl's Division

55 Meter Dash: 5. Laila Roberts, 7.99; 7. Kella Tracy, 8.06; 15. Mckenna Tietz, 8.28; 23. Jerica Locke, 8.47; 23. Kennedy Hansen, 8.47

200 Meters: 5. Kella Tracy, 29.12; 12. Mckenna Tietz, 30.40

800 Meters: 6. Taryn Traphagen, 2:41.08; 21. Ashlynn Warrington, 2:54.55

1600 Meters: 5. Faith Traphagen, 6:12.99

55m Hurdles - 33": 6. Talli Wright, 10.95; 12. Hannah Sandness, 11.90

4x400 Relay: 2. (Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Kella Tracy, Laila Roberts), 4:30.07

Shot Put - 4kg: . Emma Kutter, 9.12m; 12. Faith Flihs, 8.23m; 36. Ashley Johnson, 6.98m

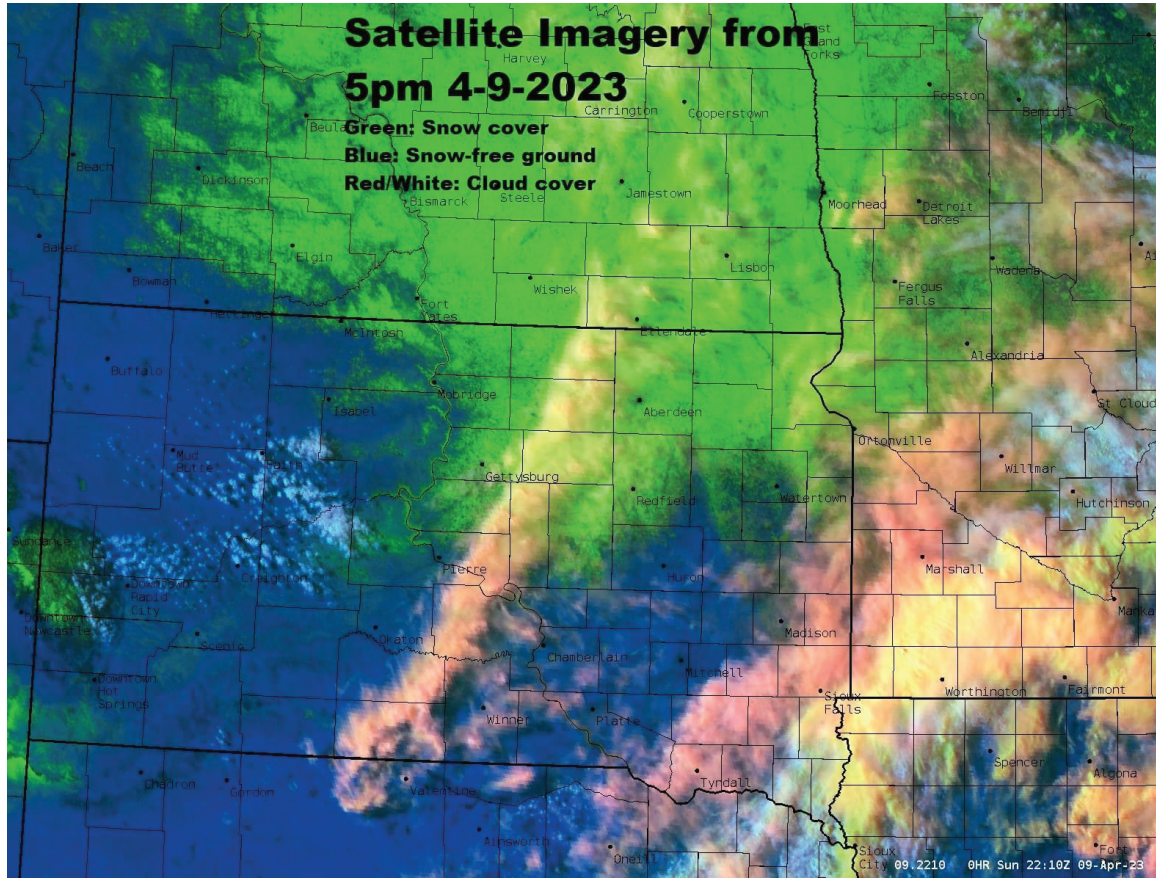
High Jump: 5. Emerlee Jones, 1.37m; 8. Anna Fjeldheim, 1.32m

Long Jump: 4. Aspen Johnson, 4.40mSR; 8. Anna Fjeldheim, 4.20m; 18. Sydney Leicht, 3.90m

Triple Jump: 3. Aspen Johnson, 9.22m; 12. Emerlee Jones, 8.06m

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Greatest Snow Depths on Record

Greatest depth for each season shown

Aberdeen

30" from January 10-18th, 1997

26" from April 5-7th, 2023

25" on March 10th, 2019

25" from February 25-26th, 2001

25" on February 28th, 1969

**The previous April record snow depth was 15" in 1975 and 1952, both recorded on the 1st*

**Records begin in 1900*

Sisseton

35" from January 10-25th, 2011

32" on February 22nd, 1969

32" from February 7-11th 1937

31" from April 5-6th, 2023

31" from January 7-9th, 2010

**The previous April record snow depth was 17" in 2019 on the 12th*

**Records begin in 1900*



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

January 27, 2023 3:59 AM

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Preliminary Seasonal Snowfall Totals

	Through April 9th, 2023	Rank for Most on Record	Record Seasonal Totals	Average Seasonal Totals
Aberdeen	73.9"	9th	109.8" (1936-37)	38.5"
Watertown	44.8"	26th	81.7" (2018-19)	35.8"
Sisseton	81.5"	4th	87.4" (2018-19)	30.7"
Wheaton	69.8"	7th	82.8" (1996-97)	32.7"
Pierre	62.7"	5th	82.0" (1951-52)	31.9"
Mobridge	45.2"	14th	86.8" (2018-19)	27.8"
Kennebec	56.8"	9th	73.2" (2000-01)	31.5"
Timber Lake	72.0"	5th	92.9" (1949-50)	35.4"



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

January 27, 2023 3:59 AM

GDILIVE.COM

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

April 11, 2023 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

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

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

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

- Open Sealed Bids for 2023 Street Resurfacing
- Department Reports
- Baseball Concessions – LWCF Grant
- Sign for Groton PD Building
- Appoint Library Board Members
- 2023-2024 Malt Beverage License Renewals:
 - MJ's Sinclair
 - Ken's Food Fair
 - Dollar General
- Approval of Special Event Alcohol Beverage License – Groton Fireman's Fun Night – April 22.
- Minutes
- Bills
- Economic Development
- Announcement: Spring Garbage Routes are In Effect
- Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
- Establish Miscellaneous Pool Wages
- Hire Summer Employees
- Adjournment

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To tell the tooth

I don't mind telling you folks that I'm tired after another Easter with Mom. I mean, it's not like we have an Easter kegger, or anything like that, but our family traditions are exhausting. For instance, Mom doesn't hide Easter eggs in the yard. She hides Easter rabbits.

At least that's what she told us back when there were six kids in the house and not a lot of money. If we ever caught one, she said, we could eat. We had crackers for Easter dinner most years.

I'll never forget the year I brought my college friend Joe Lavelle home for Easter break and while gopher hunting in Orville Crawford's pasture, the Philly Kid drew a bead on a big old jackrabbit loping along in the wind a good two hundred yards away. The thing was about the size of a four-point buck.

"Impossible," I said. "Don't waste a .22 shell."

The rabbit dropped. We never found a bullet hole. I still think that old thing just dropped dead of a heart attack. Stretched out, it was as long as Joe was tall. He proudly presented it to my mom in the kitchen where she was cooking crackers.

Worst. Easter. Ever.

I was a little off my game this Easter. I've been dealing with an abscessed tooth.

Question. What's worse than being marooned by a three-day blizzard? Being marooned by a three-day blizzard with a toothache. Imagine a world in which you're looking forward to a root canal.

Even though penicillin quieted it down, I've been taking enough over-the-counter pain relievers to kill three elephant livers and enough of the good stuff to be a rock star.

Anyway, they stopped me before I dragged home the neighbor's poodle. So, crackers again.

You probably think our holiday traditions are terrible. That's nothing. One Christmas morning we woke to find Dad had tied a reindeer to the Christmas tree. If we could kill and gut it we could eat. It got pretty bloody. I got gored in the calf before Prancer escaped through the picture window.

More saltines.

I don't even want to talk about Halloween.

Perhaps you think all of this is far-fetched. You know what's even harder to believe?

This is a column about dentistry.

Must be the Advil.

Anyway, I used to heckle my dentist, a Montana transplant, on my radio show in Juneau, Alaska. He

was a gangly guy, about 6-5, and I made him out to be a real hayseed. Told everyone he used Black & Decker drills and that he sold chewing tobacco approved by 4 out of 5 dentists. That sort of thing.

He was a pretty good sport. If you were there for a filling, you might hear my show in the background defaming, slandering, libeling, and besmirching his good name. I discovered I had a gift for that sort of thing which is how I eventually got into newspapering.

Anyway, one day, I was in the waiting room, a mother and her grade school son beside me, when the swinging doors burst open, and there he stood, towering over me with a purple kid's cowboy hat perched on his head, a string looped around his chin—Dr. Ichabod Festus.

"Yippee-Ki-Yay, he yelled, and I swear to God, he lassoed me and dragged me back through the swinging doors. I think the mom and son made a run for it.

At one juncture, Dr. Festus referred me to an oral surgeon to have my wisdom teeth extracted, which I suppose explains a lot of things. I'll preface the rest of this by explaining that although I can handle reindeer gore, compound fractures, and do-it-yourself appendectomies, I'm squeamish about the little stuff. I panicked the first time an ophthalmologist put contacts on my eyeballs. Hyperventilated.

Before the procedure, the oral surgeon, X-rays in hand, explained in minute detail exactly what they were going to do to extract teeth that apparently had roots down to my toenails.

I was so relieved when they brought me around. Thank God that's over.

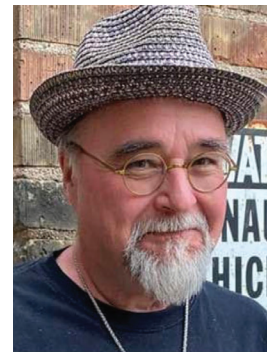
Then, I learned I'd fainted during the explanation. I was a little embarrassed. More than a little irritated.

"Why didn't you do the job while I was out?"

"Protocol, something, something, blood pressure, something something, America..."

"So you brought me around to put me down again?"

I'm two weeks out from the root canal. I hope my liver holds out.



That's Life

by Tony Bender

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

Trump's Case: When Novel Theories Become Legal Principles

Defendant Donald J. Trump and his supporters have assailed the 34-count felony indictment of the former president brought by the Manhattan District Attorney as resting on a flimsy, untested and novel legal theory that converts Trump's alleged misdemeanors to felonies.

While a jury of President Trump's peers will decide his fate, assuming the case goes to trial, it turns out that the theory of the case underlying the 34 felony charges brought by the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, may not be novel at all. New York legal experts have pointed to a lengthy record in the state of converting misdemeanor charges to felonies.

Setting aside the question of whether Bragg is promoting an untested legal theory, that he is swimming in uncharted waters, does the alleged novelty of his legal theory, or any legal theory, weaken its strength and legitimacy? How do new legal theories become established legal principles and constitutional doctrines, including those of enduring importance? These are questions central to our constitutional system and civic education.

Every legal concept and principle, every constitutional doctrine, has a creation story. They require invention, beginning, perhaps with a mere assertion by legal scholars, judges and other public figures. Some American legal principles, not enumerated in the Constitution, evolve slowly, over a long period of time, with roots in English legal history that reflect fundamental controversies surrounding the evolution of constitutional government. The doctrine of judicial review is such an example.

Other legal doctrines, including the assertion of executive privilege, arrive suddenly, like a thunderclap or a lightning bolt, lacking doctrinal paternity, historical precedent and practice. These are declarations grounded on an "ipse dixit"—it is so because I say it is so. Like Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin, executive privilege "never was born. It just grewed like cabbage and corn."

Judicial review—the authority of a court to declare laws and governmental actions unconstitutional—is a pillar of American Constitutionalism, but it was a mere seedling and bizarre legal theory, at that, when James Otis asserted it in 1761 in the landmark Writs of Assistance Case. That case represented a historic battle waged against a repressive English law that rankled colonists' conceptions of a yet unarticulated legal concept: the right to privacy derived from unreasonable searches of their homes and businesses.

Otis, a young, Boston attorney, whose growing reputation for genius, eloquence and creative legal reasoning, drew attention from men of great stature, including John Adams. Otis argued on behalf of colonists that the writs of assistance statute, which authorized sweeping searches—fishing expeditions—violated colonists' constitutional and natural rights. He reached a crescendo when asserting a novel legal theory: the court has the right and duty to declare the law null and void, that is, unconstitutional. The court was stunned by the argument that judges possessed the power of judicial review. Otis lost his case, of course, because judicial review had never taken root in Anglo-American legal history.

But Otis's creative legal theory quickly found currency, for two reasons. First, it drew upon the observations of Sir Edward Coke, the magisterial 17th Century English champion of the common law, to whom the colonists looked for defense of English liberties and early expressions of constitutionalism. Otis's legal research took him to Coke who, in 1610, in the landmark Dr. Bonham's Case, offered a minority opinion from the bench: a law against common right and reason should be declared null and void. Coke's novel theory never found foundation in England, as it surely could not, since Parliament is sovereign and its laws are not subject to judicial review. In Coke, Otis found instant pedigree.

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Second, Otis's argument provided a sorely needed weapon for colonial lawyers to wield in court as they attacked as unconstitutional a series of statutes familiar to readers—the Stamp Act, the Sugar Act and the Iron Act, among others—that violated the rights of an emerging citizenry. Otis's powerful argument was cited and quoted again and again in courts up and down the Eastern Seaboard. For this argument and other contributions, Otis is widely recognized as the Godfather of American Constitutionalism. His novel theory became a cornerstone of our legal system.

Executive privilege—the claim of presidential power to withhold information from Congress and investigators—has no similar pedigree. In fact, the English King had no authority to withhold information from Parliament. There was no historical figure in England—no member of Parliament and no legal scholar—who invoked the words or asserted the spirit of “executive privilege.”

Executive privilege was, in fact, not invoked in the United States until 1954, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower conjoined the words “executive” and “privilege” to justify his decision to withhold information from Senator Joseph McCarthy, who was bullying governmental officials on the false accusation of communist loyalties. Americans cheered Eisenhower's novel legal theory and his willingness to denounce McCarthy, but that legal concept, neither grounded in the text or the history of the Constitution and at odds with the architecture imposing executive accountability, would become a regrettable doctrine in the presidential arsenal for circumventing legal and constitutional requirements.

In the end, novel legal theories, whether invoked in 18th century Boston or 21st century New York, should be judged on their merits.



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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Last day of school remains unchanged

by Elizabeth Varin

Groton Area Schools have faced eight consecutive weeks of school interrupted by inclement weather. However, barring any more snow days, the district is on schedule to finish the 2022-2023 school year at the end of May, Superintendent Joe Schwan told the school board Monday evening.

Following three snow days last week, the district has had a total of 15 snow days, seven late starts and two early dismissals.

"Hopefully we're done," Schwan said.

The board didn't have to take action Monday, but were made aware of where the district now stands with a final school date.

At the district's March 13 board meeting the school calendar was amended to move the last day of class on May 25, with May 26 scheduled as a faculty in-service day.

Weather has made an impact not only on events that have been rescheduled, like the Groton Area FFA CDE contest, but it has also impacted standardized testing at the middle and high school, said Principal Kiersten Sombke. Due to the school closures last week, Smarter Balance Testing has been extended to April 19 and 20.

Though weather is looking to improve, there are still challenges for the district, Superintendent Schwan told the board. Transportation may become difficult through the next few weeks, with muddy, soft roads.

The district will continue to work with the families of children who ride the buses, Schwan said. Though some districts have talked about pulling buses off gravel roads, Schwan said he doesn't think Groton will have to go that far.

Events, like the track meet scheduled for Tuesday in Groton, will likely be impacted by soft ground and muddy conditions.

Elementary school staff are still planning to hold the track and field day for the younger students on Friday, May 12, said Principal Brett Schwan. However, they are still prepared with a back-up date the following week.

District looking at large incoming class

The district will likely have a large kindergarten class beginning in the fall, Principal Schwan told the board. Based on those who attended the kindergarten round-up on Friday, there could be as many as 50 students entering kindergarten.

The 2022-2023 kindergarten enrollment is 38 students. Junior kindergarten enrollment totals 21 students.

All students in the district's census were able to attend the round-up last week, but families with children who are turning five on or before September 1, 2023 can contact the elementary school, Schwan said.

Cleaner air for classrooms on the way

A new program from the South Dakota Department of Health could help air quality in the classroom.

The state is offering funding for air purifiers and two to three years of replacement filters for accredited South Dakota schools free of charge, Schwan said. A request was submitted last week, and it appears the district will receive some equipment, though a total amount has not been finalized. The air filters are also on backorder as of now, so it might be awhile before the district receives equipment.

"If nothing else, it helps provide a cleaner air environment," Schwan said.

Business Manager Mike Weber asked if there is a total cost for air filter replacements after the initial two or three years, and added he will add a note in the budget.

Lunch rate may rise

Superintendent Schwan prepared the board for a possible small increase in school lunch rates.

The district doesn't have complete control over prices set for breakfast and lunch at the school, Schwan said. The district may be looking to increase the rate by five or 10 cents. However, that will be based on

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what the U.S. Department of Agriculture sets rates at.

“Over the long term, if we can keep the cash balance healthy, we’ll keep that lunch rate as low as we can for the kids,” he said.

In other action:

- The district is holding small group staff meetings to look at strengths and weaknesses of the student and employee experience at the schools, Superintendent Schwan said. The meetings are separate from negotiations about salaries and benefits. The information will be brought back to a small subgroup of staff to compile goals to move forward for the next school year.

- Business Manager Weber said staff is starting work on the 2023-2024 fiscal year budget. The requisition process for the next school year has started.

- Business and computer teacher Becky Hubsch will begin training with Weber to take over the business manager position at the district.

- The board approved a new district membership agreement with the North Central Special Education Cooperative. There were no changes from the previous year, Superintendent Schwan told the board. There are still nine schools in the co-op.

- The district board approved allowing school vans to be utilized by the community spring baseball program, charging a rate of 70 cents per mile. The baseball group would provide their own driver. The request came to the district from Seth Erickson. The program has more players than in the past, so they need more transportation options, Superintendent Schwan said. A majority of the trips would likely be on the weekends.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Living in SD means elevated risk for radon exposure, lung cancer

State has highest average levels in the nation

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 10, 2023 12:14 PM

Donna Wright and her husband moved to the Black Hills in 2005 and built their home atop a mountain ridge overlooking the prairie, Bear Butte and the Black Hills near Sturgis.

It was a "dream come true," until the couple realized they were being exposed to 20 times more radon than the amount deemed safe by the Environmental Protection Agency.

As an oncology nurse, Wright was aware of the risks of radon and its presence in the Black Hills. An invisible threat, the naturally occurring gas with no color, taste or smell is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, and about 21,000 deaths are associated with it each year.

Formed when radioactive metals break down in rocks, soil and groundwater, radon can enter buildings through foundations, sinks, showers and toilets. It can be found in water or air, the latter being the most worrisome in terms of cancer risk.

The Wrights' house had a radon level around 80 picocuries per liter. The average indoor reading in the U.S. is 1.3 pCi/L, and the EPA says levels exceeding 4 pCi/L are unsafe.

Sixty percent of homes tested in South Dakota have elevated radon levels, which is the highest rate in the nation, according to the American Lung Association.

The state also has the highest average reading of radon levels across the nation, according to a 2022 report from the association. According to the EPA, the average indoor reading in South Dakota is 9.8 picocuries per liter — over twice the recommended safety level.

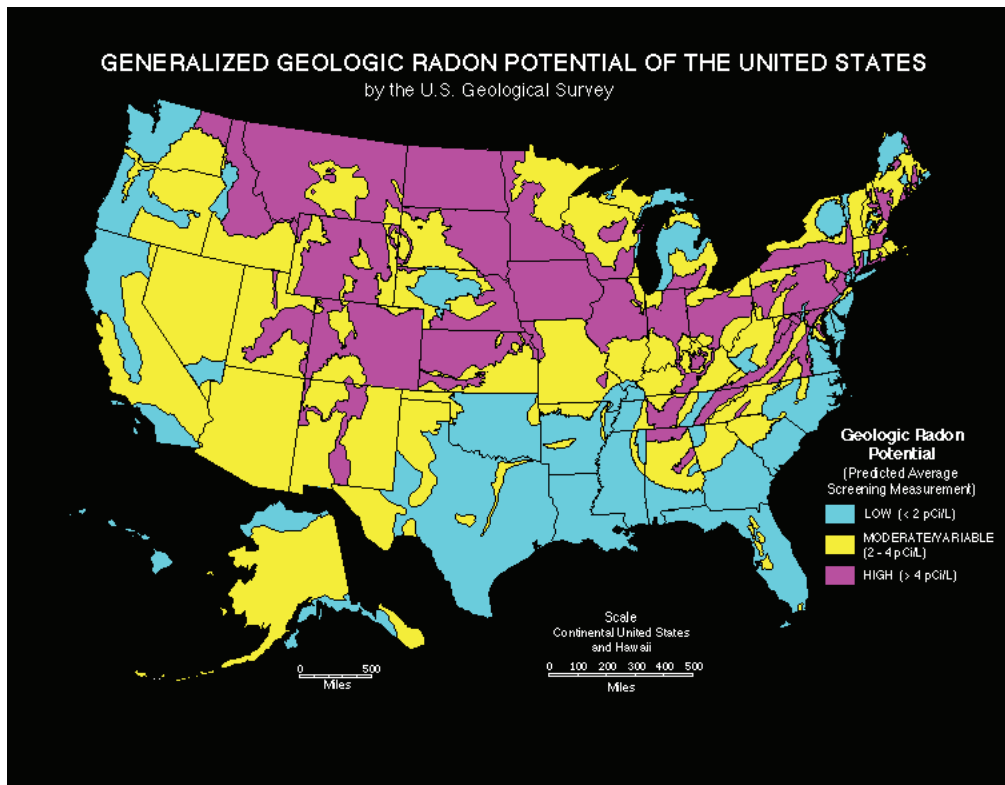
The Wrights hired a radon mitigation expert to install piping and a fan in their home to better circulate the air. Now, their radon levels are "basically zero," Wright said.

"You just have to be aware of where you're at," Wright said. "If you lived in a big city, you should be aware of smog. I think it's just environmental awareness and knowing the environment you're in here in South Dakota."



Bob Burns and his son Murray LaHood-Burns, of Earthorizons Inc., install a radon mitigation system in a Rapid City home on March 24, 2023. (Seth Tupper/South

Dakota Searchlight)



A map of geologic radon potential in the United States. The "high" potential includes all of eastern South Dakota and the ridge around the Black Hills. (Courtesy of USGS)

Why is South Dakota so high?

Bob Burns, owner of Earthorizons Inc. in the Black Hills, has been working in radon mitigation for decades. He said it's more likely than not that homes have high levels of radon, and although the EPA safety threshold is 4 pCi/L, he considers any reading above the average outdoor level of 0.4 pCi/L to be elevated.

"I would guess every house in South Dakota has an elevated radon level," Burns said.

Radon risk in the state is particularly elevated in the Black Hills, where a ridge around the Black Hills is rich with minerals including some uranium deposits in the Edgemont and Elkhorn Creek areas. Rapid City sits on both sides of the ridge, which is known as the Dakota Hogback.

Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming are among the highest-risk states for lung cancer from radon gas, according to the EPA. Radon concentrations are generally high in this area because uranium is concentrated in the granites and metamorphic rocks of the Rocky Mountains.

Burns said he's seen homes in Rapid City with levels above 100 pCi/L — he's even worked on a home that had a reading of 1,000 pCi/L in the Black Hills area.

Custer County has the highest average radon concentration with an estimated mean of 30.1 pCi/L — over seven times the EPA recommendation, according to the American Lung Association.

Of South Dakota counties that had at least 10 reported tests between 2008 and 2017, the lowest mean radon level was 4.9 pCi/L in Aurora County. Minnehaha County, with 1,920 tests, had an estimated mean radon level of 6.5 pCi/L.

"People in South Dakota talk to each other," Burns said. "I think we have a lot of testing done, especially testing done in areas where radon is high."

Lung cancer is SD's leading cause of cancer deaths

Breathing radon for extended periods of time can pose significant risks, and those who smoke have an even greater chance of getting lung cancer when combined with radon exposure. Children and the elderly are also vulnerable.

Radon enters a home through cracks in walls, basement floors, and foundations, as well as water used for showers, dishwashing, and toilet flushing. Radioactive particles from radon become trapped in a person's lungs when they breathe the gas, ultimately causing damage over time.

Signs of radon poisoning can closely resemble lung cancer, such as a cough that won't go away, trouble breathing, blood in mucus, chest pains, wheezing or frequent respiratory infections.

According to the EPA, living in a home with South Dakota's average level of radon is like "having 300

chest X-rays each year.”

In South Dakota, lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths with a death rate of 36.2 per 100,000 residents. For context, prostate and breast cancer are the second and third leading cancer deaths in South Dakota at 19.1 and 18.9 deaths per 100,000 people, respectively.

South Dakota’s lung cancer death rate ranks 23rd among all states, according to the American Lung Association.

State offers free

radon testing kits

Homeowners can check the radon levels in their homes with test kits or through an official inspection of their home. Such kits can be purchased at a hardware store for under \$20.

The state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources also provides 500 radon tests for free a year through its air quality program.

Test kits are shipped directly to the homeowner. After the sample is collected, the homeowner can ship the completed test to a lab for free analysis. DANR also provides technical assistance on how to test for and mitigate radon, said Brian Walsh, public affairs director for the department.

Long-term tests are also available, which average out the highs and lows of reading levels across three months, painting a more accurate picture, Burns said.

Once someone detects radon in their home, they should hire a mitigation specialist, Burns said. South Dakota does not require mitigation specialists to be certified, though Burns is nationally certified for home and multi-family mitigation and is a member of the American Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists.

