

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 1 of 70

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Obit: Ryan Spencer](#)
- [3- Boys Golf Awards](#)
- [4- Two teams take first at Groton CDE](#)
- [4- Groton Sump Pump Ad](#)
- [5- SearchLight: Family left with questions after man dies in custody of rural sheriff's office](#)
- [8- SearchLight: Federal judge temporarily blocks new Biden WOTUS rule in two dozen states](#)
- [10- SearchLight: Biden administration proposes to strengthen patient privacy for those seeking abortions](#)
- [12- Weather Pages](#)
- [16- Daily Devotional](#)
- [17- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [18- Subscription Form](#)
- [19- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [20- News from the Associated Press](#)
- [67- SDHSAA: Schools to vote on recruitment, game ejection amendments](#)
- [68- SDHSAA: SDHSAA tables name, image, likeness amendment](#)
- [69- SDHSAA: SDHSAA hears plea for greater penalties for poor sportsmanship](#)
- [69- SDHSAA: White River seeks apology, answers for mistakes at Class B Tournament game](#)
- [70- SDHSAA: Three principals vie for SDHSAA board](#)

Groton Community Calendar

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.

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



Friday, April 14

Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad sandwich, tomato spoon salad, carrot bars

School Breakfast: Eggs and sausage.

School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, peas.

All School Play, 7 p.m

Indoor track meet at Barnett Center, 10 a.m.

Saturday, April 15

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

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

Emmanuel Lutheran worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

All School Play, 4 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

© 2023 Groton Daily Independent

The Life of Ryan Spencer



Ryan Taylor Spencer, 37, of Lind, WA, passed away on March 26, 2023.

Ryan was born March 17, 1986, in Everett, Washington, to Larry Spencer and Robin Slatum.

Ryan was a hard worker and would give the shirt off his back if you needed it. He owned his own roofing business in Lind Washington, and many of the buildings around the area have benefited from his roofing skills and professionalism. He always has a smile on his face and a "live for the moment" attitude.

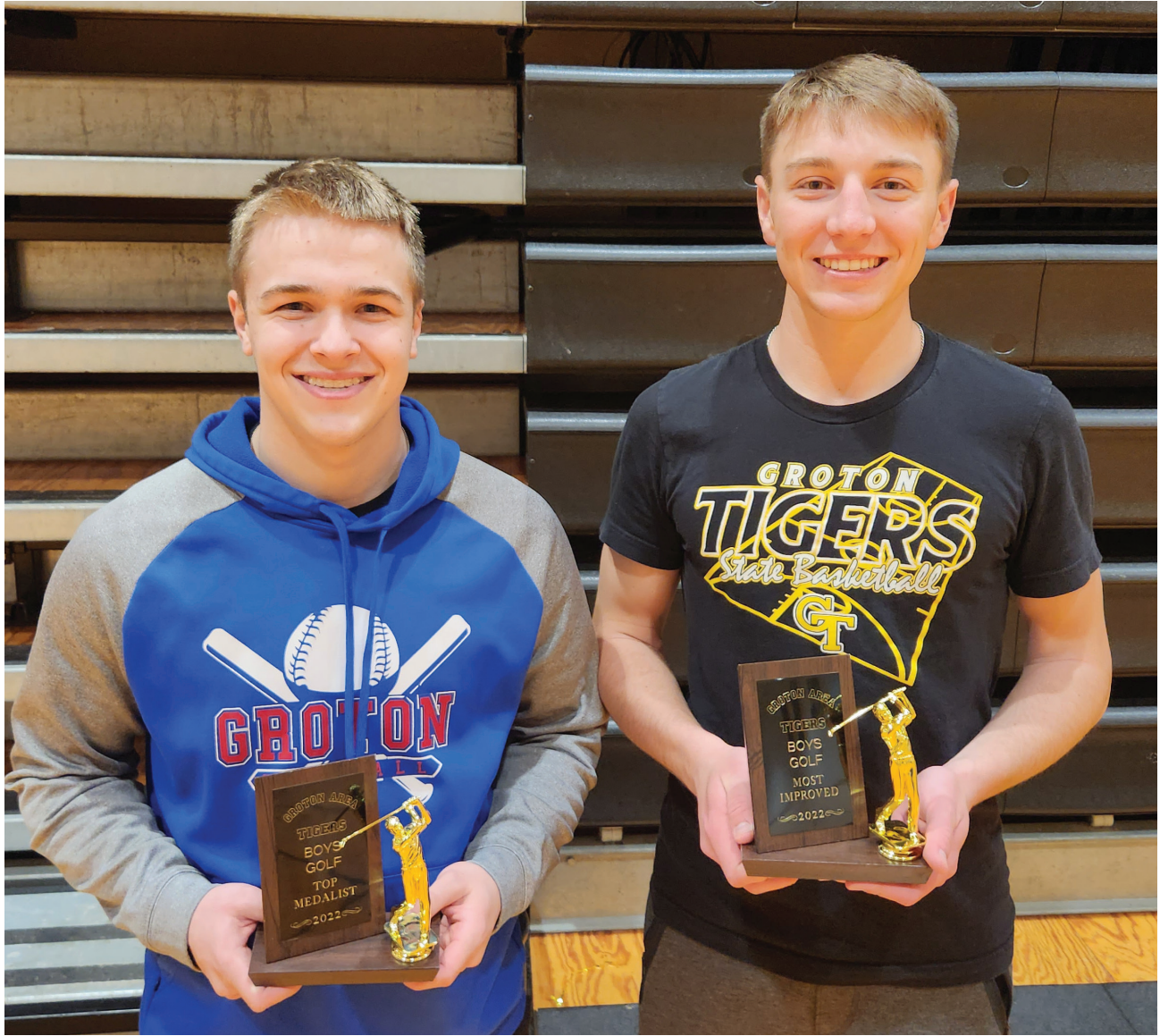
Ryan married the love of his life in 2013, and they have 2 boys together, Ryan (Bubba) and Carson.