State requires seller disclosure

Mike Austad, owner of Dakota Radon Mitigation in Sioux Falls, is seeing an increase in people testing and hiring him to install radon mitigation systems in their homes. He typically sees radon levels between 8 and 10 pCi/L.

Austad is starting to see radon resistant homes “gain traction” in East River as well.

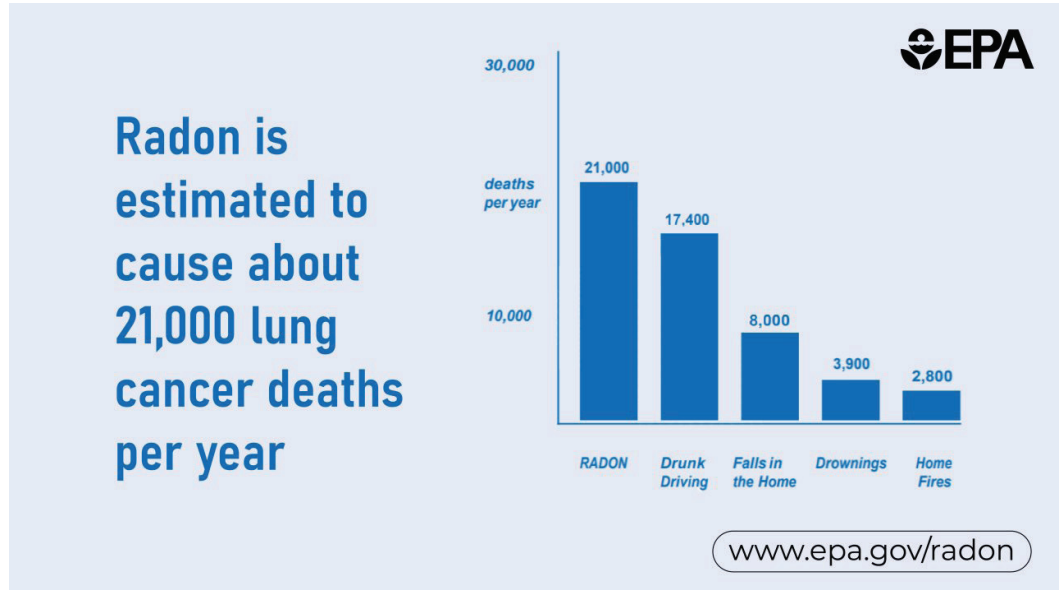
“There’s still room for more growth in that area of building in-phase radon resistant construction,” Austad said. “It doesn’t cost much, and I’ve been an advocate of that from the get-go.”

Despite high levels of radon across the state, South Dakota doesn’t have legal requirements to test homes or build “radon resistant” homes. Such homes use materials and “passive radon system” techniques that prevent radon from entering a home. All new homes built in Minnesota are required to be built radon-resistant since 2009.

South Dakota only has a law requiring sellers to disclose known radon levels in the sale of a home. It does not require radon testing and does not require landlords to disclose radon levels to tenants.

“Typically people say ‘no’ in that form, but they should say ‘don’t know’ because often ‘no radon’ is the wrong answer,” Burns said.

But Austad believes South Dakota is dealing effectively with the problem.



(Courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency)



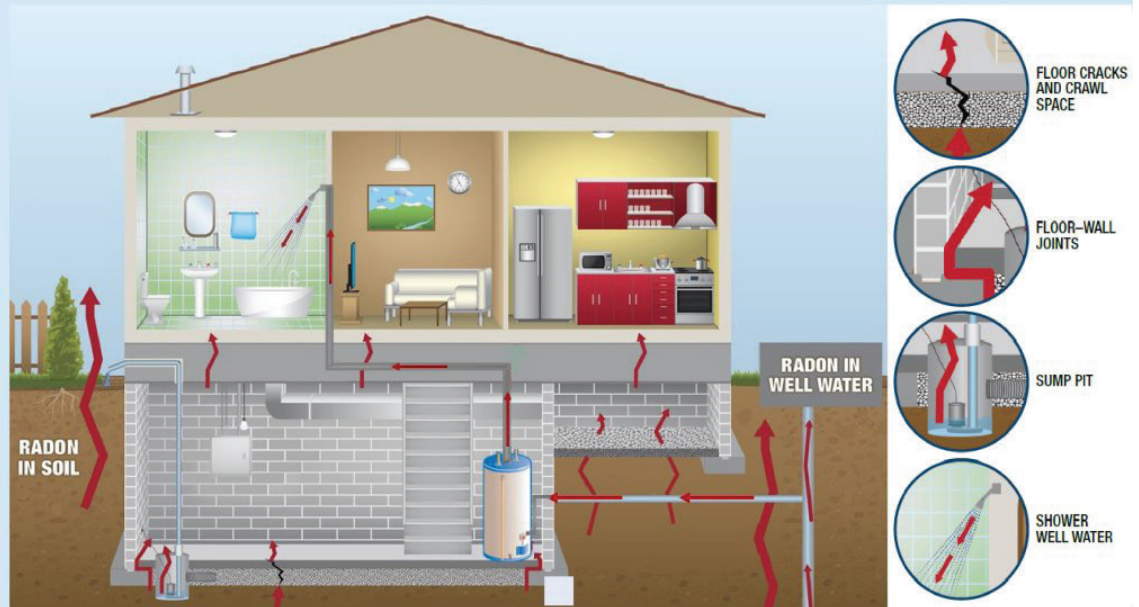
Part of a radon mitigation system in a Rapid City home. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

"I believe the word is out there and it's getting more and more common," Austad said. "You have professional real estate and home sales people who are disclosing radon information and are advising their clients to get tested now. In a way, maybe such laws wouldn't be as effective or helpful as they would have been years ago."

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

Radon can enter your home in many ways:

- Cracks in solid floors
- Construction joints
- Cracks in walls
- Gaps in suspended floors
- Gaps around service pipes
- Cavities inside walls
- The water supply



www.epa.gov/radon

(Courtesy of the Environmental Protection Agency)

Democratic leaders warn abortion pill ruling could endanger other FDA-approved drugs

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 10, 2023 10:31 AM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democratic leaders vowed to defend reproductive rights and abortion access Saturday, less than a day after a federal judge in Texas ruled the federal government needs to pull the abortion pill off the market within a week.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, of New York, and Washington Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, in a call with reporters emphasized they believe the correct place to address the Texas ruling is through the judicial system and pledged to do everything they can to move legislation through Congress as well.

They also expressed concern that if one federal judge is allowed to overturn the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of this pharmaceutical, other court cases could upend the agency's medical and scientific judgment on additional prescription drugs. The Biden administration has filed notice it will appeal the ruling by Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump appointee, to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

The Texas judge's ruling to suspend FDA approval of mifepristone throughout the country pending that appeal is in conflict with a separate ruling by a federal judge in Washington state on Friday that the FDA cannot alter mifepristone access in 17 states and Washington, D.C. The Texas appeal means there is no impact on the abortion pill's FDA status until April 14 or until another court decision.

The political leaders emphasized the risk that other drugs could be affected in future cases by the Texas decision. "We cannot lose sight of what this does to the FDA," Schumer said. "This right-wing MAGA judge — in his zeal to impose his own views on the American people — has suspended this long-time FDA-approved medication, over the agency and drug manufacturers' opinion."

"According to authorities, this is the first time a long-time approved drug by the FDA has been overturned by the court," Schumer added.

Murray, who used to chair the Senate panel that oversees health, said that mifepristone is safe and effective, rejecting arguments from anti-abortion groups in the case that claimed it is not.

"This ruling is not about science. It is about ideology," Murray said. "It is not about protecting women. It's about controlling their bodies. It is cruel, and it flies completely in the face of all reason and logic."

"And let's not forget, this dangerous ruling threatens to absolutely upend FDA's ability to approve all kinds of other safe medications, everything from insulin to chemotherapy drugs," Murray added.

Outlook in Congress

Schumer, Murray and other Democrats who support abortion rights will have an especially challenging time moving any bills related to abortion through their narrow majority in the U.S. Senate or convincing Republicans to bring up legislation in the U.S. House.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader Steve Scalise and the vast majority of GOP lawmakers in the U.S. House campaigned on a platform that included protecting "the lives of unborn children and their mothers," though they provided no specifics on what that would look like in legislation.

House Republicans have not brought bills on reproductive rights, abortion, or maternal mortality to the floor since they took over the chamber in January.

Top GOP leaders in Congress hadn't publicly reacted to or commented on the Texas judge's ruling as of mid-day Saturday.

In the U.S. Senate, several Democrats are lukewarm about the likelihood of sending President Joe Biden reproductive rights legislation, or a bill specifically protecting access to medication abortion, which is approved for up to 10 weeks.

In interviews with States Newsroom ahead of the Texas judge's ruling on Friday, Democratic senators were less than optimistic about clearing any reproductive rights bills.

Vermont independent Sen. Bernie Sanders, chair of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pen-

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sions Committee, said "I don't have an answer to that," when asked specifically what the Senate should do on medication abortion.

Schumer didn't have a clear plan Saturday for how Democrats would move legislation protecting access to mifepristone or broader reproductive rights issues.

"We're going to work in every way we can legislatively and otherwise to preserve a woman's right to choose," Schumer said.

Schumer brought Democrats' centerpiece legislation on reproductive rights, the Women's Health Protection Act, to the floor twice last year. Each time, Republicans blocked the legislation from moving past the 60-vote legislative filibuster.

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

Attempts to secure the right to contraception stemmed from Associate Justice Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion in the abortion case last summer. In it, Thomas wrote the justices should "reconsider all of this Court's substantive due process precedents" that relied on similar legal reasoning that was used in *Roe v. Wade*.

Thomas specifically mentioned the 1965 *Griswold v. Connecticut* ruling, which recognized married couples' right to use contraception.

'Chaos' predicted for providers if ruling stands

On Saturday's call, Murray, asked about arguments that the Biden administration and FDA could ignore or defy the Texas ruling, emphasized it won't go into effect for six more days and that the key next step is the appeals process. "It is critical that we win this fight in court," she said.

She also sharply criticized Republicans for their stance on reproductive rights and abortion access.

"Everyone should realize now that Republicans across the country have one goal in mind, and that's to take away women's right to make their own health care decisions in any way they can," Murray said. "This battle is going to be fought in public opinion and in our votes at the ballot box."

Center for Reproductive Rights President and CEO Nancy Northup, who was also on the call, said health care providers are in "uncharted waters" given the conflicting rulings in Texas and Washington state.

"We, of course, are counseling our clients with regard to what these decisions could mean," Northup said. "But beyond that, I'm going to hold on saying more. We do have six more days until this goes into effect."

Northup said health care providers who offer abortion services "are preparing and being advised on what to do if this actually goes into effect."

"But it will be chaos," she said. "And it's unacceptable because it is a safe, effective method of abortion as approved by the FDA 22 years ago."

The at-odds rulings from two federal judges are likely to move the cases with speed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Northup noted that could happen very quickly, saying that when the organization was litigating a case on Texas' six-week abortion ban, "we went from a decision in the trial court to the Supreme Court in a week."

The FDA issued a statement Saturday on the appeal by the U.S. Justice Department, saying the agency approved Mifeprex, the brand name version of mifepristone, "more than 20 years ago based on a comprehensive review of the scientific evidence available and determined that it was safe and effective for its indicated use — medical termination of an early pregnancy."

"FDA stands behind its determination that mifepristone is safe and effective under its approved conditions of use for medical termination of early pregnancy, and believes patients should have access to FDA-approved medications that FDA has determined to be safe and effective for their intended uses."

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.

U.S. Department of Justice asks appeals court to pause abortion pill ruling

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 10, 2023 4:43 PM

WASHINGTON — The federal government on Monday asked the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals to place on hold a Texas judge's ruling that would otherwise overturn U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval of the abortion pill.

The Department of Justice's request for an administrative stay asks the New Orleans-based appeals court to decide before noon on Thursday whether the Texas ruling should take effect on Friday at midnight or if it should be placed on hold during the appeals process.

Meanwhile, on Monday, as the impact of the sweeping Texas decision reverberated:

- More than 400 pharmaceutical companies, including Pfizer, wrote an open letter expressing concerns about the precedent that could be set if one U.S. district court judge can overturn the FDA's scientific and medical judgment in approving pharmaceuticals. On Saturday, Democratic leaders in Congress voiced similar concerns.

- The U.S. Justice Department sought clarity in a different federal judge's ruling on the abortion medication mifepristone, in Washington state, that was also released Friday evening. That ruling appears to conflict with the Texas ruling.

If a stay, or pause, is ordered on the Texas decision as the DOJ requested, that would keep mifepristone on the market and available to consumers throughout the appeals process that is likely to end at the U.S. Supreme Court. The Justice Department has also formally appealed the decision to the 5th Circuit.

If a stay isn't granted, the Texas's judge's ruling would go into effect this weekend, likely creating immense confusion among health care providers about how exactly to implement a first-of-its-kind ruling overturning the FDA's scientific and medical judgment. Some congressional Democrats, like Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, have called for the FDA to defy or ignore the ruling, though administration officials don't appear to be considering that proposal.

"Rather than preserving the status quo, as preliminary relief is meant to do, the district court upended decades of reliance by blocking FDA's approval of mifepristone and depriving patients of access to this safe and effective treatment, based on the court's own misguided assessment of the drug's safety," said the federal government's request for a stay.

The request argued the Texas judge's ruling on Friday evening was "especially unwarranted given the balance of harms."

"If allowed to take effect, the court's order would thwart FDA's scientific judgment and severely harm women, particularly those for whom mifepristone is a medical or practical necessity," it said. "This harm would be felt throughout the country, given that mifepristone has lawful uses in every State. The order would undermine healthcare systems and the reliance interests of businesses and medical providers."

Medication abortion is typically a two-drug process that begins with mifepristone, which is approved for use up to 10 weeks into a pregnancy, and misoprostol. The second drug is not at issue in the legal fight.

Medication abortion is used in more than half of pregnancy terminations within the United States, according to the Guttmacher Institute.



Abortion rights activist Rachel Bailey, center, chants during an International Women's Day abortion rights demonstration at the Texas State Capitol on March 8, 2023, in Austin, Texas. (Photo by Brandon Bell/Getty Images)

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Seven-day delay

U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas Judge Matthew Joseph Kacsmaryk's ruling from Friday, April 7 would revoke the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 2000 approval of mifepristone, removing it from the market, in a case brought by the Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine and other anti-abortion organizations.

"The Court does not second-guess FDA's decision-making lightly," Kacsmaryk wrote. "But here, FDA acquiesced on its legitimate safety concerns — in violation of its statutory duty — based on plainly unsound reasoning and studies that did not support its conclusions."

But Kacsmaryk put a seven-day delay in his ruling, giving the federal government through Friday, April 14, to appeal the decision and to seek a stay.

Separately on Monday, the U.S. Justice Department sought clarity on the Washington order.

The ruling, also from a U.S. District Court judge, ordered the FDA not to remove access to mifepristone in 17 states and Washington, D.C., following a lawsuit from their attorneys general.

In that request for clarification, the federal government says the Texas ruling to remove mifepristone from throughout the country "appears to be in significant tension" with the Washington state federal judge's order that bars the FDA from "altering the status quo and rights as it relates to the availability of Mifepristone" in those 17 states and the District of Columbia.

"The Court did not address the interaction between the two orders, presumably because they were issued less than 20 minutes apart," the Justice Department's clarification request says.

"To ensure that Defendants comply with all court orders in these unusual circumstances, Defendants respectfully request that this Court clarify their obligations under its preliminary injunction in the event that the Alliance order takes effect and stays the approval of mifepristone."

'Dangerous step' seen

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre addressed the Texas ruling during the press briefing Monday, calling the judge's decision to try to remove medication abortion from the entire country a "dangerous step."

"This court decision threatens access to this medication, which is used not only for abortion, but also for other critical purposes like helping women manage miscarriages," Jean-Pierre said. "If the decision stands, it would put women's health at risk and undermine the FDA's ability to have access to safe and effective medications when they need them the most."

Pharmaceutical companies made themselves heard as well.

"Judicial activism will not stop here," the group of more than 400 companies wrote in their letter. "If courts can overturn drug approvals without regard for science or evidence, or for the complexity required to fully vet the safety and efficacy of new drugs, any medicine is at risk for the same outcome as mifepristone."

Reproductive rights organizations also said Monday that the Texas judge's ruling not only rejected decades of sound scientific evidence that mifepristone is safe and effective, but the FDA's authority to approve pharmaceuticals.

Jessica Ellsworth, counsel at the law firm Hogan Lovells and counsel for Danco Laboratories, said on a press call the pharmaceutical company, which manufactures mifepristone, would likely ask the U.S. Supreme Court for a stay in the case if the 5th Circuit doesn't grant a hold pending appeal.

"If the 5th Circuit does not grant a stay — or at least an administrative stay, which is sort of a short-term stay, so it has time to consider this request in an orderly fashion — I think it is likely that either Danco and/or the United States will ask the U.S. Supreme Court for a stay," she said.

If neither the appeals court nor the U.S. Supreme Court grants a stay ahead of the current Friday deadline, Ellsworth said, "there will be some difficult questions Danco needs to address and some conversations that it will need to have with FDA around what happens next."

Jennifer Dalven, director of the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, said the Texas judge set a dangerous precedent when he chose to ignore more than 100 studies spanning 30 years from 26 countries that concluded mifepristone is "a safe and effective means of ending an early pregnancy."

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Dalven said she expects the Texas case will quickly go before the U.S. Supreme Court, which will then decide on mifepristone access and FDA authority more broadly.

"As monumental as the effects will be for abortion and miscarriage care, the implications of this case go far beyond that," Dalven said.

"If the courts allow this, it will radically alter the process for approving drugs and will chill innovation and bringing new drugs to market," Dalven added.

"If the courts allow this decision to stand, they will be in essence telling every fringe group with an opposition to a medication or vaccine 'Just go find a politically aligned judge,' who can then with a stroke of a pen deny Americans the ability to get the critical, life-saving treatment they need. That possibility should have all of us very concerned."

Kirsten Moore, director of the EMAA Project, said that it could potentially take years for the FDA to re-approve mifepristone if the judicial process ends with the Supreme Court overturning the FDA's 2000 approval.

"The drugmaker would need to take some time to figure out what the new application would look like and have dialogue with FDA about that," Moore said. "And then, FDA has typically 10 months to review that. So we could ... in reality be facing a scenario where this medication is only available in a clinical trial setting and not available to patients in the real world for upwards of two, maybe three years. Even if everybody wants to move fast."

GOP comments

Republicans in Congress, so far, have been relatively mum about the Texas or the Washington state judges' decisions, though two key U.S. House GOP lawmakers weighed in Monday.

Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers, of Washington, and Subcommittee on Health Chair Brett Guthrie, of Kentucky, released a joint statement, saying "We must remain committed to the fundamental principle that every life is worth living." The panel writes legislation on health care.

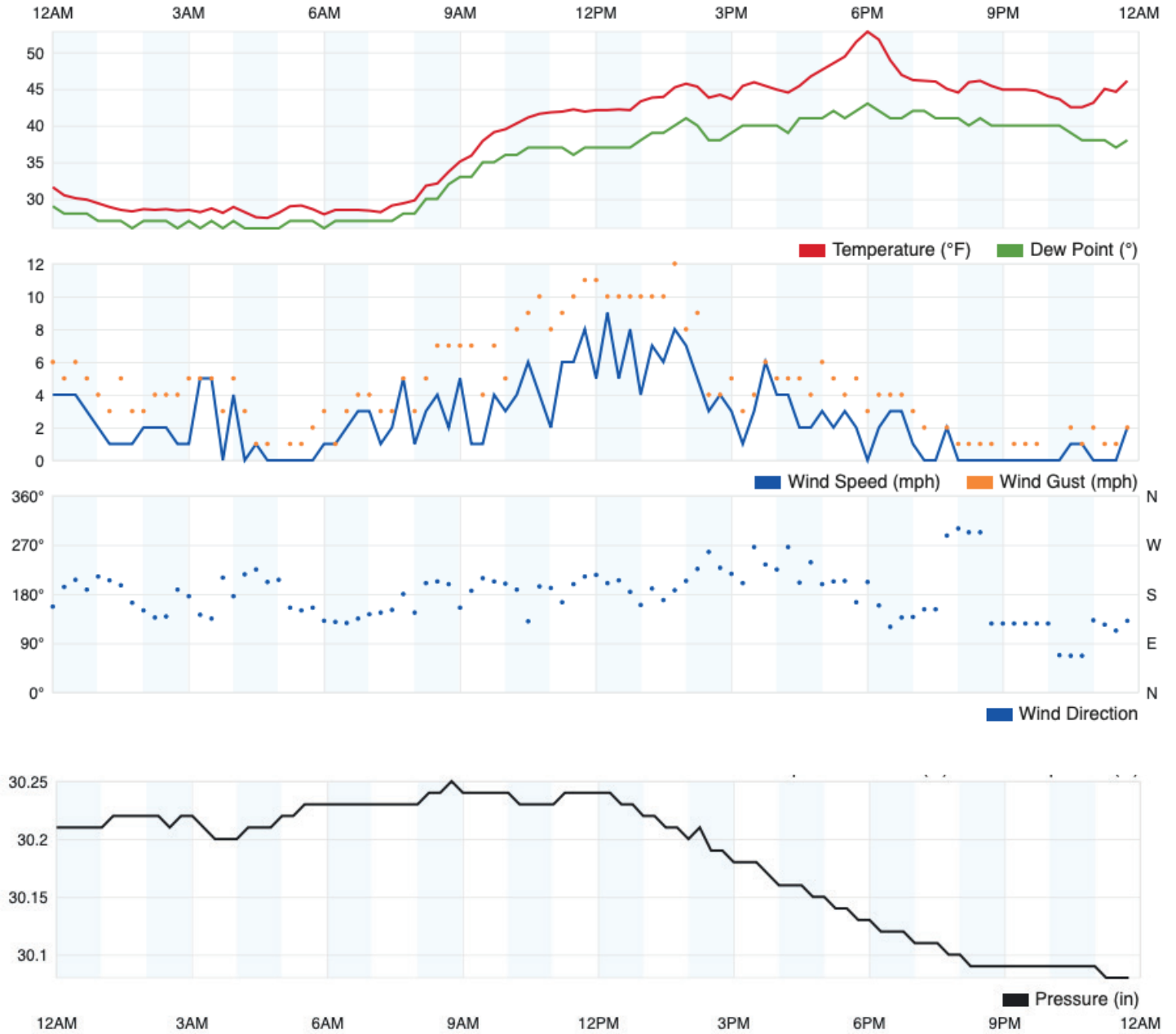
"The FDA's first and most important job is to ensure the safety of the American people," they added. "As the courts review the cases at hand, we must not lose sight of this directive."

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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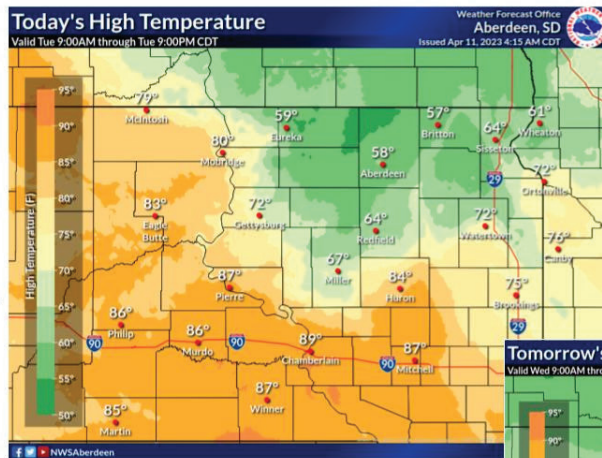
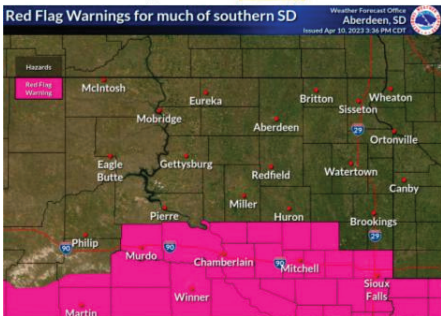
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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday
						
Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Breezy. Partly Cloudy then Slight Chance T-storms	Breezy. Slight Chance T-storms then Slight Chance Rain	Rain Likely and Breezy	Chance Rain
High: 57 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 48 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 51 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 42 °F

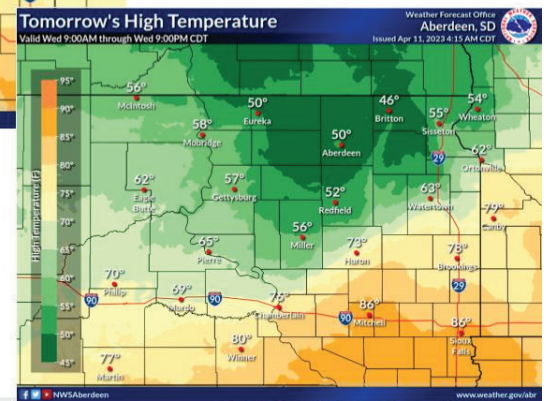


Elevated Fire Concerns

over portions of southern South Dakota where hot and windy conditions are expected today.



Hot Today,
Cooler Wednesday



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

An upper ridge and breezy winds will bring much above normal temperatures to the region today. Snow free areas will see highs soar into the 80s while snow covered areas will be closer to average. A cold front will sweep through on Wednesday bringing cooler temperatures.

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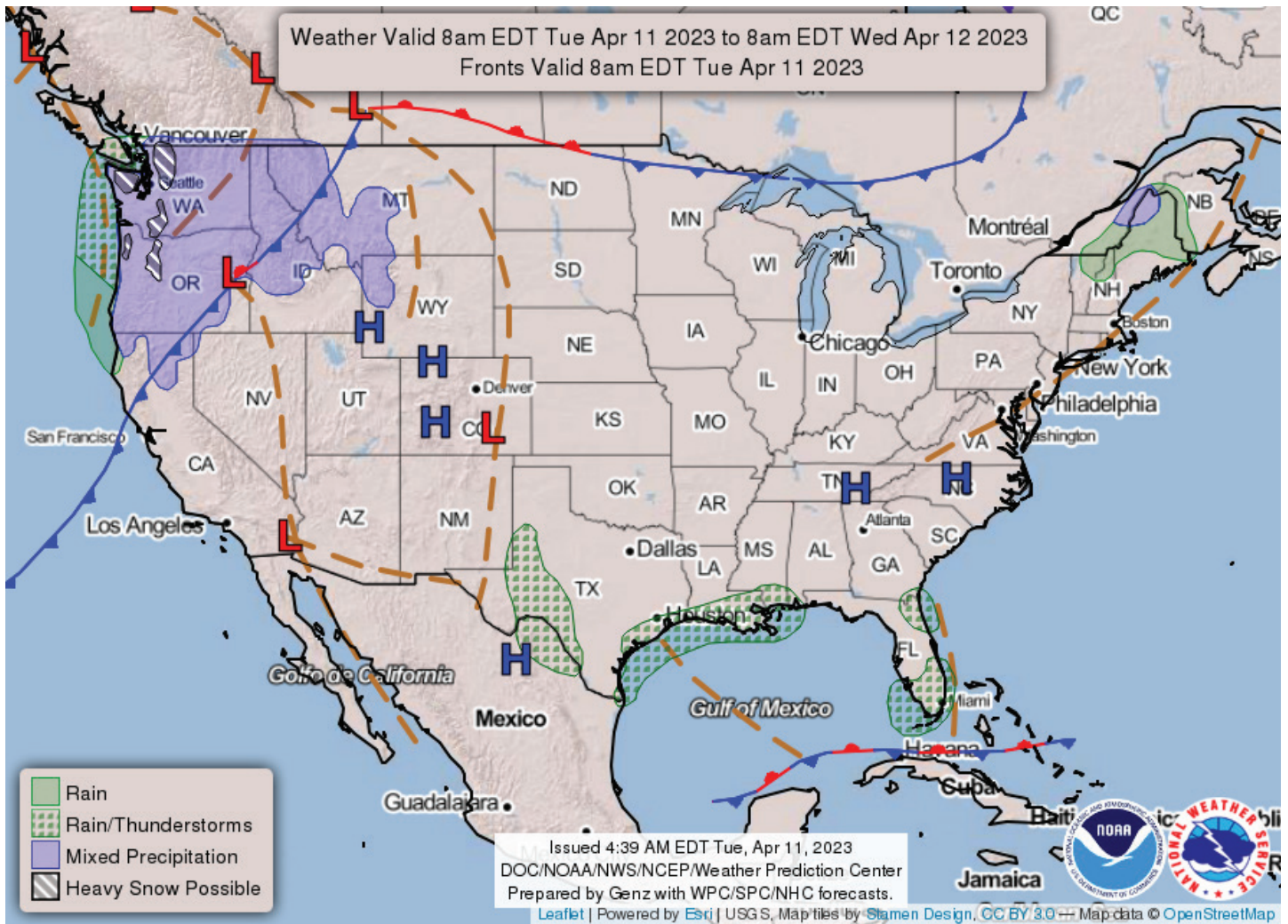
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 53 °F at 6:03 PM
Low Temp: 27 °F at 4:37 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 12:02 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 86 in 1910
Record Low: 8 in 1939
Average High: 56
Average Low: 30
Average Precip in April.: 0.51
Precip to date in April.: 0.48
Average Precip to date: 2.57
Precip Year to Date: 4.41
Sunset Tonight: 8:14:28 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:50:35 AM

Day length: 13 hours, 22 minutes



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Today in Weather History

April 11, 1993: Heavy wet snow fell over a portion of northeast South Dakota, mainly east of Aberdeen and north of Watertown. The snowfall began on the 10th and carried into the 11th. 2 to 6 inches were reported across the area. However, 8 inches were reported near Summit and 7 inches near Sisseton.

April 11, 2007: A large upper-level low-pressure area wrapped snow into far northeast South Dakota. Snow covered and slushy roads resulted from the heavy wet snow making travel tough. Some schools and events postponed or canceled. Snowfall amounts included 6 inches at Sisseton and Milbank, 7 inches at Castlewood, 8 inches at Bryant, 9 inches at Toronto and Clear Lake, and 12 inches at Summit.

April 11, 2008: An intense area of low pressure moving northeast across the Central Plains brought widespread heavy snow and strong winds to parts of central and northeast South Dakota. Snowfall amounts from 3 to 16 inches combined with north winds of 30 to 45 mph brought widespread blowing and drifting snow with blizzard conditions and heavy drifting affecting much of the area. A few thunderstorms also occurred, bringing rapid snowfall rates to some areas. Many vehicles went into the ditch with many other accidents occurring. Most roads became nearly impassable with no travel advised for parts of central and much of northeast South Dakota. There were many people stranded to wait out the storm. Also, many schools and businesses were closed on Friday the 11th. Snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Faulkton, Ree Heights, Kidder, and Hayti, 7 inches at Garden City, Castlewood, Miller, Britton, and near Stephan, 9 inches at Waubay, Bryant, and Roy Lake, 10 inches at Big Stone City and Milbank, 11 inches at Wilmot, Watertown, and Victor, 15 inches at Summit, and 16 inches at Clear Lake.

1965: Severe thunderstorms in the Upper Midwest spawned fifty-one tornadoes killing over 250 people and causing more than 200 million dollars damage. Indiana, Ohio and Michigan were hardest hit in the "Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak". Although no F5's were officially reported, at least 22 were rated as F3 or F4. This is the third deadliest day for tornadoes on record, behind the Super Outbreak of 4/3/1974, and the outbreak that included the Tri-State Tornado of 3/18/1925. Dr. Ted Fujita discovered suction vortices during the Palm Sunday tornado outbreak. It had been believed the reason why tornadoes could hit one house and leave another across the street completely unscathed was because the whole tornado would "jump" from one house to another. However, the actual reason is because most of the destruction is caused by suction vortices: small, intense mini-tornadoes within the main tornado.

1987 - Ten days of flooding in the northeastern U.S. finally came to an end. Damage from flooding due to rain and snow melt ran into the billions of dollars. The collapse of the New York State Thruway Bridge over Schoharie Creek claimed ten lives. (Storm Data)

1988: Sixteen cities in the western U.S., nine in California, reported new record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 95 degrees at Sacramento and 96 degrees at Bakersfield, California were the warmest of record for so early in the season.

1989: Forty-four cities in the south central and eastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date. Lows of 25 degrees at Conway Arkansas, 29 degrees at Dallas/Fort Worth Texas, and 22 degrees at Ozark Arkansas, were April records. Lows of 26 degrees at Hot Springs Arkansas and 31 degrees at Shreveport Louisiana equaled April records.

1990 - While showers produced heavy rain over much of the northeastern U.S., heavy snow blanketed northern Maine, with 13 inches reported at Telos Lake. Strong southwesterly winds accompanying the rain and snow gusted to 68 mph at the Blue Hill Observatory in Massachusetts. Rainfall totals of 1.04 inch at Pittsburgh PA and 1.52 inch at Buffalo NY on the 10th were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2012: The deluge began around 3:30 a.m. Over the next few hours, fast-moving hailstones pummeled the area north of Amarillo, Tex., which had lately been sitting in dust due to a lack of precipitation, according to the news organization. The hail mixed with melting hail turning the dust to mud and the mix create four-foot high mounds that shut down a major highway for the next 18 hours.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE RING BEAR

It was the first time he had been asked to be involved in a wedding. As he came down the aisle, he would take a step, turn his hands into claw-like instruments, grasp at the air, and growl like a bear, curl his lips, furrow his forehead, and lunge forward.

The people were laughing at such an unusual sight. When he got to the row where the bride's mother was sitting, she pulled him to the side and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Grrrrr," he growled. "I'm being a ring bear." Unfortunately, no one taught him how a "ring bear" behaved.

Parents and teachers have an obligation and responsibility to educate and encourage children to learn and behave appropriately. Often we place expectations on the young when they have no experience or have had no one to explain how they are to behave in certain situations. When they make mistakes or when things go wrong, we put the blame on them even if they have had no opportunity to learn proper behaviors.

That is the reason Solomon gave such wise guidance, "Listen to your father's experience " True wisdom comes from God and parents must invest time with Him and in His Word if they are to prepare their children for the demands of life. Often we expect our children to know how to behave and what to do when we have neither taught them nor provided an example of godly behavior for them. That's why we have "Ring Bears."

Prayer: Grant us, Father, the willingness to accept our responsibility to faithfully teach our children "the way they should go." May our lives be their example. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: My children, listen when your father corrects you. Pay attention and learn good judgment. Proverbs 4:1-13



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:
04.07.23

12 32 49 51 66 21

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$441,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 36 Mins 12
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.10.23

3 10 12 15 37 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,200,000

NEXT 1 Day 15 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.10.23

3 5 6 17 21 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 6 Mins 12
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.08.23

8 9 18 27 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$23,000

NEXT 1 Day 15 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.10.23

6 14 20 24 63 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Day 15 Hrs 35
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.10.23

9 10 36 46 52 14

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$202,000,000

NEXT 1 Day 15 Hrs 35
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Less than half say next vehicle is an EV: AP-NORC/EPIC poll

By TOM KRISHER, MATTHEW DALY and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Many Americans aren't yet sold on going electric for their next cars, a new poll shows, with high prices and too few charging stations the main deterrents. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults are at least somewhat likely to switch, but the history-making shift from the country's century-plus love affair with gas-driven vehicles still has a ways to travel.

The poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago shows that the Biden administration's plans to dramatically raise U.S. EV sales could run into resistance from consumers. Only 8% of U.S. adults say they or someone in their household owns or leases an electric vehicle, and just 8% say their household has a plug-in hybrid vehicle.

Even with tax credits of up to \$7,500 to buy a new EV, it could be difficult to persuade drivers to ditch their gas-burning cars and trucks for vehicles without tailpipe emissions.

Auto companies are investing billions in factories and battery technology in an effort to speed up the switch to EVs to cut pollution and fight climate change. Under a greenhouse gas emissions proposal from the Environmental Protection Agency, about two-thirds of all new vehicle sales could have to be EVs by 2032. President Joe Biden has set a goal that up to half of all new vehicle sales be electric by 2030 to cut emissions and fight climate change.

But only 19% of U.S. adults say it's "very" or "extremely" likely they would purchase an electric vehicle the next time they buy a car, according to the poll, and 22% say it's somewhat likely. About half — 47% — say it's not likely they would go electric.

Six in 10 said the high cost is a major reason they wouldn't and about a quarter cited it as a minor reason. Only 16% said the high cost would not be a factor in rejecting the EV.

New electric vehicles now cost an average of more than \$58,000, according to Kelley Blue Book, a price that's beyond the reach of many U.S. households. (The average vehicle sold in the U.S. costs just under \$46,000.) Tax credits approved under last year's Inflation Reduction Act are designed to bring EV prices down and attract more buyers.

But new rules proposed by the U.S. Treasury Department could result in fewer electric vehicles qualifying for a full \$7,500 federal tax credit later.

Many vehicles will only be eligible for half the full credit, \$3,750, an amount that may not be enough to entice them away from less-costly gasoline-powered vehicles.

About three-quarters say too few charging stations is a reason they wouldn't go electric, including half who call it a major reason. Two-thirds cite a preference for gasoline vehicles as a major or minor reason they won't go electric.

"I'm an internal combustion engine kind of guy," said Robert Piascik, 65, a musician who lives in Westerville, Ohio, a Columbus suburb. "I can't see myself spending a premium to buy something that I don't like as much as the lower-priced option."

Although he has nothing against EVs and would consider buying one as the technology improves and prices fall, Piascik said the shorter traveling range, lack of places to charge and long refueling times would make it harder for him to go on trips.

In his 2017 BMW 3-Series, all he has to do is pull into a gas station and fill up in minutes, Piascik said. "The early adopters have to put up with a lack of infrastructure," he said.

Biden has set a goal of 500,000 EV charging stations nationwide, and \$5 billion from the 2021 infrastructure law has been set aside to install or upgrade chargers along 75,000 miles (120,000 kilometers) of highway from coast to coast.

Electric car giant Tesla will, for the first time, make some of its charging stations available to all U.S. electric vehicles by the end of next year, under a plan announced in February by the White House. The plan

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to open the nation's largest and most reliable charging network to all drivers is a potential game-changer in promoting EV use, experts say.

High prices and a lack of available chargers are cited by at least half of Democrats and Republicans as main reasons for not buying an EV, but there's a partisan divide in how Americans view electric vehicles. About half of Republicans, 54%, say a preference for gasoline-powered vehicles is a major reason for not buying an EV, while only 29% of Democrats say that.

James Rogers of Sacramento, California, a Democrat who voted for Biden, calls climate change an urgent problem, and he supports Biden's overall approach. Still, he does not own an EV and isn't planning to buy one, saying the price must come down and the charging infrastructure upgraded.

Even with a tax credit that could put the average price for a new EV close to \$50,000, "it's too much" money, said Rogers, 62, a retired customer service representative. He's willing to pay as much as \$42,000 for an EV and hopes the market will soon drive prices down, Rogers said.

In an encouraging finding for EV proponents, the poll shows 55% of adults under 30 say they are at least somewhat likely they will get an electric vehicle next time, as do 49% of adults ages 30 to 44, compared with just 31% of those 45 and older.

And people in the U.S. do see the benefits to an EV. Saving money on gasoline is the main factor cited by those who want to buy an EV, with about three-quarters of U.S. adults calling it a major or minor reason.

Making an impact on climate change is another big reason many would buy an EV, with 35% saying that reducing their personal impact on the climate is a major reason and 31% saying it's a minor reason.

Krisher reported from Detroit.

The AP-NORC poll of 5,408 adults was conducted Jan. 31 to Feb. 15 using a combined sample of interviews from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population, and interviews from opt-in online panels. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 1.7 percentage points. The AmeriSpeak panel is recruited randomly using address-based sampling methods, and respondents later were interviewed online or by phone.

US, Philippines hold largest war drills near disputed waters

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — American and Filipino forces on Tuesday launched their largest combat exercises in decades in the Philippines and its waters across the disputed South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, where Washington has repeatedly warned China over its increasingly aggressive actions.

The annual drills by the longtime treaty allies called Balikatan — Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder" — will run up to April 28 and involve more than 17,600 military personnel. It will be the latest display of American firepower in Asia, as the Biden administration strengthens an arc of alliances to better counter China, including in a possible confrontation over Taiwan, an island democracy that Beijing claims as its own.

That dovetails with efforts by the Philippines under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to defend its territorial interests in the South China Sea, which China claims virtually in its entirety, by boosting joint military exercises with the U.S. and allowing rotating batches of American forces to stay in additional Philippine military camps under a 2014 defense pact.

"The relationships that we have, that we build into these exercises, will make us faster to respond to conflict, crisis, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," U.S. Marine Maj. Gen. Eric Austin said.

About 12,200 U.S. military personnel, 5,400 Filipino forces and 111 Australian counterparts are taking part in the exercises, the largest since Balikatan started three decades ago. The drills will showcase U.S. warships, fighter jets as well as Patriot missiles, HIMARS rocket launchers and anti-tank Javelins, according to U.S. and Philippine military officials.

In a live-fire drill the allies will stage for the first time, U.S. and Filipino forces will sink a target ship in the Philippine territorial waters off the western province of Zambales on April 26, in a coordinated inland

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and coastal artillery bombardment and airstrike, Col. Michael Logico, a Philippine spokesman for Balikatan, told reporters.

"We have to fire at a target that is closer to what we would expect in an actual threat, which is an intrusion coming from an adversary by sea," Logico told reporters. "We are demonstrating that we are combat ready."

Asked if Marcos raised any concern that Beijing may be antagonized by the rocket-firing near the busy waterway that China considers its territory, Logico said that did not come up when he briefed the president about the event. Marcos wants to witness the live-fire drill, he said.

In western Palawan province, which faces the South China Sea, the exercises will involve retaking an island captured by enemy forces, Logico said.

Philippine military officials said the maneuvers were aimed at bolstering the country's coastal defense and disaster-response capabilities and were not aimed at any country.

Such field scenarios will "test the allies' capabilities in combined arms live-fire, information and intelligence sharing, communications between maneuver units, logistics operations, amphibious operations," the U.S. Embassy in Manila said.

In a sign of deepening defense cooperation, the Philippine foreign and defense secretaries will meet their American counterparts in Washington on Tuesday to discuss the American military presence and proposed joint naval patrols, officials said.

Washington and Beijing have been on a collision course over the long-seething territorial disputes involving China, the Philippines and four other governments, and Beijing's goal of annexing Taiwan, by force if necessary.

China last week warned against the intensifying U.S. military deployment to the region. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in a regular news briefing in Beijing that it "would only lead to more tensions and less peace and stability in the region."

The Balikatan exercises opened in the Philippines a day after China concluded three days of combat drills that simulated sealing off Taiwan, following Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last week in California that infuriated Beijing.

On Monday, the U.S. 7th Fleet deployed guided-missile destroyer USS Milius within 12 nautical miles off Mischief Reef, a Manila-claimed coral outcrop which China seized in the mid-1990s and turned into one of seven missile-protected island bases in the South China Sea's hotly contested Spratlys archipelago. The U.S. military has been undertaking such freedom of navigation operations for years to challenge China's expansive territorial claims.

"As long as some countries continue to claim and assert limits on rights that exceed their authority under international law, the United States will continue to defend the rights and freedoms of the sea guaranteed to all," the 7th Fleet said.

Associated Press journalists Joael Calupitan and Aaron Favila contributed to this report.

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

Attorneys outline complex plot in trial of slain kids' mom

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho prosecutors have suggested motives, showed graphic photos and described a complicated plot involving efforts to cast out evil spirits in the triple murder trial of a woman accused in the deaths of her two kids and a romantic rival.

On Tuesday, a detective who helped unearth the children's bodies is expected to take the stand.

"The defendant used money, power and sex to get what she wanted," Fremont County Prosecutor Lindsey Blake told jurors Monday during the first day of arguments. "It didn't matter what it was."

Lori Vallow Daybell and her fifth husband, Chad Daybell, are both charged with multiple counts of con-

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

Both defendants have pleaded not guilty, but are being tried separately. Chad Daybell's trial is still months away. Vallow Daybell faces up to life in prison if convicted.

Vallow Daybell never reported her two youngest children missing, prosecutors said. Instead, Rexburg police said both she and Chad Daybell lied to investigators about the kids' whereabouts. The search for the kids lasted for months before it came to a tragic conclusion in June of 2020, their remains found buried in Chad Daybell's eastern Idaho yard.

Tylee's body had been burned, Blake said, and leaving behind only "a mass of bone and tissue" and some DNA on a pickaxe and shovel. Duct tape had been wrapped around JJ's hands and head, his body wrapped in trash bags.

Tammy Daybell had died months earlier from what was initially reported as natural causes, purportedly dying her sleep in after coming down with an illness. But authorities grew suspicious when they learned Chad and Lori had married just two weeks after Tammy's death. With the search for the missing kids still underway, investigators had Tammy Daybell's body exhumed.

An autopsy showed she died of asphyxiation caused by someone else, Blake said.

As she spoke, she showed graphic photos to the jury of shallow graves, the children's remains and Tammy Daybell's body.

All three of the victims were killed because they were obstacles to Vallow Daybell's romantic and financial goals, Blake told jurors.

"Remember, the defendant will remove any obstacle in her way to get what she wants, and she wanted Chad Daybell," Blake said.

Defense attorney Jim Archibald presented jurors with a far different picture, describing Vallow Daybell as a "kind and loving mother to her children" who happened to have a particular interest in religion and Biblical prophecies involving the end of the world.

"Some people care less about Biblical prophecies, some people care a lot about it," Archibald said. "Thankfully in this country, we get to worship as we choose."

Vallow Daybell is presumed innocent, Archibald reminded jurors, and said the criminal charges themselves — which accuse Vallow Daybell of either directing, encouraging, assisting or participating in the murders — show that prosecutors don't really know what happened in the case.

"Did she kill, or did she assist, or did she encourage, or did she direct? They aren't sure," Archibald said.

Archibald also said Vallow Daybell's religious beliefs only began to change after she met Chad Daybell, a religious author whose fictional books focused on the apocalypse and were loosely based on the beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

But Blake said those beliefs veered toward the extreme, with the couple saying people were "dark" or "light," telling friends and acquaintances that "dark" people had been taken over by evil spirits. They eventually began teaching friends that once those evil spirits were strong enough, the person became a "zombie," and the only way to free that person's soul was by killing them.

Friends of Vallow Daybell will testify that she said the children and Tammy Daybell were "dark" before their deaths, Blake said. At least one friend told police that Vallow Daybell called both children "zombies" before they disappeared, according to police records.

"The common theme was the body has to be destroyed," Blake said. "The defendant and Chad used their self-proclaimed religious teachings to justify their actions to others — their actions from affair to murder."

JJ Vallow's grandmother, Kay Woodcock, was the first witness to take the stand after opening arguments. She cried after Madison County prosecutor Rob Wood showed her a photo of JJ.

Woodcock said Vallow Daybell was once a "doting mother," but her opinion of the defendant changed after Charles Vallow filed for divorce in early 2019. After Charles Vallow died, once-regular phone calls and

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visits with JJ dropped off, she said.

She only had contact with JJ three times after his father died, Woodcock said, in short FaceTime video calls. The last call happened the month before JJ was last seen alive, she said. It only was about 35 seconds long.

"He just said, 'Hi Mama, hi Papa,'" Woodcock said, referring to JJ's nicknames for his grandparents. "Gotta go, Mama. Gotta go, Papa. Bye!"

Woodcock eventually contacted authorities and asked them to do a welfare check on JJ, prompting Rexburg Police to open a missing persons case in November 2019. During that period, police say the couple lied about the children's whereabouts.

Prosecutors say the couple planned to use life insurance money from Tammy Daybell's death, and that Vallow Daybell kept collecting and spending the children's social security and survivor benefits after they died. Tylee's father died after he and Vallow Daybell divorced years earlier. JJ's father Charles Vallow — who Vallow Daybell was married to when she met Chad Daybell — was fatally shot by Vallow Daybell's brother, Alex Cox.

Vallow Daybell is charged in Arizona in connection with Charles Vallow's death, but yet to enter a plea. Cox, who told police the shooting was in self-defense, died a few months after the shooting and was never charged.

The couple had eliminated "any and every obstacle that was in their way of getting exactly what they wanted," she said.

It may not have been the first attempt on Tammy Daybell's life: Ten days earlier, she had called police to report that a masked man approached her in her driveway and shot at her a couple of times before running away.

Later that night, someone overheard a phone call between Vallow Daybell, who was angry, and another person, Blake said.

"She made statements along the line of, 'he can't do anything right,'" the prosecutor told jurors.

Another witness testified that he was also the target of a shooting in October 2019. Brandon Boudreaux was formerly married to Vallow Daybell's niece, Melani Pawlowski.

Pawlowski looked up to Vallow Daybell, Boudreaux said, and the women began attending religious meetings together. Pawlowski grew increasingly religious, he said, fixated on the idea that the world was about to end.

The two divorced in 2019. Boudreaux said he was driving to his new rental home when someone parked in a Jeep Wrangler near his driveway shot at him, the bullet shattering his car window. Boudreaux said he recognized the Jeep as one that had belonged to Tylee.

Vallow Daybell has not been charged with the shooting attempt against Boudreaux, but prosecutor Rachel Smith said the shootings were all part of the same plan to "cause the death of multiple people in her world."

Rexburg Police Detective Ray Hermosillo is expected to take the witness stand on Tuesday. Hermosillo has testified during previous court proceedings about how investigators unearthed the children's bodies and the condition of the remains. His testimony is expected to take all day.

Taiwan's Tsai says China not being 'responsible' with drills

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen has condemned China's military drills in the Taiwan Strait, saying Tuesday that China did not demonstrate the "responsible" behavior of a major Asian nation.

China's three-day, large-scale drills that ended Monday were retaliation for Tsai's meeting with United States House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in California last week on her tour of Taiwan's official and unofficial allies.

"As the president, I represent our country in the world, whether it's a visit to allied countries or stopping through in the U.S. and interacting with our international friends, and not only has this been going on for years, it's the Taiwanese people's shared expectation," Tsai said in a statement. "But China used this as

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a pretext to start military drills, creating instability in the Taiwan Strait and region. This is not the attitude of a responsible major nation in this region.”

China sees such meetings as encouraging Taiwanese voters and politicians who support formal independence for the island, a step China’s ruling Communist Party says would lead to war.

The sides split in 1949 after a civil war, and the government says the island is obliged to rejoin the mainland, by force if necessary. China does not recognize Taiwan’s government institutions, has cut off almost all communication with Tsai’s government since shortly after her initial 2016 election and has blocked Taiwan’s participation in most international organizations, beginning with the United Nations.

Surveys show a strong majority of Taiwanese back the current state of de facto independence, while Tsai’s government says a declaration of formal independence is unnecessary because the island already enjoys the status of a sovereign nation, despite China’s attempts to isolate it diplomatically.

China’s People’s Liberation Army issued a threat as it concluded the exercises. Its troops “can fight at any time to resolutely smash any form of ‘Taiwan independence’ and foreign interference attempts,” the PLA’s Eastern Theater Command, responsible for contingencies involving Taiwan, said in a statement.

China’s Foreign Ministry backed up that threat Tuesday.

“Again, I would like to stress that China will take resolute strong measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity,” spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters at a daily briefing.

In recent years, China has been increasing its military presence in the Taiwan Strait, with warplanes being sent on a near-daily basis and military drills being conducted in the waters and skies near Taiwan.

In August, after then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan, China conducted missile strikes on targets in the seas around Taiwan and sent warships and warplanes over the median line of the Taiwan Strait. It also fired missiles over the island itself, which landed in Japan’s exclusive economic zone in a significant escalation.

Despite having only unofficial relations, the U.S. is Taiwan’s most important ally and source of military assistance. U.S. law requires Washington to regard all threats to the island — including a blockade — as matters of “grave concern,” although it does not explicitly require the commitment of forces.

The exercises this time have focused more on air strength, with Taiwan reporting more than 200 flights by Chinese warplanes. On Monday alone, Taiwan’s defense ministry tracked 91 flights by Chinese warplanes.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV, citing the PLA, said the exercises simulated sealing off the island and striking important targets in waves.