Ryan loved nature, woodworking, camping, and rocking out. He was an avid hunter and fisherman. Ryan used his time productively to focus on his family, hobbies, and work projects. Ryan lived with his grandparents (Richard and Phyllis Spencer) in Houghton, SD, and attended Groton School until 2002 before moving back to Washington.

Ryan is survived by his wife Sierra; his sons Ryan and Carson; 3 brothers, Phillip Spencer(Rhonda), Nicholas Spencer(Sarah), and Willie Spencer(Riley) and his sister Makayla Louthain along with 1 grandmother, aunts, uncles, many cousins, nieces and a nephew.

A "Celebration of Life" will be held on Saturday, July 15th, 2023, at the Birdhouse located in Wylie Park at 6 pm.

If you would like to send a card to the family, please mail them to Kandi Wiseman at 405 E 8th Ave Groton, SD 57445



Boys Golf Awards

This fall 2022 boys golf awards go to Brevin Flihs top medalist winner. Cole Simon most improved score winner. (Courtesy Photo)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 4 of 70

Two teams take first at Groton CDE

The Groton Ag Business Management and the Horse Evaluation teams placed first at the Groton Career Event held Tuesday. The Vet Science team placed second.

Ag Business Management - 1st Place Team

Kaleb Antonsen - 2nd Place
Cole Bisbee - 6th Place
Caleb Hanten - 12th Place
Ethan Gengerke - 25th Place

Ag Mechanics

Nick Morris - 44th Place

Agronomy Team - 5th Place Team

Kellen Antonsen - 7th Place
Payton Mitchell - 16th Place
Ashley Johnson - 33rd Place

Dairy Cattle - 6th Place Team

Porter Johnson - 16th Place
Karter Moody - 19th Place
Braden Wienk - 28th Place

Floriculture

Kamryn Fliehs - 61st Place

Horse Evaluation - 1st Place Team

Jayla Jones - 1st Place
Turner Thompson - 4th Place
Delayne Jones - 12th Place
Austin Aberle - 25th Place
Aiden Heathcoat - 31st Place