Tsai also urged the public to not believe any disinformation about Taiwan’s defenses, saying the military was fulfilling its duties and the public should encourage the forces. “Our nation’s soldiers and national security team will continue to stand fast at their posts to defend our country,” she said.

Taiwan’s defense ministry said eight Chinese navy vessels were still in the waters surrounding the island as of Tuesday morning.

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

Louisville bank employee livestreamed attack that killed 5

By DYLAN LOVAN and CLAIRE GALOFARO Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — A Louisville bank employee armed with a rifle opened fire at his workplace Monday morning, killing five people — including a close friend of Kentucky’s governor — while livestreaming the attack on Instagram, authorities said.

Police arrived as shots were still being fired inside Old National Bank and killed the shooter in an exchange of gunfire, Louisville Metro Police Department Chief Jacquelyn Gwinn-Villaroel said. The city’s mayor, Craig Greenberg, called the attack “an evil act of targeted violence.”

The shooting, the 15th mass killing in the country this year, comes just two weeks after a former student killed three children and three adults at a Christian elementary school in Nashville, Tennessee, about 160 miles (260 kilometers) to the south. That state’s governor and his wife also had friends killed in that shooting.

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In Louisville, the chief identified the shooter as 25-year-old Connor Sturgeon, who she said was livestreaming during the attack.

"That's tragic to know that that incident was out there and captured," she said.

Meta, the company that owns Facebook and Instagram, said in a statement that it had "quickly removed the livestream of this tragic incident this morning."

Social media companies have imposed tougher rules over the past few years to prohibit violent and extremist content. They have set up systems to remove posts and streams that violate those restrictions, but shocking material like the Louisville shooting continues to slip through the cracks, prompting lawmakers and other critics to lash out at the technology industry for slipshod safeguards and moderation policies.

A man who fled the building during the shooting told WHAS-TV that the shooter opened fire with a long rifle in a conference room in the back of the building's first floor.

"Whoever was next to me got shot — blood is on me from it," he told the news station, pointing to his shirt. He said he fled to a break room and shut the door.

Nine people, including two police officers, were treated for injuries, University of Louisville Hospital spokeswoman Heather Fontaine said in an email. One of the wounded, identified as 57-year-old Deana Eckert, later died, police said Monday night.

One of the wounded officers, 26-year-old Nickolas Wilt, graduated from the police academy on March 31. He was in critical condition after being shot in the head and having surgery, the police chief said. At least three patients had been discharged.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said he lost one of his closest friends in the shooting.

"Tommy Elliott helped me build my law career, helped me become governor, gave me advice on being a good dad," said Beshear, his voice shaking with emotion. "He's one of the people I talked to most in the world, and very rarely were we talking about my job. He was an incredible friend."

Also killed in the shooting were Josh Barrick, Jim Tutt and Juliana Farmer, police said.

"These are irreplaceable, amazing individuals that a terrible act of violence tore from all of us," the governor said.

Beshear spoke as the investigation in Louisville continued and police searched for a motive. Crime scene investigators could be seen marking and photographing numerous bullet holes in the windows near the front door of the bank, not far from Waterfront Park and minor league ballpark Louisville Slugger Field.

As part of the investigation, police descended on the neighborhood where the suspect lived, about 5 miles (8 kilometers) south of the downtown shooting. The street was blocked as federal and local officers talked to residents. One home was cordoned off with caution tape. Kami Cooper, who lives in the neighborhood, said she didn't recall ever meeting the suspect but said it's an unnerving feeling to have lived on the same street as someone who could do such a thing.

"I'm almost speechless. You see it on the news but not at home," Cooper said. "It's unbelievable, it could happen here, somebody on my street."

Deputy Police Chief Paul Humphrey said the actions of responding police officers undoubtedly saved lives.

"This is a tragic event," he said. "But it was the heroic response of officers that made sure that no more people were more seriously injured than what happened."

Just a few hours later and blocks away, an unrelated shooting killed one man and wounded a woman outside a community college, police said.

The 15 mass shootings this year are the most during the first 100 days of a calendar year since 2009, when 16 had occurred by April 10, according to a mass killings database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. The pace slowed later in 2009, with 32 mass killings recorded that year.

Going back to 2006, the first year for which data has been compiled, the years with the most mass killings were 2019 and 2022, with 45 and 42 mass killings recorded during the entire calendar year.

It was the second time that Beshear was personally touched by a mass tragedy since becoming governor.

In late 2021, one of the towns devastated by tornadoes that tore through Kentucky was Dawson Springs,

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the hometown of Beshear's father, former two-term Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear. Andy Beshear frequently visited Dawson Springs as a boy and has talked emotionally about his father's hometown.

Contributing to this report were Becky Reynolds in Louisville, Bruce Schreiner in Frankfort, Kentucky, Beatrice Dupuy in New York, database journalist Larry Fenn, researchers Rhonda Shafner and Jennifer Farrar in New York and AP Technology writer Michael Liedtke in San Ramon, California.

A previous version used an incorrect spelling of Deana Eckert's name, based on information from authorities.

A previous version incorrectly reported the shooter's age, based on information from authorities.

Fancy a dip? An Olympic reboot for Paris' toxic River Seine

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Even before he has dipped his toes into the murky waters of Paris' famous but forbidden River Seine, French triathlete Thibaut Rigaudeau is already fielding questions from disbelieving friends.

"Are you scared of swimming in the Seine?" he says they ask him. "It looks disgusting."

For decades, it was. Though immortalized in art, literature and song, and cherished by lovers who whisper sweet nothings or tearfully part on the privacy of its banks, the river was ecologically dying. It was too toxic for most fish and for swimmers, largely useful only as a waterway for goods and people or as a watery grave for discarded bicycles and other trash. Swimming in the Seine has, with some exceptions, been off-limits since 1923.

Now, however, its admittedly unappetizing green-brown waters hide a tale of rebirth.

A costly and complex cleanup is resuscitating the Seine just in time for it to play a starring role in the 2024 Paris Olympics and, after that, for it to genuinely live up to its billing as the world's most romantic river, one that's actually fit again for people. And in a warming world, a renewed ability to take cooling dips in the river should help France's capital remain liveable during increasingly frequent heat waves. It possibly might also inspire other cities to invest in reclaiming their waterways.

"It will create waves, so to speak, across the world because a lot of cities are watching Paris," says Dan Angelescu, a scientist who is tracking the Seine's water quality for City Hall, with regular sampling.

"It's the beginning of a movement," he says. "We hope so, at least."

The Olympic deadline has supercharged a cleanup that has been decades in the making. Without the imperative of having to be ready for 10,500 Olympians in July and August next year, followed by 4,400 Paralympians, City Hall officials say it would have taken many more years to fund the multi-pronged, 1.4 billion-euro (\$1.5 billion) effort. Because as well as hosting outdoor swim races, the Seine is going to be the centerpiece of Paris' unprecedented Olympic opening ceremony. For the first time, it will take place not in a stadium setting but along the river and its banks.

So it needs to be ready. Officials have been going after homes upstream of Paris and houseboats on the Seine that were emptying their sewage and wastewater directly into the river. An Olympic law adopted in 2018 gave moored boats two years to hook up to Paris' sewage network. Sewage treatment plants on the Seine and its tributary, the Marne, are also being improved.

And more than half a billion euros (dollars) is going into huge storage basins and other public works that will reduce the need to spill bacteria-laden wastewater into the Seine untreated when it rains. One storage facility is being dug next to Paris' Austerlitz train station. The giant hole will hold the equivalent of 20 Olympic swimming pools of dirty water that will now be treated rather than being spat raw through storm drains in the river.

City Hall says the water quality is already improving and that there are many more types of fish than the two or three species that were the only ones hardy enough to survive in the filth a few decades ago. It says samples taken daily last July and August in the stretch of river where Olympians and Paralympians

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will compete showed the water quality was overwhelmingly "good." By their sports' standards, that means acceptable.

Setting off from the Seine's ornate Alexandre III bridge, triathletes will race first in 2024, with men on July 30, followed by women the next day. Then come marathon swimmers, on Aug. 8 and 9, and para-triathletes on Sept. 1 and 2.

Rigaudeau, who competed in para-triathlon at the 2021 Tokyo games, is thrilled by the prospect. He's hoping for an early taste of the experience when Paris hosts warm-up swims in the Seine this summer to hone its readiness for 2024. It will be Rigaudeau's first-ever dip in his home river.

"We will be the 'testers,'" he says. "I hope we don't get sick."

After the games, the river should then reopen to everyone — in the summer of 2025. City Hall says five potential bathing spots are being studied within Paris itself, with others a bit further afield.

Officials hope that after so many years where swimming in the Seine was unthinkable, Parisians will start to feel that it's safe to go back in the water when they see Olympians and Paralympians leading the way.

"It's going to change our lives," Rigaudeau says. "But it's also true that because everyone thinks that it's really very dirty, I'm not sure if people will go of their own accord, at least at first."

Jeffrey Schaeffer in Paris contributed. More AP coverage of the Paris Olympics: <https://apnews.com/hub/2024-paris-olympic-games> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Dalai Lama apologizes after video shows him kissing boy

DHARAMSALA, India (AP) — Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama apologized Monday after a video showing him kissing a child on the lips triggered criticism.

A statement posted on his official website said the 87-year-old leader regretted the incident and wished to "apologize to the boy and his family, as well as his many friends across the world, for the hurt his words may have caused."

The incident occurred at a public gathering in February at the Tsuglagkhang temple in Dharamsala, where the exiled leader lives. He was taking questions from the audience when the boy asked if he could hug him.

The Dalai Lama invited the boy up toward the platform he was seated on. In the video, he gestured to his cheek, after which the child kissed him before giving him a hug.

The Dalai Lama then asked the boy to kiss him on the lips and stuck out his tongue. "And suck my tongue," the Dalai Lama can be heard saying as the boy sticks out his own tongue and leans in, prompting laughter from the audience.

The footage triggered a backlash online with social media users condemning his behavior as inappropriate and disturbing.

SNAP, the national advocacy group for victims of clergy abuse, said they were "horrified" by the Dalai Lama's actions. "Our primary concern is with the innocent boy who was the subject of this disgusting request by a revered spiritual figure," the group said in a statement.

Sticking out one's tongue was often used as a greeting according to ancient Tibetan culture, but is not commonly seen anymore.

"His Holiness often teases people he meets in an innocent and playful way, even in public and before cameras," the statement from the Dalai Lama read.

The Dalai Lama has made the hillside town of Dharamsala his headquarters since fleeing from Tibet after a failed uprising against Chinese rule in 1959. India considers Tibet to be part of China, though it hosts Tibetan exiles.

What we know about victims of the Louisville bank shooting

By CLAIRE GALOFARO and BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Tributes were growing Monday for the five people slain in a shooting at a Louisville bank, with friends sharing details of their lives and mourners gathering at vigils.

Details were also emerging about some of the wounded, including a rookie officer who was just recently sworn in.

Louisville's former Mayor Greg Fischer said he'd known 63-year-old Tommy Elliott, one of those killed, for 40 years. He likes to tell a story about how they met: Elliott was a young banker and Fischer was a young businessman. They were both ambitious and "wet behind the ears," Fischer said. Elliott called him up and said he wanted to be his personal banker.

"I reminded him that my net worth was less than \$5,000 and thought he was crazy," Fischer said. "I said, 'Your prospect list must be getting pretty bad, Tommy, to be calling me.'"

Fischer said that story highlights Elliott's work ethic and his ability to see things in people they might not see in themselves.

"He got great joy out of helping people and seeing people succeed," he said.

They became close friends, and when Fischer launched his first bid to be mayor, Elliott signed on to be his campaign finance manager and remained with him the rest of his political career.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Morgan McGarvey, who represents Louisville, knew Elliott for years and said, "It's unimaginable to me that he's not here."

"He enjoyed life," McGarvey said. "He enjoyed people. He enjoyed being in the mix. He enjoyed trying to get stuff done to move Louisville and Kentucky forward. He was serious about it, but he had fun with it."

Elliott's network of friends included Louisville native Lonnie Ali, the wife of the late boxing great Muhammad Ali. She pointed to his sense of humor and his commitment to his community.

"Tommy was such a warm, wonderful, funny, kind guy," she said. "Just the sweetest person. And it's just such a huge loss, not just to his friends and family, but to the community. Because that's what Tommy was about. Tommy was about community."

"I'm going to miss him so much," she added.

Fischer said Elliott was a devoted family man. He is survived by his wife, two daughters and two step-daughters. Fischer said it's hard for him to imagine the hole that's been left for them.

Nine others, including two police officers, were treated for injuries from the shooting. One of the officers, 26-year-old Nickolas Wilt, graduated from police academy March 31. He was in critical condition Monday after being shot in the head and having surgery. The police department said on Twitter that Wilt "ran towards the gunfire today to save lives."

The other slain victims included Joshua Barrick, Juliana Farmer and James Tutt. A fifth victim, Deana Eckert, died later, police announced Monday night.

Hundreds gathered Monday evening at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, where Barrick was an active member. The church placed a photo of him with a wide smile on its altar, as well as a second of Barrick with his wife and two young children.

"He was so well known, he made himself known," said Pastor Shayne Duvall. "This community is mourning. We're trying to wrap our heads around it."

Duvall remembered Barrick as a big guy with a bubbly personality who coached basketball for the first and second graders at the parish's grade school. He described him as "very charismatic, very charming" and said Barrick was among the first who welcomed him when he came to the church less than a year ago.

Barrick had worked for about two decades in banking and previously worked at WesBanco, according to The Courier-Journal. Louisville Business First named him one of its 20 People to Know in Banking in 2020.

Tutt was a Frankfort native who graduated from the University of Kentucky and worked in banking for over 38 years, according to the Lexington Herald-Leader.

Oldham County Judge-Executive David Voegelé told the Courier-Journal that Tutt served on the Oldham-La Grange Development Authority from 2011-2022, including a number of years as its chair.

"He added a tremendous amount of insights as we went about developing our office park in LaGrange,"

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Voegele said. "He's a very high quality, well-thought-of individual ... It's just sickening to hear what's happened."

Farmer, a loan officer, was a mother and grandmother, according to the Herald-Leader.

While mourning her friend and the other shooting victims in her hometown, Lonnie Ali lamented that "there is no place on this earth that we are safe as citizens."

"You always have to be aware of everything going on around you," said Ali, who is carrying on the humanitarian causes her husband championed. "And it scares me to death — not really so much for me, but for my grandchildren, my children, my friends." _____

A previous version of this story used an incorrect spelling of Deana Eckert's name, based on information from authorities.

Schreiner reported from Frankfurt.

When exactly will India surpass China as most populous?

By MIKE SCHNEIDER and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

India will surpass China's population this month. Or maybe in July. Or, perhaps it's happened already?

Demographers are unsure exactly when India will take the title as the most populous nation in the world because they're relying on estimates to make their best guess. But they know it's going to happen soon, if it hasn't occurred by now.

China has had the most people in the world since at least 1950, the year United Nations population data began. Both China and India have more than 1.4 billion people, and combined they make up more than a third of the world's 8 billion people.

"Actually, there is no way we can know exactly when India will surpass China," said Bruno Schoumaker, a demographer at Université catholique de Louvain in Belgium. "There is some uncertainty, not only about India's population, but also China's population."

STILL, WHEN IS IT HAPPENING?

Mathematical calculations from a range of surveys, as well as birth and death records, project that India will overtake China sometime in the middle of April. But demographers warn that it should be taken with a grain of salt since the numbers are fuzzy and could be revised.

"It's a crude approximation, a best guess," said Patrick Gerland, chief of the population estimates and projections section at the U.N. in New York.

Not long ago, India wasn't expected to become most populous until later this decade. But the timing has been sped up by a drop in China's fertility rate, with families having fewer children.

HOW IS IT CALCULATED?

Demographers at the U.N. Population Division make estimates based on projections from a wide variety of data sources to get what they believe are the most up-to-date demographic numbers. The last update to the data used for these calculations for both India and China was July 2022, said Sara Hertog, a U.N. population affairs officer in New York.

The demographers then use a statistical technique to infer when India's population has surpassed that of China, according to Stuart Gietel-Basten, a professor at Khalifa University of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi.

"The reality, of course, is that these estimates are just that," Gietel-Basten said. "But at least they are based on a relatively solid and consistent methodology."

WHERE DO THE NUMBERS COME FROM?

The foundations of both nations' numbers are censuses, or head counts, conducted every decade.

China's last census was in 2020. Demographers used birth and death records, along with other administrative data, to calculate how the population has grown since then.

India's last census was in 2011. Its scheduled 2021 census was postponed by COVID-19. Without an actual door-to-door count for more than a decade, sample surveys have filled in the gaps to help demographers

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and India itself understand its population, said Alok Vajpeyi of the New Delhi-based non-government organization, Population Foundation of India.

Among the most important is the Sample Registration System, India's large-scale demographic survey that gathers data on such things as births, deaths, fertility and more.

Andrea Wojnar, the United Nations Population Fund's representative for India, said the agency is confident in the survey's numbers "because it uses a very robust methodology."

WHY IS INDIA MOVING AHEAD?

China has an aging population with stagnant growth even after the government seven years ago retreated from a one-child policy, and just two years ago said couples could have three children.

India has a much younger population, a higher fertility rate and a decrease in infant mortality over the last three decades.

India has more babies born each year than in any other country, while China has joined many European countries in having more deaths each year than births, said Dudley Poston, Jr., an emeritus professor of sociology at Texas A&M University.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

There's more than bragging rights at stake over which nation is the world's most populous — there are social and economic consequences. In India, that means a growing labor force and growth that sparks economic activity. In China, that means fewer working-age adults able to support an aging population.

Once a country hits a low fertility level, it's often hard to recover population growth, even with changes in government policy to encourage more births, said Toshiko Kaneda, technical director of demographic research at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington.

"Psychologically, it will be tough for China, especially given the rivalry in other areas between the two countries," Gietel-Basten said. "It is a big moment in human history as the baton is passed to India."

Arasu reported from Bengaluru, India. Schneider reported from Orlando, Florida.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP

Follow Sibi Arasu on Twitter at @sibi123

India residents try to save a river, officials deny problems

By ROHIT THAYYIL and MOJUDAN GADHAVI, Press Trust of India undefined

KOCHI, India (AP) — Eloor smells like it is dying.

Once it was an island of rich farmland on the Periyar River, 17 km (10.5 miles) from the Arabian sea, teeming with fish. Now, a stench of putrid flesh permeates the air. Most of the fish are gone. Locals say people living near the river are hardly even having children anymore.

Yet here is Shaji, alone in his small fiber boat, fishing with his handmade rod, the southern Indian state of Kerala's massive industrial smokestacks behind him.

Some 300 chemical companies belch out dense fumes, almost warning people to stay away. The waters have taken on dark hues. Shaji, a fisherman in his late 40s who only uses one name, is among the few who remain.

"Most of the people here are trying to migrate from this place. If we look at the streets, it's almost empty. There are no jobs and now we cannot even find work on the river," said Shaji, displaying the few pearl spot fish he managed to catch during an entire day in March.

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

Many of the petrochemical plants here are more than five decades old. They produce pesticides, rare earth elements, rubber processing chemicals, fertilizers, zinc-chrome products and leather treatments.

Some are government owned, including Fertilisers and Chemicals Travancore, established in 1943, Indian

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Rare Earths Limited, and Hindustan Insecticides Limited.

Residents say the industries take in large amounts of freshwater from the Periyar and discharge concentrated wastewater with almost no treatment.

Anwar C. I., who uses initials for his last name in the custom of southern India, is a member of a Periyar anti-pollution committee and a private contractor who lives in the area. He said residents have grown accustomed to the reek that seems to hang over the area like a heavy curtain, enveloping everything and everyone.

The groundwater is now fully contaminated and the government's contention that the businesses benefit people is wrong, he said.

"When they claim to provide employment to many people through industrialization, the net impact is that the livelihood of thousands is lost," Anwar said. People cannot make a living from ruined land and water.

Residents have periodically risen up against the factories in the form of protests. Demonstrations began in 1970, when the village first witnessed thousands of fish dying. Both die-offs and protests happened again many times after that, said Shabeer Mooppan, a long-time resident who has often demonstrated.

"Some of the early protest leaders are now bedridden" in advanced age, Mooppan said, emphasizing just how long people in the community have been trying to get the river cleaned up.

Now Shabeer is trying to improve surveillance, to catch those responsible for fouling the river. It's a method used by riverkeepers and baykeepers in other cities around the world. He is also pursuing legal cases against polluting industries.

The state Pollution Control Board downplayed the industrial pollution in the Periyar River, blaming it on sewage from homes, commercial institutions and markets upstream.

"We have not found any alarming rate of metals in the river water. All the levels are within the limits," said Baburajan P K, chief environmental engineer of the board.

Baburajan said only five major companies of the over 300 industrial plants in the region are allowed to discharge wastewater into the river, and it must be treated. The rest must treat their wastewater, reusing or disposing it on their own land. He said hefty environmental levies have been imposed on violators.

Research also tells a story of a river in distress.

As far back as 1998, scientists at the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies found some 25 species of fish had disappeared from the region. Experts have found contamination in vegetables, chicken, eggs, fruits and tuber crops from the region.

Chandramohan Kumar, a professor in Chemical Oceanography at Cochin University of Science and Technology, has researched Periyar River pollution in several studies.

"We have observed pollution from various organic fertilizers, metallic components. Toxic metals like cadmium, copper, zinc and all the heavy metals can be detected there," Kumar said.

India also has a special environmental court called the National Green Tribunal. A decade ago, it ordered the government to create an action plan to restore water quality in the river to protect the environment and public health. It also ordered the formation of a monitoring committee.

More recently, the Tribunal was worried enough to initiate its own proceeding on the pollution. It cited studies going back to 2005, carried out by the environmental non-profit group Thanal, that showed "hundreds of people living near Kuzhikandam Creek at Eloor were afflicted with various diseases such as cancer, congenital birth defects, bronchitis, asthma, allergic dermatitis, nervous disorders and behavior changes."

The court cited another survey of 327 families in the region that showed hazardous chemicals, including DDT, hexachlorocyclohexane, cadmium, copper, mercury, lead, toluene, manganese and nickel had been discharged into Kuzhikandam Creek "and adversely affected the health condition of people in Eloor."

Kumar said the remedy for this pollution is onsite treatment at each facility, and it comes down to money. "If they are ready to invest, the effluent discharge can be resolved," he said.

The Pollution Control Board responded that it recently began a study that could lead to curbing air pollution and reducing the intolerable stench in the area largely caused, it said, by bone meal fertilizer factories and meat rendering plants. It is expected to be finalized in May.

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The board dismissed allegations that it does not actively pursue polluters and said it ensures no untreated waste liquids are discharged into the river.

Trainees with the Pollution Control Board do daily trips to collect samples from six different points along the river.

"But we don't know what happens to those samples," said resident Adam Kuty. "What's the point of having all the money in the world and no water to drink?"

Omana Manikuttan, a long-time resident of Eloor, said for years she and her neighbors have not eaten fish from the river. Eating them leads to serious diarrhea and tastes like pesticides, even after cooking, Manikuttan said.

As the blame game continues, the grass and trees in the area appear wilted as if scorched by the noxious fumes. The birds seem to have been driven away by the air. Without official action, the pall over the region and its residents is unlikely to lift soon.

Boston heads to Fever as No. 1 pick in WNBA draft

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Indiana Fever made the most of the first No. 1 draft pick in franchise history, selecting Aliyah Boston.

The South Carolina star had a stellar college career, leading the Gamecocks to a national championship her junior year, losing only nine games total and helping her team to three Final Four appearances. The 6-foot-5 Boston was a three-time Associated Press All-American and also the Player of the Year as a junior.

"It's really special, I'm thankful to God for putting me in this position," said the 21-year-old Boston, from the U.S. Virgin Islands. "Everyone in Indiana, they saw something in me, I'm ready to get there and get to work."

The Fever had the worst record in the league last season, going 5-31.

"Aliyah Boston will have an immediate impact on our franchise on and off the court," Fever GM Lin Dunn said. "We are excited to pair her with Kelsey (Mitchell) and NaLyssa (Smith) as we reload the Indiana Fever. We are very impressed with Aliyah's post skills as well as her natural leadership skills. This a a great day for our franchise!"

Boston, like many other players, have had to choose whether to return to college for a fifth season because of the extra year granted for the COVID-19 virus or turn pro. She decided to enter the WNBA draft, joining 111 other players to declare.

"Everyone that has a COVID year has a tough choice," Boston said. "You could be somewhere you know the system. ... It took a lot of thought."

She was one of three South Carolina players taken in the first round. Laetitia Amihere went eighth to Atlanta and Zia Cooke 10th to Los Angeles. It's the 10th time that three players from the same team were drafted in the opening round, and the first since Oregon had three in 2020.

The Gamecocks also had two other players drafted, with Brea Beal going 24th to Minnesota and Victaria Saxton picked next by Indiana.

"It's amazing experience really, because this group of girls have been through life together," Amihere said. "These four years haven't been only about basketball. Being able to be with them on one of our biggest nights is an amazing experience."

Minnesota took Diamond Miller of Maryland with the No. 2 pick, and Dallas drafted Maddy Siegrist of Villanova with the third pick. Big East Commissioner Val Ackerman, who was the WNBA's first president, sat with Siegrist.

The Wings also drafted UConn guard Lou Lopez Senechal two picks later. She had transferred to UConn after a stellar career at Fairfield.

"It feels surreal, really didn't think I'd be here," Senechal said. "I've come a long way, gone through a lot of challenges."

Stephanie Soares of Iowa State went fourth to Washington. The Mystics quickly traded her to Dallas

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soon after selecting the 6-foot-7 center. Washington got back a first round pick in 2025 and second-round pick in 2024.

"It was a very interesting feeling," Soares said. "Pure excitement going to Washington, but now getting to go to Dallas. It's going to be a great next step to the journey."

Soares tore her ACL in January and will miss the upcoming WNBA season.

Stanford guard Haley Jones went sixth to Atlanta. Indiana's Grace Berger was drafted seventh by the Fever. She was the first Hoosiers player selected in the first round in school history.

Seattle took Tennessee's Jordan Horston ninth. Dallas chose Maryland's Abby Meyers with the 11th pick. Meyers started her career at Princeton before finishing with the Terrapins.