Livestock Evaluation - 5th Place Team

Lexi Osterman - 6th Place
Blake Pauli - 17th Place
Halee Harder - 27th Place

Milk Quality - 6th Place Team

Logan Ringgenberg - 16th Place
Hannah Monson - 17th Place
Layne Hanson - 27th Place
Colby Dunker - 29th Place

Vet Science - 2nd Place Team

Ashlyn Sperry - 7th Place
Cadence Feist - 14th Place
Faith Fliehs - 21st Place
Karrah-Jo Johnson - 28th Place
Ava Wienk - 32nd Place

Natural Resources - 16th Place

Jaycie Lier - 62nd Place
Emma Schinkel - 63rd Place
Charlie Frost - 65th Place
Jarrett Erdmann - 66th Place

Groton City Sump Pump Alert



Sump pumps must be discharged outside (not in the sanitary sewer).



Thanks for your immediate compliance!

**Failure to comply will result in fines.
Groton City Council**



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Family left with questions after man dies in custody of rural sheriff's office

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 12, 2023 6:03 PM

State investigators are reviewing the death of a man shortly after his arrest on April 3 by Charles Mix County sheriff's deputies.

Friends of 35-year-old Robert Dennis "Berta" Enoch have a host of questions about how someone who'd expressed a desire to get well and had secured a place at a treatment center just days before his arrest died shortly afterward.

Charles Mix County Sheriff Randy Thaler told South Dakota Searchlight that Enoch was found in the street "screaming and yelling" and "being disorderly" on the day of his death. Deputies soon learned that Enoch was a parole absconder and detained him.

Thaler deferred further questions on the incident to the state Division of Criminal Investigation. The sheriff declined to say how long Enoch was in custody at the jail in Lakes Andes before being transferred 17 miles southeast to Wagner Community Memorial Hospital, where he was pronounced dead, according to his preliminary South Dakota death certificate.

As of April 11, Enoch's state death record did not list a cause of death.

Those closest to Enoch believe he died at the jail.

DCI spokesman Tony Mangan confirmed that the state agency was asked to investigate the situation on April 3, but did not have any other information.

"The case remains under investigation and no further details are available at this time," Mangan wrote in an email.

Traditional upbringing

Tracii Barse met Enoch at powwows when both men were about 12 years old. Barse described Enoch, a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, as a deeply traditional person who frequently joined Barse to sing prayers around the drum. Enoch took part in tribal ceremonies even as he drifted in and out of active drug addiction.

"He lost his way for a while there, and he never got a chance to find his way again," said Barse, a member of the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe.

Those who knew Enoch called him "Berta," a nickname he picked up while staying with a grandmother named "Roberta."

Enoch was his mother's only biological child, but he grew up with an adopted brother eight years his senior, Sonny LeBlanc. LeBlanc was never legally adopted, but was taken in and raised as a brother "in the Native American way," he said.

"In those times growing up in our community, it wasn't the best financially, but we had family," said LeBlanc, who now works as a disaster assistance agent for the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe.

Enoch was a happy, energetic kid, LeBlanc said, and he was also compassionate, like his mother. The boys were steeped in tribal heritage and taught to value respect, compassion, bravery, humility and the importance of community.

"He was a reflection of his mom. She would give the clothes off her back, and he carried that on," LeB-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 6 of 70

lanc said. "You can get lost in today's society, where it's about trying to conquer your neighbor. But in our culture, it's about being a good relative. Those are core teachings."

Amber Adams-Boyd also knew Enoch, but most of her memories are of him as a young man. He was close with her nephews when they were teens. The boys thought they knew it all, she recalls, but she also remembers Enoch as a person with a strong tribal heritage.

"Growing up the way he did, his family was really traditional. So he would know a lot of the teachings," she said.

He struggled with drugs, but in traditional beliefs when people get lost, "that doesn't mean they're any less of a person," Adams-Boyd said.

Berta goes dark

Regardless of how bad things got, Barse said, Enoch would call his mother and his children on a near-daily basis.