Minnesota closed out the first round taking French center Maïa Hirsch.

TIP-INS:

LSU guard Alexis Morris, who helped the Tigers win a national championship eight days ago, was taken 22nd by the Connecticut Sun. Her LSU teammate LaDazhia Williams was drafted six picks earlier by Indiana. ... USC grad students Kadi Sissoko and Okako Adika were taken 29th and 30th by Phoenix and New York, respectively. It's the first time since 2012 the school had two players chosen in the draft. ... Illinois State graduate guard Paige Robinson was the first player drafted from the school when she was selected 31st by Dallas.

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

Money, power, sex: Attorney says slain kids' mom used all 3

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — A mother accused in the triple murder of her two youngest children as well as her new husband's previous wife was willing to "remove any obstacle in her way to get what she wants," a prosecutor told jurors Monday morning.

"The defendant used money, power and sex to get what she wanted," Fremont County Prosecutor Lindsey Blake said. "It didn't matter what it was."

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

Both defendants have pleaded not guilty, but are being tried separately. Chad Daybell's trial is still months away. Vallow Daybell faces up to life in prison if convicted.

The children were missing for months before their remains were found buried in Chad Daybell's eastern Idaho yard, Blake told jurors.

"Charred remains, that's what was left of Tylee," the prosecutor said, showing jurors a photo of human remains partially uncovered in a patch of dirt. "You will hear it explained as a mass of bone and tissue. That's what was left of this beautiful young woman."

Tylee's DNA was later found on a pickaxe and shovel in a shed on the property, she said.

JJ's body was wrapped in trash bags and duct tape, Blake said — the tape binding his arms in front of him and wrapping around his head.

The kids and Chad Daybell's previous wife Tammy Daybell were all killed because they stood in the way of the couple's relationship, Blake said.

"Remember, the defendant will remove any obstacle in her way to get what she wants, and she wanted Chad Daybell," Blake said.

Defense attorney Jim Archibald presented jurors with a far different picture, describing Vallow Daybell as a "kind and loving mother to her children" who happened to have a particular interest in religion and Biblical prophecies involving the end of the world.

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"Some people care less about Biblical prophecies, some people care a lot about it," Archibald said. "Thankfully in this country, we get to worship as we choose."

Vallow Daybell is presumed innocent, Archibald reminded jurors, and said the criminal charges themselves — which accuse Vallow Daybell of either directing, encouraging, assisting or participating in the murders — show that prosecutors don't really know what happened in the case.

"Did she kill, or did she assist, or did she encourage, or did she direct? They aren't sure," Archibald said.

Archibald also said Vallow Daybell's religious beliefs only began to change after she met Chad Daybell, a religious author whose fictional books focused on the apocalypse and were loosely based on the beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

But Blake said those beliefs veered toward the extreme, with the couple saying people were "dark" or "light," telling friends and acquaintances that "dark" people had been taken over by evil spirits. They eventually began teaching friends that once those evil spirits were strong enough, the person became a "zombie," and the only way to free that person's soul was by killing them.

Friends of Vallow Daybell will testify that she said the children and Tammy Daybell were "dark" before their deaths, Blake said. At least one friend told police that Vallow Daybell called both children "zombies" before they disappeared, according to police records.

"The common theme was the body has to be destroyed," Blake said. "The defendant and Chad used their self-proclaimed religious teachings to justify their actions to others — their actions from affair to murder."

JJ Vallow's grandmother, Kay Woodcock, was the first witness to take the stand after opening arguments. She cried after Madison County prosecutor Rob Wood showed her a photo of JJ.

Woodcock said Vallow Daybell was once a "doting mother," but her opinion of the defendant changed after Charles Vallow filed for divorce in early 2019. After Charles Vallow died, once-regular phone calls and visits with JJ dropped off, she said.

She only had contact with JJ three times after his father died, Woodcock said, in short FaceTime video calls. The last call happened the month before JJ was last seen alive, she said. It only was about 35 seconds long.

"He just said, 'Hi Mama, hi Papa,'" Woodcock said, referring to JJ's nicknames for his grandparents. "Gotta go, Mama. Gotta go, Papa. Bye!"

Woodcock eventually contacted authorities and asked them to do a welfare check on JJ, prompting Rexburg Police to open a missing persons case in November 2019. During that period, police say the couple lied about the children's whereabouts.

Prosecutors say the couple planned to use life insurance money from Tammy Daybell's death, and that Vallow Daybell kept collecting and spending the children's social security and survivor benefits after they died. Tylee's father died after he and Vallow Daybell divorced years earlier. JJ's father Charles Vallow — who Vallow Daybell was married to when she met Chad Daybell — was fatally shot by Vallow Daybell's brother, Alex Cox.

Vallow Daybell is charged in Arizona in connection with Charles Vallow's death, but yet to enter a plea. Cox, who told police the shooting was in self-defense, died a few months after the shooting and was never charged.

The couple married two weeks after Chad Daybell's previous wife died unexpectedly. An autopsy showed that Tammy Daybell was killed by asphyxiation, Blake said.

The couple had eliminated "any and every obstacle that was in their way of getting exactly what they wanted," she said.

It may not have been the first attempt on Tammy Daybell's life: Ten days earlier, she had called police to report that a masked man approached her in her driveway and shot at her a couple of times before running away.

Later that night, someone overheard a phone call between Vallow Daybell, who was angry, and another person, Blake said.

"She made statements along the line of, 'he can't do anything right,'" the prosecutor told jurors.

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Another witness testified that he was also the target of a shooting in October 2019. Brandon Boudreaux was formerly married to Vallow Daybell's niece, Melani Pawlowski.

Pawlowski looked up to Vallow Daybell, Boudreaux said, and the women began attending religious meetings together. Pawlowski grew increasingly religious, he said, fixated on the idea that the world was about to end.

The two divorced in 2019. Boudreaux said he was driving to his new rental home when someone parked in a Jeep Wrangler near his driveway shot at him, the bullet shattering his car window. Boudreaux said he recognized the Jeep as one that had belonged to Tylee.

Vallow Daybell has not been charged with the shooting attempt against Boudreaux, but prosecutor Rachel Smith said the shootings were all part of the same plan to "cause the death of multiple people in her world."

Biden ends COVID national emergency after Congress acts

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. national emergency to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic ended Monday as President Joe Biden signed a bipartisan congressional resolution to bring it to a close after three years — weeks before it was set to expire alongside a separate public health emergency.

The national emergency allowed the government to take sweeping steps to respond to the virus and support the country's economic, health and welfare systems. Some of the emergency measures have already been successfully wound-down, while others are still being phased out. The public health emergency — it underpins tough immigration restrictions at the U.S.-Mexico border — is set to expire on May 11.

The White House issued a one-line statement Monday saying Biden had signed the measure behind closed doors, after having publicly opposed the resolution though not to the point of issuing a veto. More than 197 Democrats in the House voted against it when the GOP-controlled chamber passed it in February. Last month, as the measure passed the Senate by a 68-23 vote, Biden let lawmakers know he would sign it.

The administration said once it became clear that Congress was moving to speed up the end of the national emergency it worked to expedite agency preparations for a return to normal procedures. Among the changes: The Department of Housing and Urban Development's COVID-19 mortgage forbearance program is set to end at the end of May, and the Department of Veterans Affairs is now returning to a requirement for in-home visits to determine eligibility for caregiver assistance.

Legislators last year did extend for another two years telehealth flexibilities that were introduced as COVID-19 hit, leading health care systems around the country to regularly deliver care by smartphone or computer.

More than 1.13 million people in the U.S. have died from COVID-19 over the last three years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, including 1,773 people in the week ending April 5.

Then-President Donald Trump's Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar first declared a public health emergency on Jan. 31, 2020, and Trump declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency that March. The emergencies have been repeatedly extended by Biden since he took office in January 2021, and he broadened the use of emergency powers after entering the White House.

Some US states stock abortion medications after court ruling

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A growing number of states led by Democratic governors are stockpiling doses of drugs used in medication abortions, amid fears that a court ruling could restrict access to the most commonly used method of abortion in the U.S.

Massachusetts has purchased enough doses of the drug mifepristone — one of two drugs used in combination to end pregnancies — to last for more than a year, Democratic Gov. Maura Healey said Monday. California has secured an emergency stockpile of up to 2 million pills of misoprostol, the other drug used in abortion medication, Gov. Newsom, also a Democrat, announced.

And in Washington state, Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee announced last week that the state purchased

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30,000 doses of the generic version of mifepristone — which he said is enough to last the state's residents three years. The shipment arrived in late March.

"Abortion is still legal and accessible here in California and we won't stand by as fundamental freedoms are stripped away," Newsom said Friday.

The actions come as U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump appointee in Amarillo, Texas, overruled decades of scientific approval Friday and put on hold federal approval of mifepristone.

The judge stayed his ruling for a week so federal authorities could file a challenge.

The Biden administration slammed the ruling and on Monday appealed the decision, saying it would thwart the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's scientific judgment and "severely harm women, particularly those for whom mifepristone is a medical or practical necessity."

Adding to the confusion was a second opinion also released on Friday by District Judge Thomas O. Rice, an Obama appointee, directing U.S. authorities not to make any changes that would restrict access to the drug in at least 17 states where Democrats sued in an effort to protect availability.

Healey said the Kacsmaryk ruling threatens access to the medication even in states supportive of abortion rights like Massachusetts.

"It harms patients, undermines medical expertise, and takes away freedom. It's an attempt to punish, to shame, to marginalize women. It's unnecessary," Healey said, surrounded by fellow Democratic lawmakers including U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren on the steps of the Massachusetts Statehouse.

"It is terrible. It is terrible," she added.

Newsom said the ruling by Kacsmaryk "ignores facts, science, and the law," and puts the health of millions of women and girls at risk.

Inslee said it's important for states to take steps to ensure access to the drug.

"After we announced our actions last week to protect access to mifepristone, it's heartening to see other states doing the same," Inslee wrote on Twitter on Monday. "To be clear: no matter the outcome of the TX case, WA's laws ensure we will be able to sell and distribute this medication."

The 15,000 doses in Massachusetts were purchased by the University of Massachusetts-Amherst at Healey's request.

Massachusetts health care providers have also agreed to buy additional quantities of mifepristone, according to Healey, who said the administration is dedicating \$1 million to help providers contracted with the Department of Public Health to pay for the doses.

While there are no plans yet in Connecticut to stockpile mifepristone, Attorney General William Tong said Monday that he has been contacting major pharmacy chains to remind them the drug is legal and they should not be influenced by pressure from GOP attorneys general in other states.

"(I'm) obviously deeply disappointed that my colleagues have taken that action," he said. "We're pushing back on that. We're in communication with all the big pharmacy chains, advising them of their rights and obligations here in Connecticut."

Also on Friday, Healey signed an executive order expanding a 2022 law meant to build a legal firewall around abortion services — protecting health care providers, patients and pharmacists from out-of-state investigations into medication abortions. The law was signed after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*.

Black lawmaker who was expelled reinstated to Tennessee seat

By JONATHAN MATTISE, TRAVIS LOLLER and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — One of the two Black Democrats who were expelled last week from the GOP-led Tennessee House was reinstated Monday after Nashville's governing council voted to send him straight back to the Legislature.

The unanimous vote by the Nashville Metropolitan Council took only a few minutes to restore Rep. Justin Jones to office just four days after Republicans stripped him of his seat.

Moments later, Jones marched to the Capitol several blocks away. He took the oath of office on the steps

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and entered the building while supporters sang "This Little Light of Mine."

A loud round of applause erupted as Jones walked into the chamber with Democratic Rep. Gloria Johnson, who was also targeted for expulsion, but spared by one vote.

"To the people of Tennessee, I stand with you," Jones said in his first statement on the House floor. "We will continue to be your voice here. And no expulsion, no attempt to silence us will stop us, but it will only galvanize and strengthen our movement. And we will continue to show up in the people's house.

"Power to the people," he shouted, to cheers. Republican House Speaker Cameron Sexton told Jones' supporters in the galleries to "please refrain from disrupting the proceedings."

Republicans banished Jones and fellow lawmaker Justin Pearson over their role in a gun-control protest on the House floor in the aftermath of a deadly school shooting.

Pearson could be reappointed Wednesday at a meeting of the Shelby County Commission.

The expulsions on Thursday made Tennessee a new front in the battle for the future of American democracy and propelled the ousted lawmakers into the national spotlight. In the span of a few days, the two had raised thousands of campaign dollars and the Tennessee Democratic Party had received a new jolt of support from across the U.S.

Jones' appointment is an interim basis. Special elections for the seats will take place in the coming months. Jones and Pearson have said they plan to run in the special election.

At the end of Monday's evening session, Jones stood on the House floor and asked Sexton if he would be reappointed to legislative committees after being stripped of assignments last week. Jones also asked to receive full access to legislative buildings, which includes the the parking garage, and health care benefits. While Sexton referred some of the questions to human resources, the Republican leader said that traditionally in the past that appointed lawmakers do not receive committee assignments.

Pearson, meanwhile, told reporters Monday that "the lessons that we've gotten here is that people power works."

"It is because thousands — millions — of people have decided that they will march, they will lift up their voices and elevate them to end gun violence to protect our communities and ensure that the voice of the people that we care to represent us are heard in the state Capitol and all across this country," Pearson said.

As Jones was restored to his position, Nashville scored a win in court over a different move targeting the city by state-level Republican officials. A three-judge panel temporarily blocked implementation of a new law that would cut Nashville's metro council in half, from 40 to 20 members.

Before the special session of Nashville's governing council was to begin Monday, a couple of hundred people gathered in front of the Nashville courthouse, and more were pouring in. Some held signs reading, "No Justin, No Peace." Inside the courthouse, a line of people waited outside the council chambers for the doors to open.

Rosalyn Daniel arrived early and waited in line to get a seat in the council chambers. She said she is not in Jones' district but is a Nashville resident and concerned citizen.

"I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, during the Civil Rights Movement, so I understand why this is so important," she said.

House Majority Leader William Lamberth and Republican Caucus Chairman Jeremy Faison said they will welcome back the expelled lawmakers if they are reinstated.

"Tennessee's constitution provides a pathway back for expulsion," they said in a statement. "Should any expelled member be reappointed, we will welcome them. Like everyone else, they are expected to follow the rules of the House as well as state law."

Jones and Pearson quickly drew prominent supporters. President Joe Biden spoke with them, and Vice President Kamala Harris visited them in Nashville. The expelled lawmakers have filled out their legal teams. Eric Holder, who served as attorney general under former President Barack Obama, now represents Jones.

"The world is watching Tennessee," attorneys for Jones and Pearson wrote to Sexton in a letter Monday. "Any partisan retributive action, such as the discriminatory treatment of elected officials, or threats or actions to withhold funding for government programs, would constitute further unconstitutional action

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that would require redress.”

Johnson, the third Democrat targeted for expulsion, also attracted national attention.

Political tensions rose when the three joined with hundreds of demonstrators who packed the Capitol last month to call for passage of gun-control measures.

As protesters filled galleries, the lawmakers approached the front of the House chamber with a bullhorn and participated in a chant. The scene unfolded days after the shooting at the Covenant School, a private Christian school where six people were killed, including three children.

Johnson, a white lawmaker from Knoxville, was spared expulsion by a single vote. Republican lawmakers justified splitting their votes by saying Johnson had less of a role in the protest — she didn’t speak into the megaphone, for example.

Johnson also suggested race was likely a factor in why Jones and Pearson were ousted but not her. She told reporters it “might have to do with the color of our skin.”

GOP leaders have said the expulsions — a mechanism used only a handful times since the Civil War — had nothing to do with race and instead were necessary to avoid setting a precedent that lawmakers’ disruptions of House proceedings through protest would be tolerated.

Expulsion has generally been reserved as a punishment for lawmakers accused of serious misconduct, not used as a weapon against political opponents.

Leaked US intel: Russia operatives claimed new ties with UAE

By NOMAAN MERCHANT, ELLEN KNICKMEYER AND JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. spies caught Russian intelligence officers boasting that they had convinced the oil-rich United Arab Emirates “to work together against US and UK intelligence agencies,” according to a purported American document posted online as part of a major U.S. intelligence breach.

U.S. officials declined to comment on the document, which bore known top-secret markings and was viewed by The Associated Press. The Emirati government on Monday dismissed any accusation that the UAE had deepened ties with Russian intelligence as “categorically false.”

But the U.S. has had growing concerns that the UAE was allowing Russia and Russians to thwart sanctions imposed over the invasion of Ukraine.

The document viewed by the AP includes an item citing research from March 9 with the title: “Russia/UAE: Intelligence Relationship Deepening.” U.S. officials declined to confirm the document’s authenticity, which the AP could not independently do. However, it resembled other documents released as part of the recent leak.

The Justice Department has opened an investigation into the possible release of Pentagon documents that were posted on several social media sites. They appear to detail U.S. and NATO aid to Ukraine and U.S. intelligence assessments regarding U.S. allies that could strain ties with those nations.

Some of the documents may have been altered or used as part of a misinformation campaign, U.S. officials said. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby on Monday urged caution, “since we know at least in some cases that information was doctored.”

Referring to the main successor agency of the Soviet-era KGB, the document seen by the AP says: “In mid-January, FSB officials claimed UAE security service officials and Russia had agreed to work together against US and UK Intelligence agencies, according to newly acquired signals intelligence.” Signals intelligence refers to intercepted communications, whether telephone calls or electronic messages.

“The UAE probably views engagement with Russian intelligence as an opportunity to strengthen growing ties between Abu Dhabi and Moscow and diversify intelligence partnerships amid concerns of US disengagement from the region,” the assessment concluded, referring to the UAE capital.

It’s not clear if there was any such agreement as described in the UAE-Russia document, or whether the alleged FSB claims were intentionally or unintentionally misleading.

But American officials are speaking out increasingly about a surge in dealings between the UAE and Russia.

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A U.S. Treasury official, Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Rosenberg, in March singled out the UAE as a "country of focus." She said businesses there were helping Russia evade international sanctions to obtain more than \$5 million in U.S. semiconductors and other export-controlled parts, including components with battlefield uses.

U.S. intelligence officials in recent years have pointed to possible links between the UAE and the Wagner Group, a Russian paramilitary group closely associated with the Kremlin and active in Ukraine and several African countries. In 2020, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency assessed "that the United Arab Emirates may provide some financing for the group's operations."

Andreas Krieg, an associate professor at King's College in London, on Monday called the UAE "the most important strategic partner for Russia in both the Middle East and Africa." The head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergey Naryshkin, held extensive meetings with UAE leaders in Dubai in 2020.

Russia and the UAE share similar outlooks in some key conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, and the influx of Russians into the UAE since Russia launched its war in Ukraine also has strengthened ties between the two, said Kristian Ulrichsen, a Middle East expert at Rice University's Baker Institute. But the reference to teaming up against U.S. and British intelligence agencies is surprising, said Ulrichsen.

Russian intelligence officials "probably have an interest in describing something in those terms," he said. "If that was the way the UAE was describing it, I'd certainly take it ... quite differently."

A U.S. official separately has told the AP that the United States also was worried about Russian money coming into Dubai's red-hot real estate market.

And in October, federal prosecutors in New York announced charges against two Dubai-based Russian men and others accused of stealing military technology from U.S. companies, smuggling millions of barrels of oil and laundering tens of millions of dollars for the oligarchs surrounding Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Prosecutors in that case quoted one of the Dubai-based Russians as assuring his partners "there were no worries" about using a UAE financial institution for the transactions. "This is the (worst) bank in the Emirates," he was quoted as saying, using an expletive. "They pay to everything."

In a statement Monday to the AP about the apparent intelligence document, the United Arab Emirates said UAE officials had not seen the document and claims regarding the FSB were "categorically false."

"We refute any allegation regarding an agreement to deepen cooperation between the UAE and other countries' security services against another country," the statement said. "The UAE has deep and distinguished relations with all countries, reflecting its principles of openness, partnership, building bridges, and working to serve the common interests of countries and peoples to achieve international peace and security."

The leak of the purported document comes as Emirati officials have recalibrated their foreign policy in the Middle East after a series of attacks attributed to Iran. Attacks claimed by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels hit Abu Dhabi in 2022, killing three people and leading locally stationed American forces to respond with Patriot missile fire.

In the time since, and as Emiratis perceived America's presence waning in the region after its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, the UAE reached a détente with Iran. That's even as the United States maintains multiple military bases and stations thousands of troops and weaponry in the region, including at Abu Dhabi's Al Dhafra Air Base. Dubai's Jebel Ali Port remains the busiest U.S. Navy port of call outside of the continental U.S.

The UAE also remains one of the few places still running daily, direct flights to Moscow after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. That has seen money, megayachts and Russian citizens come into the UAE, an autocratic federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula. However, it hasn't been a full embrace.

Relations between the U.S. and the UAE have seesawed over the past decade, as Abu Dhabi ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan cemented his power. Under the Trump administration, the UAE diplomatically recognized Israel.

In the deal's wake, the UAE sought but has yet to receive advanced American F-35 fighter jets under President Joe Biden. Meanwhile, the Emirates has criticized Israel over the escalating violence between Israel's hard-right government under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Palestinians.

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Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. AP Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee contributed to this report.

Al Jaffee, longtime Mad magazine cartoonist, dead at 102

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Al Jaffee, Mad magazine's award-winning cartoonist and ageless wise guy who delighted millions of kids with the sneaky fun of the Fold-In and the snark of "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions," has died. He was 102.

Jaffee died Monday in Manhattan from multiple organ failure, according to his granddaughter, Fani Thomson. He had retired at the age of 99.

Mad magazine, with its wry, sometimes pointed send-ups of politics and culture, was essential reading for teens and preteens during the baby-boom era and inspiration for countless future comedians. Few of the magazine's self-billed "Usual Gang of Idiots" contributed as much — and as dependably — as the impish, bearded cartoonist. For decades, virtually every issue featured new material by Jaffee. His collected "Fold-Ins," taking on everyone in his unmistakably broad visual style from the Beatles to TMZ, was enough for a four-volume box set published in 2011.

Readers savored his Fold-Ins like dessert, turning to them on the inside back cover after looking through such other favorites as Antonio Prohías' "Spy vs. Spy" and Dave Berg's "The Lighter Side." The premise, originally a spoof of the old Sports Illustrated and Playboy magazine foldouts, was that you started with a full-page drawing and question on top, folded two designated points toward the middle and produced a new and surprising image, along with the answer.

The Fold-In was supposed to be a onetime gag, tried out in 1964 when Jaffee satirized the biggest celebrity news of the time: Elizabeth Taylor dumping her husband, Eddie Fisher, in favor of "Cleopatra" co-star Richard Burton. Jaffee first showed Taylor and Burton arm in arm on one side of the picture, and on the opposite side a young, handsome man being held back by a policeman.

Fold the picture in and Taylor and the young man are kissing.

The idea was so popular that Mad editor Al Feldstein wanted a follow-up. Jaffee devised a picture of 1964 GOP presidential contenders Nelson Rockefeller and Barry Goldwater that, when collapsed, became an image of Richard Nixon.

"That one really set the tone for what the cleverness of the Fold-Ins has to be," Jaffee told the Boston Phoenix in 2010. "It couldn't just be bringing someone from the left to kiss someone on the right."

Jaffee was also known for "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions," which delivered exactly what the title promised. A comic from 1980 showed a man on a fishing boat with a noticeably bent reel. "Are you going to reel in the fish?" his wife asks. "No," he says, "I'm going to jump into the water and marry the gorgeous thing."

Jaffee didn't just satirize the culture; he helped change it. His parodies of advertisements included such future real-life products as automatic redialing for a telephone, a computer spell checker and graffiti-proof surfaces. He also anticipated peelable stamps, multiblade razors and self-extinguishing cigarettes.

Jaffee's admirers ranged from Charles M. Schulz of "Peanuts" fame and "Far Side" creator Gary Larson to Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, who marked Jaffee's 85th birthday by featuring a Fold-In cake on "The Colbert Report." When Stewart and "The Daily Show" writers put together the best-selling "America (The Book)," they asked Jaffee to contribute a Fold-In.

"When I was done, I called up the producer who'd contacted me, and I said, 'I've finished the Fold-In, where shall I send it?' And he said — and this was a great compliment — 'Oh, please Mr. Jaffee, could you deliver it in person? The whole crew wants to meet you,'" he told The Boston Phoenix.

Jaffee received numerous awards, and in 2013 was inducted into the Will Eisner Hall of Fame, the ceremony taking place at San Diego Comic-Con International. In 2010, he contributed illustrations to Mary-Lou Weisman's "Al Jaffee's Mad Life: A Biography." The following year, Chronicle Books published "The MAD

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Fold-In Collection: 1964-2010.”

Art was the saving presence of his childhood, which left him with permanent distrust of adults and authority. He was born in Savannah, Georgia, but for years was torn between the U.S., where his father (a department store manager) preferred to live, and Lithuania, where his mother (a religious Jew) longed to return. In Lithuania, Jaffee endured poverty and bullying, but also developed his craft. With paper scarce and no school to attend, he learned to read and write through the comic strips mailed by his father.

By his teens, he was settled in New York City and so obviously gifted that he was accepted into the High School of Music & Art. His schoolmates included Will Elder, a future Mad illustrator, and Harvey Kurtzmann, a future Mad editor. (His mother, meanwhile, remained in Lithuania and was apparently killed during the war).

He had a long career before Mad. He drew for Timely Comics, which became Marvel Comics; and for several years sketched the “Tall Tales” panel for the New York Herald Tribune. Jaffee first contributed to Mad in the mid-1950s. He left when Kurtzmann quit the magazine, but came back in 1964.

Mad lost much of its readership and edge after the 1970s, and Jaffee outlived virtually all of the magazine’s stars. But he rarely lacked for ideas even as his method, drawing by hand, remained mostly unchanged in the digital era.

“I’m so used to being involved in drawing and knowing so many people that do it, that I don’t see the magic of it,” Jaffee told the publication Graphic NYC in 2009. “If you reflect and think about it, I’m sitting down and suddenly there’s a whole big illustration of people that appears. I’m astounded when I see magicians work; even though I know they’re all tricks. You can imagine what someone thinks when they see someone drawing freehand and it’s not a trick. It’s very impressive.”

This story has been corrected to show that Antonio Prohías was the creator of the “Spy vs. Spy” comic strip.

AP sources: EPA car rule to push huge increase in EV sales

By TOM KRISHER and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration will propose strict new automobile pollution limits this week that would require at least 54% of new vehicles sold in the U.S. to be electric by 2030 and as many as two of every three by 2032, according to industry and environmental officials briefed on the plan.

The proposed regulation, to be released Wednesday by the Environmental Protection Agency, would set greenhouse gas emissions limits for the 2027 through 2032 model years for passenger vehicles that would be even stricter than goals the auto industry agreed to in 2021.

The EPA will offer a range of options that the agency can select after a public comment period, the officials said. They asked not to be identified because the proposal hasn’t been made public. The proposed regulation isn’t expected to become final until next year.

Environmental groups are applauding the ambitious numbers, which were first reported over the weekend by The New York Times. But the plan is likely to get strong pushback from the auto industry, which pledged in August 2021 to make EVs half of U.S. new car sales by 2030 as it moves toward a history-making transition away from internal combustion engines.

Even the low end of the EPA’s 2030 range is 4 percentage points higher than the 2021 goal, which came after strong pressure from President Joe Biden. An executive order signed by Biden set a target for half of all new vehicles sold in 2030 to be zero-emissions vehicles, including battery electric, plug-in hybrid electric or fuel cell electric vehicles.

Biden also wants automakers to raise gas mileage and cut tailpipe pollution between now and model year 2026. That would mark a significant step toward meeting his pledge to cut America’s planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030 as he pushes a once-almost-unthinkable shift from gasoline-powered engines to battery-powered vehicles.

With electric vehicles accounting for just 7.2% of U.S. vehicle sales in the first quarter of this year, the

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industry has a long way to go to even approach the administration's targets. However, the percentage of EV sales is growing. Last year it was 5.8% of new vehicles sales.

The EPA declined to offer details ahead of Wednesday's announcement, but said in a statement that as directed by Biden's order, it is "developing new standards that will ... accelerate the transition to a zero-emissions transportation future, protecting people and the planet."

The EPA tailpipe pollution limits don't actually require a specific number of electric vehicles to be sold every year, but instead mandate limits on greenhouse gas emissions. That amounts to roughly the same thing, according to agency calculations of the number of EVs that likely would be needed to comply with the stricter pollution limits.

The auto industry likely will need to sell a lot more EVs to meet the requirements. It's already pushed up the mileage of gasoline vehicles with more efficient engines and transmissions, reducing weight and other measures. Many in the industry say they'd rather spend investment dollars developing new EVs that are likely to dominate the industry in coming years.

Suggesting a brake on the optimistic idea of vast emission improvements simply through rule making, however, the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, a trade association that includes Ford, General Motors and other automakers, said, "Regulatory mandates alone will not address the conditions that will determine the ultimate success of the EV transition."

The EPA proposal "requires a massive, 100-year change to the U.S. industrial base and the way Americans drive," the group said.

Supportive policies such as tax credits for EV purchases and funding of a nationwide network of charging stations are needed, the alliance said in a statement before the EPA rule was announced. EVs have to become more affordable, parts and domestic critical mineral supply chains have to be set up and utility generating capacity must be addressed, the statement said.

Transportation is the single largest source of carbon emissions in the U.S., but it is followed closely by electricity generation.

Environmental groups say stricter tailpipe pollution standards are needed, and provisions of the sweeping Inflation Reduction Act passed last year will help reach the tougher requirements. "Tailpipe emissions pollute the air we breathe and worsen severe weather," Fred Krupp, president of the Environmental Defense Fund, said in a statement.

The Inflation Reduction Act, a climate and health care law passed with only Democratic votes, has tax credits for electric vehicle manufacturing and for purchases of new and used EVs.

At present, many new EVs manufactured in North America are eligible for a \$7,500 tax credit, while used EVs can get up to \$4,000.

However, there are price and purchaser income limits that make some vehicles ineligible. And starting April 18, new requirements by the Treasury Department will result in fewer new electric vehicles qualifying for a full \$7,500 federal tax credit.

The rules require that certain percentages of battery parts and minerals come from North America or countries with which the U.S. has free trade agreements. Industry analysts say the requirements, announced March 31, could cut the \$7,500 credit in half on many vehicles. A smaller credit may not be enough to attract new buyers for EVs that now cost an average of \$58,600 according to Kelley Blue Book.

The price is down from \$63,500 a year ago as more lower-priced EV models hit the market. Still, EVs are more expensive than the average vehicle sold in the U.S., which costs just under \$46,000.

Krisher reported from Detroit.

Mother of 6-year-old who shot teacher indicted by grand jury

By BEN FINLEY and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (AP) — A grand jury in Virginia has indicted the mother of a 6-year-old boy who shot his teacher on charges of child neglect and failing to secure her handgun in the family's home, a prosecutor said Monday.

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A grand jury sitting in Newport News charged the boy's 25-year-old mother with felony child neglect and a misdemeanor charge of endangering a child by reckless storage of a firearm, Commonwealth's Attorney Howard Gwynn said in a news release.

The Associated Press isn't naming the mother to shield the identity of her son.

The boy shot first-grade teacher Abby Zwerner on Jan. 6 inside her classroom at Richneck Elementary School. Police said the boy's mother legally purchased the gun. Her attorney, James Ellenson, has said the gun was secured on a top shelf in her closet and had a trigger lock.

Ellenson said Monday that his client plans to turn herself in later this week. He did not comment on the indictments, which were first reported by the Daily Press.

The decision to charge the boy's mother is the latest development to cascade from the shooting in this shipbuilding city of about 185,000 people near the Chesapeake Bay.

"Every criminal case is unique in its facts, and these facts support these charges, but our investigation into the shooting continues," Gwynn said.

Gwynn said his office has petitioned the court to empanel a special grand jury to continue an investigation into any security issues that may have contributed to the shooting.

"The safety and security of Newport News students is of utmost importance. The Special Grand Jury will investigate to determine whether additional charges against additional persons are justified by the facts and the law," Gwynn said.

Diane Toscano, an attorney for Zwerner, said there were "failures in accountability at multiple levels" that led to the shooting.

"Today's announcement addresses but one of those failures," Toscano said in a statement, referring to the indictments against the boy's mother.

Days after the shooting, school officials revealed that administrators at Richneck Elementary had suspected the child may have had a weapon before the shooting occurred. But they didn't find it despite searching his backpack.

At a subsequent school board meeting, parents and teachers lambasted administrators for what they called a misguided emphasis on attendance over the safety of children and staff. They said students who assaulted classmates and staff often faced few consequences, while Zwerner's shooting could have been prevented if not for a toxic environment in which teachers' concerns were ignored.

In a lawsuit filed last week seeking \$40 million in damages, Zwerner's attorneys accused school officials of gross negligence and of ignoring multiple warnings from teachers and other school employees the day of the shooting that the boy was armed and in a "violent mood."

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

"Our lawsuit makes clear that we believe the school division violated state law, and we are pursuing this in civil court," Toscano said Monday.

Virginia's law on felony child neglect says any parent, guardian or other person responsible for the care of a child "whose willful act or omission in the care of such child was so gross, wanton, and culpable as to show a reckless disregard for human life" is guilty of a Class 6 felony. The charge is punishable by up to five years in prison.

The misdemeanor charge says it's against Virginia law to "recklessly leave a loaded, unsecured firearm in such a manner as to endanger the life or limb of any child under the age of fourteen." That charge is punishable by up to one year in jail.

Police Chief Steve Drew has repeatedly characterized the shooting as "intentional." He said there was no warning and no struggle before the child pointed the gun at Zwerner and fired one round, striking her in the hand and chest.

Zwerner, 25, hustled her students out of the classroom before being rushed to the hospital, where she stayed for nearly two weeks.

Ellenson told The Associated Press in January that he understood the gun was in the mother's closet on

a shelf well over 6 feet (1.8 meters) high and had a trigger lock that required a key.

The family has said the boy has an "acute disability" and was under a care plan "that included his mother or father attending school with him and accompanying him to class every day." The week of the shooting was the first when a parent was not in class with him, the family said.

The family said in the days after the shooting that the child was placed under hospital care and receiving "the treatment he needs."

The school board in Newport News fired the district's superintendent, while Richneck's assistant principal resigned from the school division. The elementary school's principal is still employed by the district but no longer holds that position.

Richneck also installed metal detectors before it reopened on Jan. 30, three weeks after the shooting.

For more coverage of the shooting: <https://apnews.com/hub/newport-news>

Will Trump attend his rape trial? Judge wants to know

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge wants to know if ex-President Donald Trump plans to attend a New York trial this month resulting from a columnist's claims that he raped her in a department store dressing room in the 1990s.

Judge Lewis A. Kaplan issued an order Monday directing parties in the case to notify him by April 20 whether they will be present throughout the trial, scheduled to start April 25 in Manhattan federal court. And later in the day, he rejected a request that names of anonymous jurors be released to lawyers, saying Trump's latest public statements about a criminal case against him in state court show jurors might be harassed if their identities got out.

A writer, E. Jean Carroll, sued Trump in November, saying he raped her in early 1996 after a chance meeting at the Bergdorf Goodman department store. He has repeatedly and emphatically denied it in language sure to be highlighted for a jury that will decide whether the rape occurred and if Trump defamed Carroll with his comments.

The rape claims were made immediately after a temporary state law took effect allowing adult rape victims to sue their abusers, even if attacks happened decades ago.

Trump's lawyers did not respond Monday to requests for comment on Kaplan's order.

Attorney Roberta Kaplan, no relation to the judge, said Carroll "intends to be present for the entire trial."

In his order, the judge asked "each party" to notify him in writing whether he or she intends to attend the entire trial. If not, he asked to be told what dates and times each individual will be absent.

The judge said the order was not to be construed to suggest whether either side is obliged to be present throughout the trial or what legal consequences could result from a decision not to be present the entire time.

The judge was likely interested in learning exactly when Trump might be in court because of the special security arrangements that would be required for a Secret Service-protected former president who is campaigning for a second term in office.

Last week, Trump arrived in a motorcade for a New York state court arraignment where he pleaded not guilty to a 34-count felony indictment charging him with breaking the law in a quest to silence women who claimed extramarital affairs with him years before his successful campaign for the presidency on the Republican ticket in 2016.

Judge Kaplan cited public comments Trump made after the appearance, as he rejected a request by lawyers on both sides in the rape case to be told the names of anonymous jurors. Recently, he ruled that the jury will be anonymous, citing in part the "strong likelihood" that there could be "harassment or worse" of jurors by Trump supporters.

"The likelihood of such difficulties since the Court made those findings only has increased. That is so in view of Mr. Trump's public statements," he said, citing media reports characterizing Trump's statements

as attacks against the presiding judge over his criminal case.

The judge also cited "the threats reportedly then made, presumably by Mr. Trump's supporters, against that judge and members of his family." In a footnote, the judge cited media reports including a story that said the judge in the criminal case got death threats after Trump's arrest.

In October, Trump underwent a videotaped deposition in which he was questioned about Carroll's claims, which were first made publicly in a 2019 memoir by the former longtime Elle magazine columnist.

In the deposition, Trump was dismissive of Carroll's claims, saying: "Physically she's not my type."

Even if Trump decides not to attend the trial, it is likely that significant portions of his deposition will be watched by the jury.

In recent weeks, the judge has denied requests by Trump's lawyers to exclude testimony from two women who made sexual abuse claims against Trump in circumstances similar to those alleged by Carroll and from two individuals who worked at the department store at the time the rape allegedly occurred.

He also has ruled that jurors can hear misogynistic remarks Trump made about women in 2005 on an "Access Hollywood" tape.

The Associated Press generally does not identify people who allege they have been sexually assaulted, unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

Abbott's fast-track to pardon in protest killing 'unusual'

By PAUL J. WEBER and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is moving fast to pardon a U.S. Army sergeant convicted in the 2020 killing of an armed protester. So fast, the judge hasn't even handed down a sentence.

Sgt. Daniel Perry faces up to life in prison after being convicted of murder last week in the fatal shooting of 28-year-old Garrett Foster, who had been legally carrying an AK-47 during a protest through Austin's downtown while marching with demonstrators over police accountability and racial injustice. The case will next go to sentencing.

But over the weekend, Abbott made clear he believes Perry shouldn't be punished. The three-term Republican governor, who hasn't ruled out a 2024 presidential run, tweeted that he has already asked Texas' parole board to expedite a review of Perry's conviction and will "look forward" to signing a pardon.

The rush to act in the case of an off-duty soldier shooting a protester came amid immediate outrage among conservatives over Friday's verdict, including by Fox News host Tucker Carlson.

Abbott presented the dangled pardon as a defense of Texan's right to defend themselves. Legal experts, however, said that looks like a pretense.

"It's pretty unusual for a governor to step in and preempt a jury verdict," said Mark Osler, a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. "The politics are right there at the surface."

THE SHOOTING

Perry was working for a ride-sharing company in July 2020 when he turned onto a street and into one of the demonstrations that swept the country after Minneapolis police killed George Floyd.

In video that was streamed live on Facebook, a car can be heard honking amid the crowd in downtown Austin. Then, several shots ring out, and protesters begin screaming and scattering.

Perry drove off, later calling police to report the shooting, and officers arrived to find Foster shot.

What led up to the gunfire was a core question in the trial that resulted in Perry's conviction.

Witnesses testified that Foster never raised his rifle at Perry, and prosecutors said the sergeant could have driven off rather than opening fire with a handgun. Perry didn't testify. But his defense attorneys have said Foster pointed his gun at the driver and that the shooting was self-defense.

Perry was stationed at Texas' Fort Hood at the time of the shooting and most recently assigned to Fort Wainwright in Alaska. Defense lawyer Clint Broden said the conviction will end Perry's Army service.

Broden told The Associated Press in a text message on Monday that his team has "not been in touch with the Governor nor his staff regarding a pardon."

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THE REACTION

In the hours after the conviction, however, prominent conservatives did pressure Abbott to intervene. Matt Rinaldi, chairman of the Texas Republican Party, said the case never should have been prosecuted, tagging Abbott's account in a tweet calling for a pardon.

In primetime on Fox News, Carlson called Perry's conviction a "legal atrocity" and said Abbott had declined to discuss a potential pardon. "So that is Greg Abbott's position," Carlson said. "There is no right of self-defense in Texas."

Less than 24 hours after the verdict, Abbott tweeted that he had directed the state parole board to investigate the case and said he looked forward to signing a pardon "as soon as it hits my desk." He suggested the jury "nullified" Texas' so-called "Stand Your Ground" law, which, like similar laws in other states, removes the duty to retreat before using deadly force in the face of danger.

Travis County District Attorney José Garza, whose office prosecuted the case, called Abbott's intervention "deeply troubling." He said the jurors deliberated for more than 15 hours to find Perry "guilty of murder beyond a reasonable doubt," and the case can be reviewed through the normal appeals process.

On Monday, the Democrat has sent a fundraising email off Abbott's actions, telling supporters the Republican is "threatening to take over our criminal justice system."

ABBOTT AND PARDONS

A former Texas judge and attorney general, Abbott has not publicly explained on how he reached his conclusion about Perry's case, and his office Monday referred questions to his statement on Twitter.

But publicly calling for a pardon is a clear departure for Abbott, who in more than eight years as governor typically only issues a handful of year around Christmas. Most are given to Texans who were convicted of relatively minor offenses committed decades earlier.

"It is something we usually see many years after conviction," said Sandra Guerra Thompson, professor at the University of Houston Law Center. She said a governor intervening before sentencing is a "dramatic departure" from the normal process.

In 2021, Abbott faced an unusually high-profile pardon decision surrounding George Floyd, who was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer and whose death was at the center of the protest in Austin. At the time, the Texas Board of Pardon and Paroles had unanimously supported a posthumous pardon for Floyd over a 2004 drug arrest.

Floyd was arrested by a Houston officer who was later accused of falsifying evidence for years and eventually charged with murder. But two days before Christmas, Abbott's office announced the board had unusually backpedaled on its decision after finding unspecified "procedural errors" with Floyd's case.

Floyd's case was sent back to the board for reconsideration. Nine months later, the board denied issuing a pardon.

Bleiberg reported from Dallas. Associated Press reporter Acacia Coronado contributed to this report.

Justice Department appeals Texas abortion pill order

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Justice Department on Monday appealed a Texas court ruling that would halt approval of a drug used in the most common method of abortion in the U.S., calling the decision "extraordinary and unprecedented."

If allowed to stand, the order issued last week by U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk could restrict access to the abortion medication mifepristone as early as Friday, unsettling abortion providers less than a year after the reversal of Roe v. Wade already dramatically curtailed abortion access.

The Food and Drug Administration in 2000 granted approval to mifepristone, one of two drugs used for medication abortion in the United States. There is essentially no precedent for a lone judge overruling the FDA's medical decisions, and pharmaceutical executives signed a letter Monday warning that the ruling could endanger other medications.

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In appealing to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the Biden administration said Kacsmark's "extraordinary and unprecedented order" should remain on hold while it challenges the decision.

"If allowed to take effect, the court's order would thwart FDA's scientific judgment and severely harm women, particularly those for whom mifepristone is a medical or practical necessity," the Justice Department wrote.

Kacsmark, an appointee of Donald Trump, issued his decision Friday but ruled it would not take effect for seven days — meaning the end of this week barring another court stepping in.

Adding to the uncertainty was unresolved confusion Monday over a conflicting order by a different federal judge in the state of Washington, who within 20 minutes of Kacsmark's decision issued a separate ruling that directed U.S. authorities not to make any changes that would restrict access to the drug in at least 17 states where Democrats had sued.

Underlining that confusion, the Justice Department on Monday separately asked the federal court in Washington state for clarity, given the competing orders.

The abortion drug has been widely used in the U.S. since securing FDA approval. The other drug used for abortion medication in the United States is misoprostol, which is also used to treat other medical conditions and was not part of Kacsmark's decision.

Many providers must wait and see what happens in the courts between now and Friday before deciding what to do next, Jennifer Dalven, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Reproductive Freedom Project, told reporters.

If the Texas court's ruling takes effect, some providers are prepared to pivot to a misoprostol-only regimen while others may transition to only surgical abortions.

"We don't know exactly what will happen," Dalven said. "What we do know is that there will be significant confusion and chaos as providers try to provide the best care they possibly can for their patients."

The lawsuit in Texas was filed by the Alliance Defending Freedom, which was also involved in the Mississippi case that led to Roe v. Wade being overturned. At the lawsuit's core is the allegation that the FDA's initial approval of mifepristone was flawed because it did not adequately review its safety risks.

Courts have long deferred to the FDA on issues of drug safety and effectiveness. But the agency's authority faces challenges in a post-Roe legal environment in which abortions are banned or unavailable in 14 states, while 16 states have laws specifically targeting abortion medications.

Among the pharmaceutical executives who signed the petition criticizing Kacsmark's ruling was Albert Bourla, CEO of the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, which has produced the biggest-selling COVID-19 vaccine and treatment in the U.S.

The document warns that the decision diminishes the FDA's authority over drug approvals. A Pfizer spokeswoman verified for The Associated Press that Bourla signed the letter.

"If courts can overturn drug approvals without regard for science or evidence, or for the complexity required to fully vet the safety and efficacy of new drugs, any medicine is at risk for the same outcome as mifepristone," the letter states.

Associated Press reporter Amanda Seitz in Washington and Tom Murphy in Indianapolis contributed to this report.

Leaked documents a 'very serious' risk to security: Pentagon

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The online leaks of scores of highly classified documents about the Ukraine war present a "very serious" risk to national security, and senior leaders are quickly taking steps to mitigate the damage, a top Pentagon spokesman said Monday. And as the public airing of the data sends shockwaves across the U.S. government, the White House said there are concerns there could be additional leaks.

Chris Meagher, assistant to the secretary of defense for public affairs, told reporters that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin first became aware on Thursday that a number of classified briefing slides detailing

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the U.S. military efforts in the Ukraine war and intelligence involving other nations were leaked.

In the days since, Austin has reached out to allies, held daily meetings to assess the damage and set up a group not only to assess the scope of the information lost but review who has access to those briefings. The department is looking closely at "how this type of information is distributed and to whom," Meagher said.

A defense official who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters said the Pentagon has now taken steps to reduce the number of people who have access to those briefings. The official said the Pentagon regularly reviews access lists to weigh who has a need to know and have access to classified material.

At the White House, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby was asked if the U.S. was bracing for more online releases.

"The truth and the honest answer to your question is: We don't know," he said. "And is that a matter of concern to us? You're darn right it is."

Kirby said at this point, "we don't know who's behind this, we don't know what the motive is."

And he said as U.S. authorities go through the documents that were posted online, they are still trying to determine their validity, but have found that at least some of the papers "have been doctored."

He and others would not go into detail, but at least one of the documents shows estimates of Russian troops deaths in the Ukraine war that are significantly lower than numbers publicly stated by U.S. officials. Under a section titled "Total Assessed Losses," one document lists 16,000-17,500 Russian casualties and up to 71,000 Ukrainian casualties. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said publicly last November that Russia has lost "well over" 100,000 soldiers, and Ukraine had lost about that many also. And those estimates have continued to climb in recent months, although officials have stopped providing more exact numbers.

At the State Department, spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters Monday that U.S. officials "are engaging with allies and partners at high levels over this, including to reassure them of our commitment to safeguarding intelligence and the fidelity of securing our partnerships."

The U.S. officials declined to provide any specifics, including about the expanse of the release, how it happened and to which country leaders the U.S. has spoken. Patel added that there is "no question" the documents' release present a risk to national security.

Investigators who specialize in tracking social media, including at the journalism organization Bellingcat, say the documents may have been circulating for months in private internet chats on the Discord discussion platform. Asked if the Pentagon has contacted Discord, Meagher referred questions to the Justice Department, which has opened a criminal investigation into the leaks.

The slides, which eventually were distributed on more mainstream sites such as Twitter, detail U.S. training and equipment schedules to support Ukraine, assessments of losses, what the U.S. is monitoring on key allies and strategic partners, and what moves Russia may be taking to undermine those relationships.

While the Pentagon has been careful not to authenticate the information contained in any specific document, overall "they present a very serious risk to national security and have the potential to spread disinformation," said Meagher. "We're being very careful and watching where this is being posted and amplified."

The documents are labeled secret and top secret and in some cases resemble routine updates that the U.S. military's Joint Staff would produce daily but not distribute publicly.

_____ Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant, Matthew Lee and Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

US finds WSJ reporter in Russia is wrongfully detained

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration formally determined Monday that a Wall Street Journal reporter arrested in Russia on espionage charges has been "wrongfully detained."

The designation elevates the case of Evan Gershkovich in the U.S. government hierarchy and means that a dedicated State Department office will take the lead on securing his release.

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the determination on Monday, saying he condemned the arrest and Russia's repression of independent media.

"Today, Secretary Blinken made a determination that Evan Gershkovich is wrongfully detained by Russia," the department said in a statement. "Journalism is not a crime. We condemn the Kremlin's continued repression of independent voices in Russia, and its ongoing war against the truth."

Russian authorities arrested Gershkovich, 31, in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, on March 29. He is the first U.S. correspondent since the Cold War to be detained for alleged spying.

The Federal Security Service specifically accused Gershkovich of trying to obtain classified information about a Russian arms factory. The Wall Street Journal has denied the accusations.

The State Department said the U.S. government will provide all appropriate support to Gershkovich and his family and again called for Russia to release him as well as another detained American citizen, Paul Whelan.

Monday's statement from Blinken was the first public comment on the case since Russian news agencies reported on Friday that Gershkovich had been charged with espionage and had entered a formal denial.

The state news agency Tass and the Interfax news agency said a law enforcement source informed them that the Federal Security Service, known as the FSB, had officially charged the American journalist.

The news outlets didn't say in what form Gershkovich was formally charged or when it happened, but generally suspects are presented a paper outlining the accusations.

In the Russian legal system, the filing of charges and a response from the accused represent the formal start of a criminal probe, initiating what could be a long and secretive Russian judicial process.

Tass quoted its source as saying: "The FSB investigation charged Gershkovich with espionage in the interests of his country. He categorically denied all accusations and stated that he was engaged in journalistic activities in Russia."

The source declined further comment because the case is considered secret.

The case has caused an international uproar and last Thursday, the U.S. ambassador to Russia and a top Russian diplomat met to discuss the case.

In the meeting with U.S. Ambassador Lynne T. Tracy, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stressed "the serious nature of the charges" against Gershkovich, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

The statement repeated earlier Russian claims that the reporter "was caught red-handed while trying to obtain secret information, using his journalistic status as a cover for illegal actions."

Gershkovich has been ordered held behind bars for two months in Russia pending an investigation. A Moscow court said it had received a defense appeal of his arrest; the appeal is scheduled to be heard on April 18, according to Russian news agencies.

Ryan Reynolds, Rob McElhenney move closer to Wrexham dream

WREXHAM, Wales (AP) — Ryan Reynolds punched the air before turning to embrace Rob McElhenney as the Hollywood stars moved a big step closer to their dream of leading Welsh soccer team Wrexham to promotion.

The pair celebrated at the end of a game that had all the thrills of a big screen blockbuster and the ultimate twist as former Manchester United goalkeeper Ben Foster pulled off a penalty save in the seventh minute of stoppage time to secure a 3-2 win against closest rival Notts County on Monday.

"I don't think I have a heart anymore," Reynolds said afterward. "I think I used all the beats I had left during that match. That was unlike anything I've ever seen before."

Wrexham, which has been given A-list sparkle after being bought by the two actors, moved three points clear at the top of the fifth-tier National League with a game in hand.

Elliot Lee's 78th-minute strike was the decisive goal after both teams had led during the match. But it was Foster's save to deny Cedwyn Scott that secured victory and put the fourth tier of English soccer within sight.

"When I get my hands on Ben Foster he's going to be on the injured reserve list because I'm going to

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break ribs," Reynolds said. "I'm going to hug him so hard."

It had been billed as possibly the biggest game in the history of soccer at this level — and it didn't disappoint.

Wrexham has gained global recognition since being taken over by Reynolds and McElhenney and featuring in a television series that streams worldwide. Both teams went into the match on 100 points each, with County topping the table on goal difference. Only one team is automatically promoted and Wrexham now leads the way after this crucial win. Wrexham has four games left to play in the season.