The two sang together at a funeral last fall. "I think he was trying" to keep up his traditions, Barse said.

The two knew one another growing up, but each had "lost their way," Barse said. For a time, they were both in prison for drugs at the South Dakota State Penitentiary.

The two once took apart an eagle for use in Native American ceremonies behind the walls. Enoch gave Barse three of the feathers, which are now affixed to a carved diamond willow walking stick.

Barse got sober in prison and has stayed that way for seven years. His friend continued to struggle, chalking up months of sobriety before falling off the wagon, often picking up new charges quickly as a result.

Enoch's criminal record is largely filled with drug and drunken driving offenses. The most serious crimes were aggravated eluding in 2022, when he led officers in Davison County on a chase that ended when spike strips popped the wheels of the vehicle he'd been driving, and aggravated assault, a charge that came after he'd allegedly stabbed a man in the stomach during a fistfight. The victim and a woman had been kicking Enoch out of their residence, according to court records.

The felony assault charge was pleaded down to a misdemeanor; the eluding charge was dismissed after Enoch pleaded guilty to drug possession.

Court records also show that Enoch had taken part in treatment programs in the past.

In a letter to a Roberts County judge in 2019, Enoch tried to explain his battle with addiction.

"I've been struggling with alcohol and drugs since I was 13 yrs old and I'm still fighting with substance abuse," he wrote. "I've had many periods of sobriety but in the end haven't been able to maintain recovery long-term, and my addictions always seem to win."

Enoch's brother remembers more good times than bad, but the bad times came with consequences.

"When he did lose his way, it was just a short amount of time before he was back in the system," LeBlanc said.

As last winter dragged on, Enoch found himself stumbling again. His mother and two sons stopped hearing from him early in February. More than a month passed before Barse heard from Enoch's mother, who asked him for help. Barse was concerned, but he was also busy with other issues, including helping others struggling with addiction.

Three weeks later, Barse had a dream. In it, he and his drum group were singing outside and saw Enoch approach through the trees.

"He looked at me and said, 'Bro, can I sing with you guys?'" Barse said. "And I tried to tell him, 'Yes, you're always welcome to sing with us.' But I couldn't. I couldn't speak to him."

When Barse awoke, he heard a sound similar to a knock at the door. He went out to investigate and saw that the diamond willow branch, which had been standing upright, had fallen on the floor.

"As soon as I picked it up and touched it, I felt something in my bones and my heart and my brain. It was like, 'you've got to help find Berta now,'" he said.

Located in Lake Andes

Things moved quickly after that.

Enoch was officially reported missing to tribal authorities, which triggered a call to the Sioux Falls Police

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 7 of 70

Department on March 28. Enoch had been staying in a sober living apartment at the Glory House in that city until shortly after Christmas.

"Missing" posters bearing Berta's likeness and last known location were circulated online.

In short order, Barse heard that his friend was holed up in a Lake Andes drug house. Instead of calling police – Barse doubted that anyone would've opened the door for officers – he called a friend and offered him \$80 to check on Enoch.

Enoch was inside.

"At the time, I was fired up, because his mom thought he was dead," Barse said. "She was crying so hard every time I talked to her. So I said, 'put me on speakerphone.' And he did. And I said, 'Berta, call your family. Now.'"

That's what he did.

Jayde Adams, a niece to Adams-Boyd, works at the Sisseton nursing home where Enoch's mother lives. She remembers Enoch's call to his mother. He was upset, she recalled, and wanted the missing person posters taken down.

That was a Tuesday. The following day, March 29, according to Sioux Falls police spokesman Sam Clemens, an officer learned that Enoch had spoken to his family, and the department closed the case.

The Friday before he died, Barse said, Enoch called him. He needed help, he told Barse. He needed to get back to treatment. Enoch's parole officer found a spot for him at a treatment center that day, Barse said – a lucky break in a state with high demand for in-patient treatment.

The path forward seemed clear to Barse: turn yourself in as a parole absconder, he told Enoch – he hadn't picked up new charges, he'd only lost touch with his parole officer – then wait for the judge to turn you over to the Department of Corrections. From there, he'd go to treatment.