John Bostock fired County ahead in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time with a free kick.

Paul Mullin evened the score in the 50th and Jacob Mendy put Wrexham ahead in the 69th as Reynolds and McElhenney watched on at the Racecourse Ground.

Celebrations from the home fans were cut short, however, when Kyle Cameron equalized for the visitors in the 75th.

Lee struck three minutes later to put Wrexham on course for victory.

That was before Eoghan O'Connell was adjudged to handle in the box and County had the chance to level the score once again from the penalty spot.

But Foster, who only stepped out of retirement last month to join Wrexham on a short-term deal, proved the hero with his last-gasp save.

"I'm used to working under extreme pressure I think, but usually I have some kind of say in it," Reynolds said. "I have control over it. I have nothing here. All I can do is watch and hope like everybody else."

Earlier in the day, Reynolds and McElhenney were awarded the Freedom of Wrexham at a civic ceremony.

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

New this week: Jeremy Renner, Metallica and 'Cocaine Bear'

By The Associated Press undefined

Here's a collection curated by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists of what's arriving on TV, streaming services and music and video game platforms this week.

MOVIES

— "Cocaine Bear" was technically inspired by a true story — a 1985 plane crash that scattered some \$2 million worth of cocaine across Georgia hillsides and resulted in the death of a 175-pound black bear, who overdosed. The film, however, is pure fantasy about what might have happened if the bear went on a coke rampage instead of dying. After its wild trailer went viral, the R-rated pic directed by Elizabeth Banks and starring Keri Russell and O'Shea Jackson Jr. left audiences somewhat divided. Some thought it a B-movie delight, others were left cold by the excess. And starting on Friday, via Peacock, you can access it at home to decide for yourself.

— Katie Holmes directs and stars in "Rare Objects," an adaptation of a novel by Kathleen Tessaro about a woman with a traumatic past trying to rebuild her life starting with a new job at a New York antique shop. Holmes has been working on making this film since 2016, and her adaptation moves the story from its Depression-era Boston origins to contemporary New York. In an interview with Variety, Holmes said she was drawn "to the female friendship and this metaphor of 'you are more beautiful for having been broken.'" The film opens in theaters and on demand on Friday.

— Also on demand, on Tuesday, is "Linoleum," a science fiction drama starring Jim Gaffigan as a children's television host who dreams of being an astronaut. The film, which premiered to favorable reviews at South by Southwest last year, turns into fantasy when a satellite lands in his backyard and he starts to try to build it into a rocket of his own. Rhea Seehorn co-stars.

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

MUSIC

— Let's just call this Metallica's week. On Thursday, the hard rockers have a listening party in movie theaters worldwide for their upcoming 12th studio album, "72 Seasons." The one-night event will feature

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the new music in surround sound with music videos and exclusive commentary from the band. The next day the album comes out on vinyl, CD and digital, their first collection of new material since 2016's "Hard-wired... To Self-Destruct." Early singles include "Screaming Suicide" and "Lux Æterna," with James Hetfield singing "Full speed or nothing."

— Natalie Merchant returns with lush, gorgeous new horn-heavy music on the album "Keep Your Courage," her first collection of all-new material in almost 10 years. The album was produced by the former singer of 10,000 Maniacs and features contributions from Celtic folk group Lúnasa, Syrian clarinet player Kinan Azmeh, jazz trombonist Steve Davis and singer Abena Koomson-Davis, who adds joy and warmth to "Come On, Aphrodite." "For the most part, this is an album about the human heart. I think the pandemic was a great period of solitude and longing," Merchant says. "I craved and savored human connection; it was the only thing that really mattered."

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

TELEVISION

— The half-hour critically praised comedy "Single Drunk Female" returns for its second season on Freeform. Executive produced in part by Jenni Konner ("Girls"), it stars Sofia Black-D'Elia as a 20-something magazine writer named Samantha who at the beginning of season one, is sent to rehab after (repeatedly) getting drunk on the job and ultimately assaulting her boss as he's attempting to fire her. Samantha moves back home to build both a community and new life for herself, even if it's a life she never pictured. In season two, Samantha is confident and ready to expand her horizons with independence, like finding her own place, and romance. Season two of "Single Drunk Female" debuts Wednesday and the entire season will hit Hulu on Thursday.

— Four months after surviving a serious snowplow accident in Nevada, Jeremy Renner's four-part series "Rennervations" debuts on Disney+ on Wednesday. The two-time Oscar nominee, who plays Hawkeye in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, will repurpose, and refurbish vehicles, to assist local communities. Examples include making a water treatment facility out of a delivery truck and transforming a tour bus into a mobile music studio. He's assisted by celebrity friends including fellow Marvel star Anthony Mackie and Vanessa Hudgens. Renner is so passionate about "Rennervations" that he plans to attend a red carpet on Tuesday in Los Angeles for the show's premiere.

— It's never too early to teach children about protecting the planet and a new educational series coming to Apple TV+ called "Jane" aims to do just that. "Jane" aims to introduce kids to the ideals and work of primatologist and conservationist, Dr. Jane Goodall. The series is a combo of live action and CGI and stars Ava Louise Murchison as 9-year-old Jane Garcia, who is passionate about protecting the environment and saving endangered animals. Using her creativity and imagination, Jane takes her best friends David and a chimpanzee named Greybeard on adventures around the globe to help rescue wild animals. "Jane" premieres globally on Friday on the streaming service.

— Alicia Rancilio

VIDEO GAMES

— The 1982 movie "Tron" wasn't a huge success, but it seems like everyone who did see it became a computer game designer. One such acolyte is Mike Bithell, creator of the award-winning indie games Thomas Was Alone and Subsurface Circular. His Bithell Games studio is behind Tron: Identity, a new cyberpunk adventure from Disney. In an abandoned sector of the Grid that's evolved in weird ways, your character is a "detective program" named Query assigned to investigate a break-in and robbery. It's a dialog-driven mystery broken up by defragging puzzles, and its neon-infused look is bound to appeal to anyone who grew up on PC games of the 1980s and '90s. Plug in Tuesday on Nintendo Switch and PC.

— Lou Kesten

Catch up on AP's entertainment coverage here: <https://apnews.com/apf-entertainment>.

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Trump's response to criminal charges revives election lies

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Legally, the most important words former President Donald Trump said after he was charged with 34 felonies by the Manhattan District Attorney last week were “not guilty.” But, politically, the most significant may be “election interference.”

Trump's repetition of those words, which have been taken up by other top Republicans, show how he is trying to turn his historic position as the first former president charged with crimes to his advantage. It's another example of what's been a consistent refrain throughout his political career — claiming without evidence that an election is being rigged against him.

After his initial court appearance in the New York case, the first of several in which he is in legal jeopardy, Trump ticked through the varied investigations he was facing and branded them as “massive” attempts to interfere with the 2024 election.

“Our justice system has become lawless,” Trump said as he appeared before supporters at his Florida home, Mar-a-Lago. “They're using it now, in addition to everything else, to win elections.”

Trump has made some version of those claims in at least 20 social media posts since March 3, the bulk of which occurred in the last two weeks, accelerating when a Manhattan grand jury appeared to be wrapping up its work and preparing to indict the former president. Trump declared his latest bid for the White House shortly after the November midterms, in what some in his orbit saw as an effort to head off the various probes swirling around him.

Alleging an election is being stolen from him is a routine Trump tactic, despite no evidence to back up his assertions. When competing for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016, Trump claimed his loss in the Iowa caucuses was due to fraud. When he won the White House that November but lost the popular vote, Trump claimed the only reason for falling short in the latter category was because undocumented immigrants voted. A task force he formed to find voter fraud disbanded without finding any evidence to back up his claim.

In 2020, Trump began arguing the election would be fraudulent months before voting started. He attacked efforts to loosen restrictions on mail voting during the coronavirus pandemic, and expanded those allegations after losing the election to claim he'd actually won it. Those lies led to the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the 2020 election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed.

Trump is behaving like a politician in the legal crosshairs, said Steven Levitsky, a Harvard political scientist. “He's certainly not the first politician to be prosecuted — sometimes fairly, sometimes not — to play the political victim card,” Levitsky said.

Levitsky, who cowrote the book “How Democracies Die,” said that several former presidents of other countries, when prosecuted, have claimed it was a plot to foil their future elections. Most recently, that was the complaint of Brazil's former president Luis Inácio Lula Da Silva after he was jailed before the 2018 election. Silva was freed by his country's supreme court and won back the presidency in October.

What's notable in Trump's case, however, is that his own party is echoing the stolen election claims ahead of the next campaign. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last month said he was directing his party's committee chairs to “investigate if federal funds are being used to subvert our democracy by interfering in elections with politically motivated prosecutions.”

“That a whole party is carrying this line is somewhat unusual,” Levitsky said.

Last week's charges in New York court stemmed from Trump's reimbursements to his lawyer at the time, Michael Cohen, of hush money paid in the waning days of the 2016 presidential election to porn actress Stormy Daniels, who alleged they had an affair. Even some critics of Trump have seen the charges as a stretch of New York laws.

The heart of the Manhattan case is prosecutors' claim that Trump falsified business records at his com-

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pany to make the payoff in order to keep a potentially damaging story quiet while he was campaigning — an illegal attempt by Trump, they argued, to try to influence the election.

The former president also faces legal jeopardy from other investigations, two of which are related to his attempts to try to interfere with the 2020 election.

Prosecutors in Fulton County, Georgia, are probing Trump's January 2021 call to the state's top elections officer asking him to "find" enough votes to declare Trump the winner there, as well as other efforts by the former president and his allies to overturn his narrow election loss in the state.

The U.S. Justice Department also has launched a federal special counsel probe into Trump's attempts to try to overturn his loss in the 2020 presidential election. Trump is also enmeshed in a federal special counsel investigation of his handling of classified documents found at his Florida estate.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, when asked at a news conference on Tuesday whether the timing of the case was political, responded by saying, "I bring cases when they're ready."

Bragg's office declined to comment on Trump's statements about "election interference," as did the Department of Justice.

Critics warn that Trump is, once again, sowing suspicions of fraud that could damage democracy. "We've seen this film before," Joanna Lydgate, chief executive officer of States United Action, which tracks politicians who embrace Trump's election lies, said in a statement. "We know this is dangerous because we all saw what happened on January 6th."

Trump has routinely waved off such warnings, and has seamlessly integrated his current legal jeopardy into the false allegations he's made for three years about Democratic Party wrongdoing leading to his ouster.

In his first campaign rally, in Waco, Texas, days before the Manhattan indictment, Trump railed against all the investigations and said that his opponents were using the probes "because it's harder for them to stuff the ballot boxes, of which they stuffed plenty."

"The new weapon being used by out-of-control unhinged Democrats to cheat on election is criminally investigating a candidate," he said.

Trump and other Republicans have sometimes contradicted themselves, decrying the investigations as an attempt to tarnish Trump while also predicting they'll aid his bid for the White House.

"I think you'll see his poll numbers go up," Rep. Elise Stefanik, R-N.Y., one of the president's most vocal backers in the House, predicated at a GOP conference last month. "He's never been in a stronger position." She condemned the charges last week as "unprecedented election interference."

Aaron Scherb, senior director of legislative affairs for Common Cause, which has long been critical of Trump's allegations of election rigging, noted that all the investigations of the former president began well before he started running for president again.

"Nobody is above the law, including former presidents, and running for president cannot and must not serve as a shield for wrongful conduct," Scherb said.

___ Riccardi reported from Denver. Associated Press writer Farnoush Amiri in Washington contributed to this report.

Illustrated Anne Frank book removed by Florida school

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A high school along Florida's Atlantic Coast has removed a graphic novel based on the diary of Anne Frank after a leader of a conservative advocacy group challenged it, claiming it minimized the Holocaust.

"Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation" was removed from a library at Vero Beach High School after a leader of Moms for Liberty in Indian River County raised an objection. The school's principal agreed with the objection, and the book was removed last month.

The book at one point shows the protagonist walking in a park, enchanted by female nude statues, and later proposing to a friend that they show each other their breasts.

Under the school district's policy, the principal makes the decision on a challenged book. If someone

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disagrees with a decision to keep the disputed book on the shelves, it can be appealed to a districtwide committee. The Anne Frank graphic novel had been checked out twice before it was removed, Cristen Maddux, a spokeswoman for the School District of Indian River County, said Monday.

Vero Beach is located 105 miles (169 kilometers) southeast of Orlando.

Other books about Anne Frank and copies of the published diary she wrote chronicling her time hiding from the Nazis with her family and other Jews in German-occupied Amsterdam remain in the school systems' libraries. The Jewish teenager's diary was published in 1947, several years after she died in a concentration camp, and it has become a classic read by tens of millions of people around the world.

By law, Florida schools are required to teach about the Holocaust, and nothing has changed in that respect, Maddux said.

"The feedback that the Holocaust is being removed from the curriculum and students aren't knowledgeable about what happened, that is not the case at all," Maddux said. "It's just a challenged book and the principal removed it."

Besides the Anne Frank graphic novel, Moms for Liberty in Indian River County objected to three books in the "Assassination Classroom" series, and they also were removed.

Moms for Liberty leader Jennifer Pippin said the Anne Frank graphic novel violated state standards to teach the Holocaust accurately.

"Even her version featured the editing out of the entries about sex," Pippin said, referring to the original diary. "Even the publisher of the book calls it a 'biography,' meaning, it writes its own interpretive spin. It's not the actual work. It quotes the work, but it's not the diary in full. It chooses to offer a different view on the subject."

Published in 2018, the graphic novel was adapted from Anne Frank's diary by Ari Folman, and David Polonsky provided the illustrations. Folman's parents are Holocaust survivors.

When contacted by email, the book's publisher, Pantheon Graphic Library, forwarded the inquiry to Yves Kugelmann, a board member of a foundation set up by Anne Frank's father, Otto, devoted to distributing Anne Frank's diary and other matters. Kugelmann didn't immediately respond to questions.

The American Library Association reported last month that there were more than 1,200 demands to censor library books last year in the U.S., the highest number since the association began tracking more than 20 years ago.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP

The anime hit 'Suzume' and Shinkai's cinema of cataclysm

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Makoto Shinkai was never the same filmmaker after the 2011 earthquake struck Japan. When the tsunami and quake ravaged the Tōhoku region of northern Japan and prompted a nuclear meltdown, Shinkai, a now 50-year-old director and animator of some of the most popular anime features in the world, could feel his sense of storytelling crumbling.

"The shock to me was that the daily life that we had become accustomed to in Japan can suddenly be severed without any warning whatsoever," says Shinkai. "I had this odd, foreboding feeling that that could happen again and again. I began to think about how I wanted to tell stories within this new reality."

The three blockbusters that have followed by Shinkai — "Your Name," "Weathering With You" and the new release "Suzume" — have each tethered hugely emotional tales to ecological disaster. In "Your Name," a meteor threatens to demolish a village, an event that dovetails with a body-switching romance. In "Weathering With You," a runaway teenage boy befriends a Tokyo girl who can control the weather, spawning fluctuations that mirror climate change.

"Suzume," which opens in U.S. theaters Friday, returns to the earthquake of 2011. Suzume, whose mother perished in the tsunami, years later meets a mysterious young man responsible for racing to close portals — literal doorways that appear around Japan — before they unleash a giant, earthquake-causing worm.

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"With these three films, I didn't set out to make a disaster movie. I wanted to tell a love story, a romance, a coming-of-age of an adolescent girl," Shinkai said on a recent trip to New York, speaking through an interpreter. "As I continued to make the plot, this idea of disaster kept creeping in. Suddenly, I felt surrounded in my daily life by disaster. It's like a door that keeps opening."

Shinkai has emerged as one of cinema's most imaginative filmmakers of contemporary cataclysm. His movies aren't just about surviving apocalypse, though, but living with its omnipresent threat. And it's made him one of the biggest box-office draws in movies.

After it was released in 2016, "Your Name" became the then-best-selling anime of all time, dethroning Hayao Miyazaki's beloved "Spirited Away" with nearly \$400 million in ticket sales. "Weathering With You" made nearly \$200 million. Before opening in North America, "Suzume" has already crossed \$200 million, including \$100 million in Japan and nearly that in China. It's easily the biggest international release of the year so far in China, more than doubling the sales of "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania."

Much of that success is owed to Shinkai's earnest grappling with today's ecological upheaval in sprawling epics that are filtered through everyday life. National trauma mixes with supernatural fantasy. While Japan has been home to many extreme geological events, it's a tension that most in the world can increasingly connect with.

"It can be anything: earthquakes, climate change, the pandemic. Russia and Ukraine, for an example," says Shinkai. "This idea that our daily life will continue to maintain the status quo should be set aside and challenged."

Shinkai, who writes and directs his films, has become convinced that young people shouldn't be pandered to with stories where the natural world is heroically returned to balance, calling such approaches "egotistic and irresponsible." Instead, his disasters take on metaphorical meaning for young protagonists who learn to persist, and find joy, in a world of perpetual danger, shadowed by loss.

His latest, which was the first anime in competition at the Berlin Film Festival in two decades, is a road movie where the 17-year-old Suzume (voiced by Nanoka Hara) travels from the the southwestern island of Kyushu with that mysterious young man, Souta (Hokuto Matsumura), who happens to get transformed into a three-legged chair while closing a portal.

As a wooden sidekick, Souta recalls a Miyazaki side character like the hopping scarecrow of "Howl's Moving Castle." But Shinkai, who's often been cited as among the heirs to Miyazaki, says his film is no homage. But he grants Miyazaki's influence is so pervasive in Japanese society that it seeps into everything. He imagines Suzume, herself, grew up on his films.

Shinkai liked the symbolism of a chair, something we use every day. His father made him one as a child. While promoting "Suzume," Shinkai has traveled with a chair just like the one in the movie, packing it in a suitcase, bringing it with him on stage and occasionally taking pictures of it at places like Times Square or the Museum of Natural History.

"I've picked very daily items — a door, a chair — that are perhaps relatable to a wide range of audiences," he says. "This symbolism of the door, I think people are able to translate to their own story. We start thinking about: How do we maintain our daily routine?"

Shinkai is known for photorealistic panoramas of glittering splendor. As much as doorways make up the iconography of "Suzume," the most indelible image is one he uses at the beginning and end of the film. Suzume rides her bike on a steep hill with a sparkling ocean set behind her. The waters below, which to her could signify the tsunami that left her an orphan, are at once gorgeous and perilous.

"In a weird way, I feel that with 'Your Name' and 'Weathering With You' and 'Suzume' that I'm creating this sort of folklore or mythology," Shinkai says. "In mythology or these ancient legends, what they're doing is taking real-life events and transforming it into a story that can related to others."

Whether Shinkai will continue on this quest in his next film he doesn't know. It's a blank slate, he says. But he doesn't close the door.

"As I continue to make more stories," he says, smiling, "that door might start creaking open again."

Michael Lerner, 'Barton Fink' Oscar nominee, dies at 81

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

Michael Lerner, the Brooklyn-born character actor who played a myriad of imposing figures in his 60 years in the business, including monologuing movie mogul Jack Lipnick in "Barton Fink," the crooked club owner Bugsy Calhoun in "Harlem Nights" and an angry publishing executive in "Elf" has died. He was 81.

His nephew, actor Sam Lerner, announced his death in an Instagram post Sunday. Sam Lerner wrote that his uncle died Saturday but did not provide further details. Neither his nor Michael Lerner's representatives immediately responded to requests for further comment.

"He was the coolest, most confident, talented guy," Sam Lerner wrote. "Everyone that knows him knows how insane he was — in the best way...we're all lucky we can continue to watch his work for the rest of time. RIP Michael, enjoy your unlimited Cuban cigars, comfy chairs, and endless movie marathon."

Born in 1941 to Romanian-Jewish parents and raised in Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood, Michael Lerner began acting locally as a teen and into his days at Brooklyn College, where he got the chance to play Willie Loman in "Death of a Salesman." His ambitions to pursue acting professionally crystalized when he received a Fulbright Scholarship and chose to study theater at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, where he lived in an apartment with Yoko Ono for a time, appearing in her short film "Smile." His brother, Ken Lerner, also became an actor.

Lerner moved to Los Angeles in 1969, at the urging of an agent who saw his work at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. He started getting cast in television shows, including "M(asterisk)A(asterisk)S(asterisk)H," "The Brady Bunch" and "The Rockford Files," making his film debut in Paul Mazursky's "Alex in Wonderland," alongside Charlotte Rampling. But he considered his first significant role to be in the television movie "Ruby and Oswald" (he played Jack Ruby) with Brian Dennehy.

In 1981, he was cast in Bob Rafelson's remake of "The Postman Always Rings Twice," alongside Jack Nicholson, who he called one of the most generous actors he'd ever worked with, and Jessica Lange. A longtime cigar aficionado, Lerner felt out of his depths when he was asked to smoke a cigarette in a scene with Nicholson in a jail. Lerner said he held the cigarette with both hands.

He felt more comfortable playing cigar-smoking journalist and politician Pierre Salinger in "Missiles of October," for which Jackie Kennedy once told him that he'd "out Pierre'd Pierre."

Lerner also loved working with John Sayles on "Eight Men Out," in which he played Arnold Rothstein, the crime boss who conspired to fix the 1919 World Series.

"Most of the time I don't rehearse, but I do a lot of preparation. Especially for a biographical character or one of the studio heads," he said in 2016. "I did a lot of research for Barton Fink and looked into Louis B. Mayer and all the moguls in Hollywood."

Joel and Ethan Coen's "Barton Fink," released in 1991, is the film Lerner is most remembered for.

"I had auditioned for Joel and Ethan before, for Miller's Crossing. So I walked into the room, as the character, and I don't say hello to anybody. And I sit down behind my desk and do this big speech: 'Bart! Bart! So great to see you,'" Lerner said in 2016. "I did the monologue the way I wanted to do it and I just walked out of the room and that was it. And Joel and Ethan were just sitting in a corner just laughing and laughing and that was it."

Lerner, who drew inspiration from Preston Sturges movies, said the Coens didn't give him much acting direction and "were a little nervous that I was talking so fast" but that they let him do what he wanted.

The role got him his first and only Oscar nomination, but in 1992, the Academy Award for supporting actor went to Jack Palance for "City Slickers."

The Coens called him years later to do a cameo in "A Serious Man."

Lerner also said he was frequently recognized for his turns in Eddie Murphy's "Harlem Nights" and "Elf," as Fulton Greenway. He also played Cher's father in the television spinoff of "Clueless."

In the late 90s, he was excited to get a chance to work with Woody Allen on the film "Celebrity," but it turned into a terrible experience, he said in a 2016 interview.

"He is a schmuck," Lerner said. "And the movie's a piece of s—."

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Lerner also appeared in several bigger blockbusters over the years, including "Godzilla" as Mayor Ebert, "X-Men: Days of Future Past," as Senator Brickman, and "Mirror Mirror" as Baron.

"Those are good parts but not great acting roles," Lerner said.

And he never felt cheated by being known as a "character actor" rather than a leading man. In 1999, in an interview with Cigar Aficionado, he said, simply, "Every role is a character role."

Biden kicks off Easter egg roll with talk of reelection bid

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Not even the annual White House Easter Egg Roll is safe from presidential politics. President Joe Biden, the host of Monday's festivities on the South Lawn, said he plans to participate in "at least three or four more Easter egg rolls, maybe five."

Biden was alluding to his expected reelection bid, but when pressed for news by Al Roker of NBC's "Today" show, he gave no ground. The president repeated what he's been saying for months.

"I'm planning on running, Al, but we're not prepared to announce it yet," Biden told Roker.

After making an early appearance on the lawn to speak with Roker after the gates opened at 7 a.m., Biden and first lady Jill Biden addressed the crowd from the White House balcony before joining the "egg-citement." Some 30,000 people, mostly children, were expected, in nine waves of participants, ending at 7 p.m.

"Anything's possible in America," Biden said in brief remarks welcoming guests to the South Lawn, "if we remember who we are and we do it together."

Biden and the first lady then went to the lawn, each one blowing a whistle to kick off egg-rolling competitions. Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband, Doug, applauded as another group of children coaxed dyed, hard-boiled eggs to the finish line in a separate area.

Jill Biden later visited the "reading nook," where she read "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" to the parents and children gathered there, including Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. The first lady's grandson Beau Biden held the book while she turned the pages.

Her final stop was the talent stage and a performance by the cast of the Broadway musical, "The Lion King." They performed "Circle of Life" and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight."

"The Lion King has amazed and enchanted kids and grown ups alike," she said to introduce the cast. "And now they're bringing their magic to the Easter Egg Roll."

She watched the performance off stage and shook hands with cast members and posed for a photo as they exited.

The first lady's theme is "EGGucation." Jill Biden is a teacher and she has incorporated numerous learning opportunities into the event. "Learning doesn't only happen in a classroom, there are so many fun opportunities to learn around us every day," she said in her remarks on the balcony, explaining that's why they turned the South Lawn into a "school community."

The White House Easter Egg Roll dates to 1878, when President Rutherford B. Hayes opened the White House lawn to children after they were kicked off the grounds of the U.S. Capitol.

Bodies of missing musician, son recovered from Arkansas lake

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (AP) — The bodies of a jam band musician and his adult son were recovered from an Arkansas lake more than three weeks after the two went missing during a kayaking trip, authorities said.

The Benton County Sheriff's Office said Sunday that the bodies were identified as those of Chuck Morris, 47, and his 20-year-old son, Charley Morris. Chuck Morris was a percussionist who for more than two decades had been a member of the instrumental jam band Lotus.

The father and son from Kansas City, Missouri, were last seen on March 16 while on a kayaking trip to Beaver Lake, The Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported. A search crew found their bodies over

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the weekend while searching the lake with an underwater drone, the sheriff's office said in a news release. Lotus posted a statement from the Morris family on its Facebook page saying relatives had spoken with Arkansas authorities and were told the men drowned.

A Facebook statement from the band said proceeds from upcoming concerts in Denver; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Port Chester, New York, will go to benefit the Morris family.

"Thank you all for the outpouring of support from around the world — we feel it and love you just as much," the band posted.

Ukraine, Russia send home around 200 troops in prisoner swap

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — More than 200 Russian and Ukrainian soldiers have returned home in a prisoner swap, the warring countries said Monday.

Russia's Defense Ministry said 106 Russian soldiers were released from Ukrainian custody as part of an agreement with Ukraine.