"I said, 'Bro, all you've got to do is sit in jail for 24 hours. For guys like us, that's nothing.'"

Enoch did not turn himself in, but he still wound up in jail.

News of death lands

Adams-Boyd didn't know about those plans until Barse talked about the phone call at Enoch's funeral on Monday.

The path from found and hopeful to dead at 35 remains unclear to those who listened to that story at the Sisseton service.

Barse heard from a friend on the morning of April 3 that Enoch was in jail. Less than an hour later, he said, he got another message saying that Enoch had died.

Adams-Boyd got a call that day, too, in her case from the woman at the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe who had processed the missing persons report the week before.

She and Adams-Boyd called the Roberts County Sheriff's Office to ask them not to break the news of Enoch's death to his mother. They wanted loved ones to tell her, she said. The deputies agreed, Adams-Boyd said, but it didn't help.

Someone with the Sisseton Police Department notified Enoch's mother before they got there.

"I didn't even have my shoes on yet," Adams-Boyd said. "It was literally not even a minute after I told my nieces we were coming."

Enoch's mother did not take the news well. She called out for Jayde Adams and her sister Daisy, who tried their best to comfort her.

"There was nothing I could do but cry with her and hug her," Adams said.

Messages left with the Roberts County Sheriff's Office and the Sisseton Police Department were not returned.

Questions surround death

Enoch's family and friends were frustrated by the way the news was delivered, but they have larger frustrations about the lack of clarity surrounding his death.

Adams spoke to Sheriff Thaler on behalf of Enoch's mother, she said, and was told that deputies were sent after Enoch because he was a parole absconder. Enoch was found unresponsive either late in the

morning or early in the afternoon, she was told, in a holding cell that was monitored by video. Deputies had checked on him periodically, she said.

The death certificate notes the location of his death as Wagner Community Memorial Hospital.

Not knowing the cause of death is concerning, Adams said.

"We don't know about the autopsy, so we don't know what happened," she said.

LeBlanc is concerned about jail protocols for people who are under the influence when they're booked. He wonders if something could've been done differently, or if medical help could've come sooner.

"Is there a log sheet that says they were checking on him and monitoring him? There are so many questions," he said. "As law enforcement, people who are supposed to protect and serve, there has to be accountability."

LeBlanc said he wants people to know that his brother was more than an inmate or parolee. There were two days of mourning and gathering for him over the weekend in the run-up to his funeral, and his obituary lists 18 pallbearers, 29 named honorary pallbearers and "all his Sundance bros."

"He was a brother. He was family. People loved him," LeBlanc said.

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

Federal judge temporarily blocks new Biden WOTUS rule in two dozen states

South Dakota attorney general describes ruling as 'tremendous win'

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 12, 2023 4:43 PM

A federal judge in North Dakota on Wednesday blocked in 24 states — including South Dakota — the Biden administration's newly effective definition of waters that can be regulated under the Clean Water Act.

U.S. District Judge Daniel Hovland, a George W. Bush appointee on retired status in the North Dakota District, issued a preliminary injunction in a case two dozen Republican state attorneys general brought against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The ruling for now blocks enforcement of a rule to expand what the EPA could consider "waters of the United States," or WOTUS, under the Clean Water Act in Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley issued a news release Wednesday praising the preliminary injunction and criticizing the Biden administration rule.

"Today's ruling is a tremendous win for our farmers and ranchers and for the premise that the states are better positioned than a distant Washington to protect the environment within our own state," Jackley said in the release.

The rule took effect March 20, despite bipartisan objections from Congress.

The Clean Water Act was meant to apply to "navigable waters," Hovland said.

But the Biden administration definition ignored that standard, removing any limit on federal regulation of any waterway that crosses a state boundary. That went beyond the statutory meaning of the Clean Water Act and raised "serious federalism questions and concerns," Hovland said.

"The exercise of jurisdiction over all rivers, lakes, and other waters that flow across state boundaries, no matter how small or isolated and regardless of navigability is constitutionally troublesome," he wrote. "There is nothing in the text of the Clean Water Act that supports making every wetland, stream, or other water crossing a border subject to federal jurisdiction."

As the EPA and Army Corps review their options, they are enforcing the pre-2015 definition of waters of the United States in the 24 states, an EPA spokesperson said in a written statement Wednesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 9 of 70

"The agencies continue to believe the rule, which is informed by the text of the relevant provisions of the Clean Water Act and the statute as a whole, as well as the scientific record, relevant Supreme Court case law, input from public comment, and the agencies' experience and technical expertise after more than 45 years of implementing the longstanding pre-2015 regulations defining waters of the United States, is the best interpretation of the Clean Water Act," the spokesperson wrote.

"The agencies remain committed to establishing and implementing a durable definition of 'waters of the United States' informed by diverse perspectives," the spokesperson added. "Our goal is to protect public health, the environment, and downstream communities while supporting economic opportunity, agriculture, and industries that depend on clean water."

'Nothing but confusion'

The legal definition of waters of the United States has been the subject of fierce debate for years.

Describing the long procedural and legal history of the rule, Hovland said the shifting definitions of the rule "have created nothing but confusion, uncertainty, unpredictability, and endless litigation throughout this country."

After years of litigation and a 2006 U.S. Supreme Court case that defined waters subject to federal enforcement as having "a significant nexus" to navigable waters, the EPA under President Barack Obama in 2015 issued a rule seeking to clarify what that meant. Many in agricultural and construction industries that rely on federal permitting said that definition expanded what the federal government could regulate.

Under President Donald Trump, the EPA narrowed the definition to "traditional navigable waters."

President Joe Biden's rule once again widened the definition to be closer to the Obama administration's version.

Congress sought to overturn enforcement of the rule, with majorities in both chambers voting in March to adopt a resolution blocking the rule.

Biden vetoed that resolution on April 6.

Supreme Court case pending

The Biden rule has been deeply unpopular with farmers and ranchers, many of whom view it as federal overreach onto private lands.

In statements praising the decision, some of the attorneys general in the case echoed that sentiment.

"This is a huge win for Iowan farmers, builders, and landowners," Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird said in a statement. "And we're not going to stop here. We're continuing to fight back against the Biden Administration's aggressive federal overreach and will turn this into a permanent win."

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule this term on another WOTUS case. That challenge to the rule was brought by an Idaho couple, Michael and Chantell Sackett, who said wetlands on their property should not be considered "water of the United States."

U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, an Idaho Republican who chairs the U.S. House Appropriations subcommittee that oversees EPA funding, said the agency should not have issued the rule while a Supreme Court decision was pending.

"The Biden Administration should not have issued their expansive and overreaching rule on WOTUS while a case is currently before the Supreme Court," Simpson tweeted. "I'm glad to see the rule blocked."

Hovland said the pending ruling in that case was one reason to block the Biden rule from taking effect.

Because the Supreme Court ruling will likely have a major impact on the central issues of the case, the status quo should remain in place until the Supreme Court rules, he said.

"Hopefully, the Supreme Court decision in Sackett will provide some clarity," Hovland wrote. "The outcome of the Sackett case may have significant implications for the EPA's authority to determine jurisdictional waters under the Clean Water Act. It may also determine the EPA's ability to enforce the 2023 WOTUS Rule. Until then, every state will continue to swim in waters of uncertainty, ambiguity, and chaos."

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

Biden administration proposes to strengthen patient privacy for those seeking abortions

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 12, 2023 8:54 AM

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is trying to enhance the federal law that guards patient privacy to further protect those who seek legal abortion care and other reproductive health care services.

The announcement comes amid two major ongoing federal court cases dealing with access to the abortion pill and fears that the pill's U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval could be suspended. Numerous states also have moved to limit or ban abortions following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision last year to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, or are considering new abortion laws.

The proposed rule from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights, released Wednesday, is meant to strengthen the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA.