Andriy Yermak, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, said that Russia freed 100 Ukrainian prisoners.

Neither announcement mentioned whether any intermediaries were involved in the agreement.

Some of the Ukrainian soldiers have severe injuries and illnesses, Yermak said in a statement published on Telegram.

He added that the latest of the sporadic prisoner swaps in the war that started in February 2022 was "not an easy one." He did not elaborate.

Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War alleged that almost half of the 80 men and 20 women soldiers who returned home "have serious injuries, illnesses or have been tortured." It presented no evidence for its claims.

According to Ukrainian news reports, one of the women prisoners is Valeriia Karpilenko, a border guard who had helped defend Mariupol's Azovstal steel plant. Last May, she married a Ukrainian soldier in the steel plant's basement while Russian forces surrounded the complex. Her husband was killed three days later.

The freed Russians were being flown on military transport planes to Moscow for medical treatment and rehabilitation, the Defense Ministry said.

Such exchanges represent one of the few areas of cooperation between Ukraine and Russia. The two sides have returned hundreds of each other's soldiers, as well as the bodies of fallen troops, since the war began.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's presidential office said at least six civilians were wounded in the latest Russian shelling.

Separately, Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said Russian forces struck a power plant and residential buildings in the eastern province.

The Russians also shelled nine border villages in the provinces of Kharkiv, Sumy and Chernihiv.

Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said in televised remarks that the country has nearly seven million internally displaced people, including about one million children.

Most of them have abandoned their homes in the east and the south to move to safer locations in central and western Ukraine.

___ Associated Press Writer Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, contributed to this report. ___ Follow AP's coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine>

Hilary Swank gives birth to twins, shares 1st photo

By NARDOS HAILE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Hilary Swank has given birth to twins — a boy and a girl.

The 48-year-old "Million Dollar Baby" actor posted a photo of her and her twins looking at the sunset on Instagram Sunday evening with the caption: "It wasn't easy. But boy (and girl!) was it worth it."

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She added on Instagram that she's "posting from pure heaven." She and entrepreneur Philip Schneider have been married since 2018.

Over the course of her pregnancy, Swank had been filming her new ABC show "Alaska Daily." She shared in an interview in October that when her pants didn't fit during filming, she cut them open and put a jacket on to hide her bump.

"You don't tell for 12 weeks for a certain reason. But then, like, you're growing and you're using the bathroom a lot and you're eating a lot. I'm sure there's been conversations, and when I get back to the set, people will be like, 'Oh, it all makes sense now,' the two-time Oscar winner said.

At January's Golden Globes, Swank joked on the red carpet that she had "three months to go and I walked into a store the other day and this woman goes, 'Honey, you better start jumping up and down to get that baby out.' And this other woman like she's like, 'Oh, my God, three more months.'"

Ahead of the birth, She lightheartedly shared with her Instagram followers that she was contemplating putting Salt-N-Pepa's "Push It" on her delivery playlist.

California storms hit beekeepers, but honey outlook's sweet

By AMY TAXIN Associated Press

During California's prolonged, wet winter, beekeeper Gene Brandi said he had to spend twice as much money on a sugary syrup to feed his honeybees and keep them alive.

That's because the bees sent to pollinate blooming almond orchards took longer than usual to emerge from their hives due to chilly temperatures, wind and rain. Since the bees weren't out gathering nectar and pollen for nourishment, the 71-year-old beekeeper provided sustenance for them.

"We probably fed twice as much than we've fed in a normal year," said Brandi, of the Central Valley community of Los Banos. "It's expensive to feed, but it's more expensive if the hive dies."

The challenge is one of many faced by America's beekeepers following the unusually wet winter that ravaged California's farm country, which feeds much of the nation. Most commercial beekeepers send their bees to California early in the year to help pollinate its \$5 billion-a-year almond crop, then move them elsewhere to pollinate commodities ranging from avocados to cherries or to the Midwest to produce honey.

The state was battered this winter by at least a dozen atmospheric rivers — long plumes of moisture from the Pacific Ocean — as well as powerful storms fueled by arctic air that produced blizzard conditions in mountainous areas. The wintry weather flooded homes, triggered power outages and brought much-needed rain to drought-parched agriculture, though in some cases, more water than the crops could withstand.

It also took a toll on bees, who were slow to emerge from their hives during the cold front and weeks of showers.

Almond growers say it's too soon to know if the delay in the bees' emergence will hurt the state's nut crop, which accounts for about 80% of the world's almonds, according to the Almond Board of California. With a slight reduction in almond acreage following three years of drought and the intense winter, it's possible there will be fewer nuts this year than last, which was a boom year for the crop, said Rick Kushman, a spokesperson for the state Almond Board.

Almond trees depend on bees for cross-pollination, and bees in turn feed on almond pollen, which helps sustain the hives throughout the bloom. While many people keep bees as a hobby, commercial beekeepers may have hundreds of hives and relocate their bees to pollinate various crops in distinct seasons.

Bryan Ashurst, who sends his bees north from California's Imperial Valley to pollinate almond trees, said some hives were washed away by flooding. He said he sent six workers to try to feed his bees during the cold snap since they weren't out flying — something he hasn't done in at least two decades and that cost at least \$45,000.

"In bees, margins are thin, so we are putting out huge amounts of money," he said.

Dan Winter, president of the American Beekeeping Federation, trucked his bees from Florida in late January to pollinate California's almond orchards, which took longer than usual due to the weather. That delayed their return, so he said he now must hurry to get the hives ready to head to New York for apple

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tree pollination in less than a month.

"We've got to kick it in gear and work a little faster, a little harder," Winter said. "It just costs a little bit."

There may be a sweet spot for California beekeepers as the rain is expected to bring a burst of spring wildflowers, which could provide ample forage for bees and potentially translate into a good year for honey.

Brandi said he'll take his hives to coastal areas this spring so the bees can forage on a native plant to make sage honey, a premium product that he can only make every few years when there's ample rain.

"It is the finest honey we can make," he said, adding that the last sage honey he has in his shop dates to 2019.

After that, Brandi, who sells honey to Bay Area buyers and a Midwest honey packer who supplies Costco, said his bees will head onward to feed on other plants and make more honey yet.

"We've been praying for rain for the last three dry years, and we finally have it," he said. "It should be a wonderful spring once it warms up for the bees."

Biden and Irish poets: 'Hope and history,' a lifelong love

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When President Joe Biden visits Ireland this week, he will mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, confer with top officials on current issues and honor his Irish ancestors.

You can also count on Biden to quote an Irish poet or two, especially two late Nobel laureates — Seamus Heaney and William Butler Yeats.

"I think that's a safe guess to make," says former Biden speechwriter Dan Cluchey, who worked with the president from 2018-2022. "Yeats and Heaney encompass so much of the universal catalog of emotions poetry can express and they are the major wells he (Biden) goes to when he needs the perfect words to encapsulate a feeling."

Presidents have long made a point of citing a favorite writer, and for Biden that often has been Heaney, renowned for what Nobel judges in 1995 called "works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth." Besides his original poems, his noted works include a bestselling translation of the Old English epic "Beowulf" and his play "The Cure at Troy," a verse adaptation of Sophocles' "Philoctetes," with Heaney's inspirational alliteration about a time when "hope and history rhyme."

Biden's affinity for Heaney dates back at least to an earlier presidential run in 2008, when he lost the nomination to Barack Obama and eventually became his running mate. In a speech early in his own campaign, Biden observed that he liked to quote Irish poets because they are "the best poets." He listed Heaney as his preferred "contemporary" Irish bard, and referred to Heaney's words from "The Cure at Troy," saying he believed they were reflected in "the sentiments and hearts of the vast majority of the American people."

History says, don't hope On this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime The longed-for tidal wave Of justice can rise up, And hope and history rhyme.

"I believe with every fiber of my being," Biden concluded, "we have a chance to make hope and history rhyme."

Biden biographer Evan Osnos says that by 2008 he had already quoted "The Cure at Troy" so frequently his daughter Ashley would tease him. In his 2017 memoir "Promise Me, Dad," Biden remembered Ashley's response when Obama choose him as the vice presidential candidate: "Dad, this is hope and history." Biden answered with a joke: "Oh, great. He's hope. And I'm history."

Biden has since invoked "hope and history" while serving as vice president, in his acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination in August 2020, in a widely seen campaign video from 2020, when presenting a National Humanities Medal last fall to Elton John, and even in last month's reception marking the Persian new year.

At the end of the Obama administration, when the president awarded Biden a Medal of Freedom, Obama joked that he was going to quote Yeats — because "Seamus Heaney is taken."

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Biden, not surprisingly, quoted Heaney during his own remarks, but this time drew from the poem "From the Republic of Conscience" as he praised Obama for his humility.

You carried your own burden and very soon your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared.

Biden might have claimed Yeats as well. Osnos, whose biography "Joe Biden" came out in 2020, says that Biden began memorizing Yeats as a teenager working to overcome his stutter. He would stand in front of a mirror and speak lines from Yeats and Ralph Waldo Emerson, straining to avoid the contortion of his face muscles.

As vice president, Osnos says, Biden quoted Yeats' "Easter 1916" at least 20 times, especially the line, "The world has changed, changed utterly."

"He has quoted the line so many times that his aides can sense when he's about to do it, a bit like the birds who can sense when an earthquake is coming," Osnos told the AP in a recent email.

A previous Irish-American president, John F. Kennedy, had his own history of reciting verse. According to JFK biographer Fredrik Logevall, Kennedy was a lifelong poetry reader who memorized works ranging from poems by Robert Frost to the British writer Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses." In the summer of 1963, Kennedy became the first sitting president to visit Ireland and mentioned various Irish poets during his trip, which included an address to the country's parliament.

"There are those who regard this history of past strife and exile as better forgotten," Kennedy said. "But, to use the phrase of Yeats, let us not casually reduce 'that great past to a trouble of fools.' For we need not feel the bitterness of the past to discover its meaning for the present and the future. And it is the present and the future of Ireland that today holds so much promise to my nation as well as to yours, and, indeed, to all mankind."

Heaney's "The Cure at Troy" premiered in 1990 and politicians were soon quoting it. Mary Robinson, in her 1991 inaugural address as Ireland's president, hoped for an era in Europe "where old wounds can be healed, a time when, in the words of Seamus Heaney, 'hope and history rhyme.'"

In November 1995, weeks after Heaney won the Nobel, Bill Clinton became the first sitting president to visit Northern Ireland and later made a stop in Dublin, part of his years-long effort to forge what became the Good Friday Agreement among Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

"I could not say it better than your Nobel Prize winning poet, Seamus Heaney, has said: We are living in a moment when hope and history rhyme," Clinton said while in Dublin. "In Dublin, if there is peace in Northern Ireland, it is your victory, too."

Clinton's memories of the agreement have their own internal meter. Why did peace remain in Northern Ireland when treaties elsewhere so often fail, he asked in an essay published Sunday in The Washington Post? It was, he wrote, "a happy occasion of hope and history rhyming."

Taliban ban restaurant gardens for families, women in Herat

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban have banned families and women from restaurants with gardens or green spaces in Afghanistan's northwestern Herat province, an official said Monday. The moves followed complaints from religious scholars and members of the public about mixing of genders in such places, he said.

It was the latest in a slew of restrictions imposed by the Taliban since they took power in August 2021. They have shut girls out of classrooms beyond sixth grade and women from universities, most types of employment, including jobs at the United Nations. They are also banned from public spaces such as parks and gyms.

Authorities say the curbs are in place because of gender mixing or because women allegedly are not wearing the hijab, or Islamic headscarf, correctly.

The outdoor dining ban only applies to establishments in Herat, where such premises remain open to men. Baz Mohammad Nazir, a deputy official from the Ministry of Vice and Virtue's directorate in Herat, denied

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media reports that all restaurants were off limits to families and women, dismissing them as propaganda.

It applied only to restaurants with green areas, such as a park, where men and women could meet, he said. "After repeated complaints from scholars and ordinary people, we set limits and closed these restaurants."

Azizurrahman Al Muhajir, who is head of the Vice and Virtue directorate in Herat, said: "It was like a park but they named it a restaurant and men and women were together. Thank God it has been corrected now. Also, our auditors are observing all the parks where men and women go."

Nazir also denied reports that sales of DVDs of foreign films, TV shows and music are banned in the province, saying that business owners were advised against selling this material because it contradicted Islamic values.

Shopkeepers who did not follow through on the advice eventually saw their shops closed, Nazir added. He also denied local media reports that internet cafes have shut down in Herat, but said that gaming arcades were now off-limits to children because of unsuitable content. Some games insulted the Kaaba, the cube-shaped structure in the Great Mosque at Mecca toward which Muslims turn when praying, and other Islamic symbols.

"Internet cafes, where students learn and use for their studies, are necessary and we have allowed them," Nazir said.

Next abortion battles may be among states with clashing laws

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

Abortion is banned in Idaho at all stages of pregnancy, but the governor on Wednesday signed another law making it illegal to provide help within the state's boundaries to minors seeking an abortion without parental consent.

The new law is obviously aimed at abortions obtained in other states, but it's written to criminalize in-state behavior leading to the out-of-state procedure – a clear nod to the uncertainty surrounding efforts by lawmakers in at least half a dozen states to extend their influence outside their borders when it comes to abortion law.

At the same time, Democrat-controlled states are advancing and adopting laws and executive orders intended to shield their residents against civil lawsuits and criminal investigations related to providing abortions for women from states where there are bans.

But there is no legal precedent giving good guidance about whether states can influence their residents getting abortions outside their borders.

"If red states pass laws saying, 'We can go after people for X, Y and Z,' and blue states say, 'You can't,' we're in uncharted territory," said Mary Ziegler, a legal historian at the University of California, Davis School of Law.

Arguments about the laws could be rooted in key clauses of the U.S. Constitution that could contradict each other in this case. One clause requires states to respect the laws of other states while another recognizes the right to travel among states and a third restricts the ability of states to impair interstate commerce.

Legal experts say that no prior cases are exactly comparable, though state laws have conflicted in weighty ways in the past.

In the 1840s and 1850s, it was with questions over whether fugitive enslaved people in free states remained the property of slaveholders. In the 1857 Dred Scott decision, frequently cited as the worst ruling in U.S. history, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that they did.

More recently, before the nation's top court recognized a right to same-sex marriage in 2015, state marriage laws were a patchwork. Some states did not recognize marriages that were legal elsewhere, and all the protections that go with them, including hospital visitation rights and even the ability to divorce. The federal ruling largely resolved those legal conflicts.

The effort to restrict abortion in far-reaching ways is an outgrowth of last year's U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned Roe v. Wade and ended a nationwide right to abortion.

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Each state now makes its own rules. Abortion is banned in all stages of pregnancy in 13 states. Another five have similar bans on the books but are not being enforced under judge's orders as legal challenges to them are sorted out.

Texas took a step toward state-border restrictions even before Roe was overturned with a 2021 law that allows civil lawsuits against a person who "aids or abets the performance or inducement of abortion." It does not specify whether the aid would have to happen within Texas. Oklahoma has a similar law.

But using them to block out-of-state abortions has not been tried yet — or tested in court.

Other states are pursuing different approaches.

Idaho's measure bans transporting a minor for an abortion without parental consent — but bars only the part of the journey that takes place in Idaho.

Tennessee's GOP-dominated legislature last week approved a measure that would prohibit cities and counties from using their funds to help someone obtain an abortion outside the state — including banning coverage of out-of-state abortions under government employee health insurance plans.

In his concurring opinion in last year's ruling overturning Roe, Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh contemplated whether states could restrict their residents from getting abortions in other states: "In my view, the answer is no based on the constitutional right to interstate travel," he wrote.

Andrea Miller, president of the National Institute for Reproductive Health, which supports abortion rights, said the validity of interstate laws is unclear.

"The hope would be this would be seen as an extreme overreach," she said, "but one would have thought that overturning Roe v. Wade would have been an extreme overreach too."

Elisabeth Smith, state policy director for the Center for Reproductive Rights, said the measures have impacts even if they don't hold up in court.

"Will anti-abortion activists continue to try to use these techniques and use these avenues?" he asked. "Absolutely. Their goal in doing so is to try to chill activity and make those of us who support abortion rights too frightened to help people."

One possible test of the out-of-state applicability of abortion laws is just getting started in Texas.

The former husband of a Galveston-area woman who terminated a pregnancy last year with medication sued three women who helped her obtain pills, claiming wrongful death. The lawsuit says the woman terminated the pregnancy in July 2022 and the couple divorced in February.

A lawyer representing the ex-husband is Jonathan Mitchell, a former Texas solicitor general who is the architect of the law that uses civil penalties to enforce an abortion ban. As part of the suit, Mitchell sent a letter to the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice in New York City, demanding that it preserve documents. The letter said one of the women helping the ex-wife obtain abortion pills worked for the group and the organization would face questions about whether she was acting as part of her job.

"If anyone out-of-state helps one of their employees break Texas laws, then you better believe that there can be action taken against that, against that company or organization," said Mark Lee Dickson, a Texas anti-abortion activist who has pushed successfully for local governments to bar abortion clinics. "If an individual assists Texans in breaking the laws of Texas, then that's a problem, too."

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey and Hanna from Topeka, Kansas. Associated Press writers Acacia Coronado in Austin, Texas; David Lieb in Jefferson City, Missouri, and Kimberlee Kruesi in Nashville, contributed to this report.

Doctors express 'cautious optimism' on Berlusconi's health

ROME (AP) — The condition of former Italian premier Silvio Berlusconi, hospitalized in intensive care for a lung infection, is progressively improving, allowing for "cautious optimism," his doctors said Monday.

Berlusconi, 86, was taken Wednesday to the intensive care unit at Milan's San Raffaele hospital. Doctors revealed that the media tycoon and three-time premier has had a chronic form of leukemia for some time.

Monday's new health bulletin, signed by Berlusconi's doctors Alberto Zangrillo and Fabio Ciceri, said they observed a "progressive and constant improvement" in his condition.

They added that antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory treatments are “producing the expected results, allowing us to express a cautious optimism.”

Over the past few days, Berlusconi has been constantly visited by relatives and friends, who expressed optimism over his recovery.

Berlusconi has a history of heart problems, and in 2020 he was hospitalized with COVID-19 and pneumonia.

Academic coaches help students finish community college

By REBECCA GRIESBACH, AL.com undefined

PHENIX CITY, Ala. (AP) — A decade after dropping out, Briana Mathis, a 30-year-old mother of two, is navigating her first year back at Wallace Community College.

She was recruited back to the school in Dothan, Alabama, by the staff at a new student support center. The same adviser has kept her on track by helping her appeal a financial aid decision and checking in regularly on her progress.

“I definitely needed the guidance, and I probably wouldn’t have gotten this far without the guidance,” Mathis said.

Two-year community colleges, which serve many of the students who need the most support, have the lowest completion rates of any kind of university or college. The availability of advisers, students say, is often a deciding factor in who succeeds.

In Alabama, a number of community colleges have sought new ways to help students through whatever life and academic challenges come up until they graduate.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This story is part of Saving the College Dream, a collaboration between AL.com, The Associated Press, The Christian Science Monitor, The Dallas Morning News, The Hechinger Report, The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina, and The Seattle Times, with support from the Solutions Journalism Network.

At Chattahoochee Valley Community College in Phenix City, the Strategies to Enhance New Student Engagement program, or SENSE, has counselors reach out to students who are in remedial classes, on academic probation, or in need of extra support for other reasons. The program is supported by a five-year, \$1.8 million federal grant.

“We lose a lot of students because they don’t think they have solutions to their problems,” SENSE project coordinator Alisha Miles said.

Nationally, about 36% of community college students who enrolled in 2018 graduated within three years. In Alabama, the rate is about 30%.

At Chattahoochee Valley, students say the new program has helped them cross the finish line in ways big and small.

Alaysha Hill, a first-year transfer student, said a success coach helped her turn her grades around after a rocky transition. Another student, Cortez Rawlins, said he was struggling in one of his courses until a coach helped him come up with a detailed study plan.

The goal, Miles said, is for coaches to stick with students until they get a job or transfer successfully, and to help them overcome barriers along the way — be they transportation issues, lack of money for books or a lack of family support.

“We’re trying to interject or put ourselves in the middle of those obstacles so that we can see higher completion rates,” she said. “But it’s still a difficult task because we’re fighting against a lot of things. Sometimes it’s personal issues that keep people from moving forward, and sometimes it could be financial, or it could be that they just can’t do it, and they just stop.”

Not all community colleges offer so much support, said Linda García of the Center for Community College Student Engagement. A 2022 CCCSE report found that nationally, 53% of students said an adviser helped them to set academic goals and create a plan for achieving those goals.

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Jahnelle Congress, a first-year student at Lawson State Community College, said she needed help determining a major but her school's advising line never responded to her emails or in-person requests.

"You need an adviser to help you figure out those things, and to not have that is kind of tough," she said.

Resources for more robust advising services are often scarce, experts say.

"Funding is by far the biggest limitation to quality community college advising, and this includes being able to staff advising experts in the evenings and weekends, or at a distance, which is when and how many community college students are able to attend classes," said Deryl Hatch-Tocaimaza, an associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

While Alabama's community colleges mostly operate independently, they can share some funding and programming system-wide.

This spring, Alabama community college system leaders are working on new statewide measures to retain students, including appointment scheduling and a "student success scoring" system, which would help identify students who need help early, rather than waiting until they ask.

But it's ultimately up to individual colleges to decide what type of support they need, said Ebony Horton, a spokesperson for the system.

Technical schools, for example, may be more focused on hiring career coaches, while other institutions may have more students who need help transferring. Sometimes instructors take on advising roles, too, she said.

In her first year at Chattahoochee Valley, Oryanan Lewis failed three classes as she struggled with a chronic illness. She nearly lost her financial aid and likely would have had to quit, she said, without intervention. The new team of success coaches developed a plan to maintain grades she'd need to keep her scholarship. The medical assisting student is now approaching graduation.

"If I didn't go in there and get the information and the support that I had, I don't think I would be where I'm at now," she said. "I most definitely don't think I would have been in school still."

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Today in History: April 11, Civil Rights Act becomes law

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, April 11, the 101st day of 2023. There are 264 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 11, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which included the Fair Housing Act, a week after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

On this date:

In 1814, Napoleon Bonaparte abdicated as Emperor of the French and was banished to the island of Elba. (Napoleon later escaped from Elba and returned to power in March 1815, until his downfall in the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815.)

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke to a crowd outside the White House, saying, "We meet this evening, not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart." (It was the last public address Lincoln would deliver.)

In 1899, the treaty ending the Spanish-American War was declared in effect.

In 1913, Postmaster General Albert S. Bursleson, during a meeting of President Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet, proposed gradually segregating whites and Blacks who worked for the Railway Mail Service, a policy that went into effect and spread to other agencies.

In 1945, during World War II, American soldiers liberated the Nazi concentration camp Buchenwald in Germany.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers played in an exhibition against the New York Yankees at Ebbets Field, four days before his regular-season debut that broke baseball's color line. (The Dodgers won, 14-6.)

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In 1961, former SS officer Adolf Eichmann went on trial in Israel, charged with crimes against humanity for his role in the Nazi Holocaust. (Eichmann was convicted and executed.)

In 1970, Apollo 13, with astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert, blasted off on its ill-fated mission to the moon. (The mission was aborted when an oxygen tank exploded April 13. The crew splashed down safely four days after the explosion.)

In 1980, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued regulations specifically prohibiting sexual harassment of workers by supervisors.

In 1996, 7-year-old Jessica Dubroff, who hoped to become the youngest person to fly cross-country, was killed along with her father and flight instructor when their plane crashed after takeoff from Cheyenne, Wyoming.

In 2020, the number of U.S. deaths from the coronavirus eclipsed Italy's for the highest in the world, topping 20,000.

Ten years ago: Congress' most serious gun-control effort in years cleared its first hurdle as the Senate pushed past conservatives' attempted blockade, rebuffing 68-31 an effort to keep debate from even starting. (However, proposals for tighter background checks for buyers as well as bans on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines went down to defeat six days later.) Comedian Jonathan Winters, 87, died in Montecito, California.

Five years ago: House Speaker Paul Ryan announced that he would retire rather than seek another term in Congress. California Gov. Jerry Brown accepted President Donald Trump's call to send the National Guard to the Mexican border but said the troops would have nothing to do with immigration enforcement. Pope Francis admitted he made "grave errors" in judgment in Chile's sex abuse scandal; during a January visit to Chile, Francis had strongly defended Bishop Juan Barros despite accusations by victims that Barros had witnessed and ignored their abuse. A military transport plane crashed just after takeoff in Algeria, killing 257 people in the worst aviation disaster in the history of the North African country. Mitzi Shore, owner of the Los Angeles club the Comedy Store, died at the age of 87.

One year ago: The mayor of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol said more than 10,000 civilians died in the Russian siege of his city. Philadelphia becomes the first major U.S. city to reinstate its indoor mask mandate after reporting a sharp increase in coronavirus infections. A jury was selected to hear a libel lawsuit Johnny Depp filed against his ex-wife, actress Amber Heard, whom he accused of falsely portraying him as a domestic abuser. Mimi Reinhard, a secretary in Oskar Schindler's office who typed up the list of Jews he saved from extermination by Nazi Germany, died at age 107.

Today's Birthdays: Ethel Kennedy is 95. Actor Joel Grey is 91. Actor Louise Lasser is 84. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Ellen Goodman is 82. Movie writer-director John Milius is 79. Actor Peter Riegert is 76. Movie director Carl Franklin is 74. Actor Bill Irwin is 73. Country singer-songwriter Jim Lauderdale is 66. Songwriter-producer Daryl Simmons is 66. Rock musician Nigel Pulsford (Bush) is 62. Actor Lucky Vanous is 62. Country singer Steve Azar is 59. Singer Lisa Stansfield is 57. Actor Johnny Messner is 54. Rock musician Dylan Keefe (Marcy Playground) is 53. Actor Vicellous (vy-SAY'-luhs) Shannon is 52. Rapper David Banner is 49. Actor Tricia Helfer is 49. Rock musician Chris Gaylor (The All-American Rejects) is 44. Actor Kelli Garner is 39. Singer Joss Stone is 36. Actor-dancer Kaitlyn Jenkins is 31.