"Protecting individuals' health information has taken on a critical importance following the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*," said a senior administration official, who provided background information on the proposed rule in a call with reporters on Tuesday night.

The proposed rule "would prohibit doctors, other health care providers, and health plans from disclosing individuals' protected health information, including information related to reproductive health care, under certain circumstances," according to a fact sheet from the Biden administration.

"Specifically, the rule would prevent an individual's information from being disclosed to investigate, sue, or prosecute an individual, a health care provider, or a loved one simply because that person sought, obtained, provided, or facilitated legal reproductive health care, including abortion," the fact sheet says.

Dueling rulings

The abortion pill cases in the courts are related to access to the medication mifepristone.

U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas Judge Matthew Joseph Kacsmaryk ruled Friday, April 7, to overturn the FDA's 2000 approval of mifepristone, which is approved for use up to 10 weeks into a pregnancy.

Kacsmaryk put a seven-day delay in his ruling, leaving mifepristone on the market until at least Friday, April 14, at midnight, or until another court ruling.

The U.S. Justice Department has since filed an appeal to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans and asked the court to put the Texas ruling on hold pending an appeals process that's likely to end up at the U.S. Supreme Court.

U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington Judge Thomas Rice issued a separate ruling Friday, just minutes after the Texas order, that barred the FDA from changing "the status quo and rights as it relates to the availability of Mifepristone" in the 17 states and District of Columbia that filed a lawsuit about the pharmaceutical in his court.

The U.S. Justice Department has asked Rice to clarify his ruling, saying it "appears to be in significant tension" with the Texas opinion.

Bolstering privacy rules

The new proposed rule from HHS released Wednesday is designed to bolster current HIPAA privacy regulations, according to a senior administration official.

The official who spoke on background Tuesday ahead of the official announcement noted that HHS currently has guidance that tells health care providers and insurance companies that HIPAA disclosures are "permissible, meaning you can say no to them."

"This rule actually goes a step further than that because we found that even with the permissible disclosures, some providers get fearful when they receive a subpoena, or they might feel like they have to turn the information over," an official said.

"HIPAA covers a range of providers from small, medium, to large, and while larger systems, or larger provider groups may have a privacy officer, or more sophisticated systems, we know small and medium-sized providers likely don't," the official added.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 11 of 70

"And so they're very reliant on our guidance and rules. And so this is helpful in that it gives them the ability to not provide that information, if it's not for the specific purpose articulated in the rule."

In a second fact sheet released Wednesday, the Biden administration criticized the Texas judge for taking the "dangerous step of attempting to override FDA's approval of medication abortion — which is used not only for abortion but also for helping women manage miscarriages."

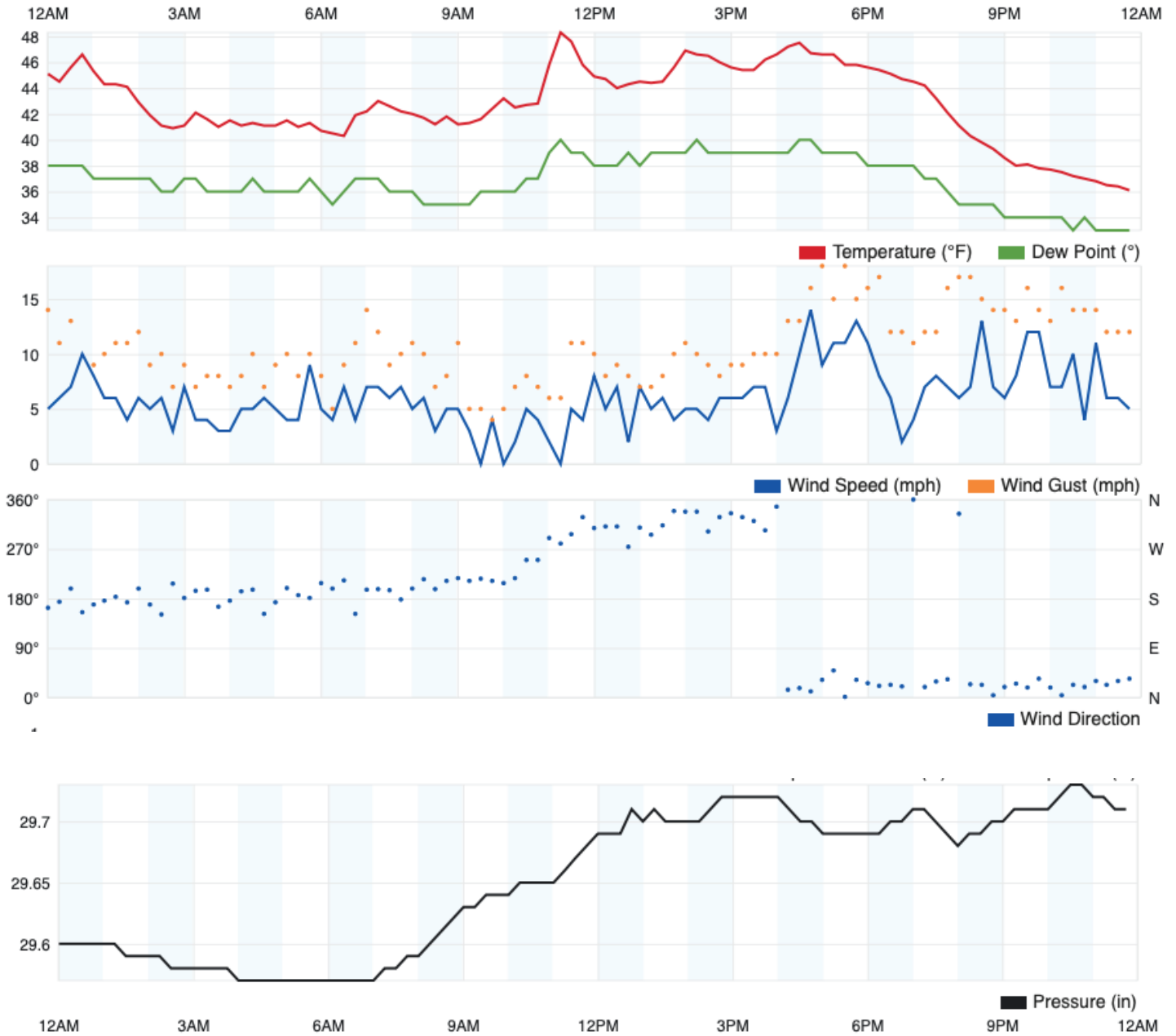
"This lawsuit is part of broader efforts to ban abortion nationwide and to prevent women from making their own decisions about their own bodies without government interference," the administration wrote. "The Administration is fighting this ruling in the courts, and stands by FDA's scientific and evidence-based judgment that mifepristone is safe and effective."

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.

Groton Daily Independent



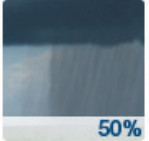




Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 12 of 70

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 13 of 70

Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
 20%	 50%	 50%	 30%			
Slight Chance Showers then Mostly Cloudy	Chance T-storms	Chance Showers	Chance Rain and Blustery	Partly Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Blustery	Sunny and Breezy
High: 46 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 42 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 40 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 47 °F



Today

Mostly Cloudy, Slight Chance of Morning Showers

Highs: 43 - 78°F
(coolest in snow covered areas)

Tonight

Showers and Thunderstorms

Lows: 32 - 45°F

Friday

Showers and Thunderstorms

Highs: 39 - 53°F

April 13, 2023 4:18 AM

An area of low pressure will bring showers and thunderstorms to the region through Friday night. Isolated showers are possible this morning, but more widespread activity is expected to develop this evening. No severe storms are expected. The additional rain will lead to more flooding across eastern SD.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 14 of 70

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 11:23 AM

Low Temp: 36 °F at 11:17 PM

Wind: 18 mph at 4:57 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 28 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 2003

Record Low: 9 in 2013

Average High: 57

Average Low: 30

Average Precip in April.: 0.62

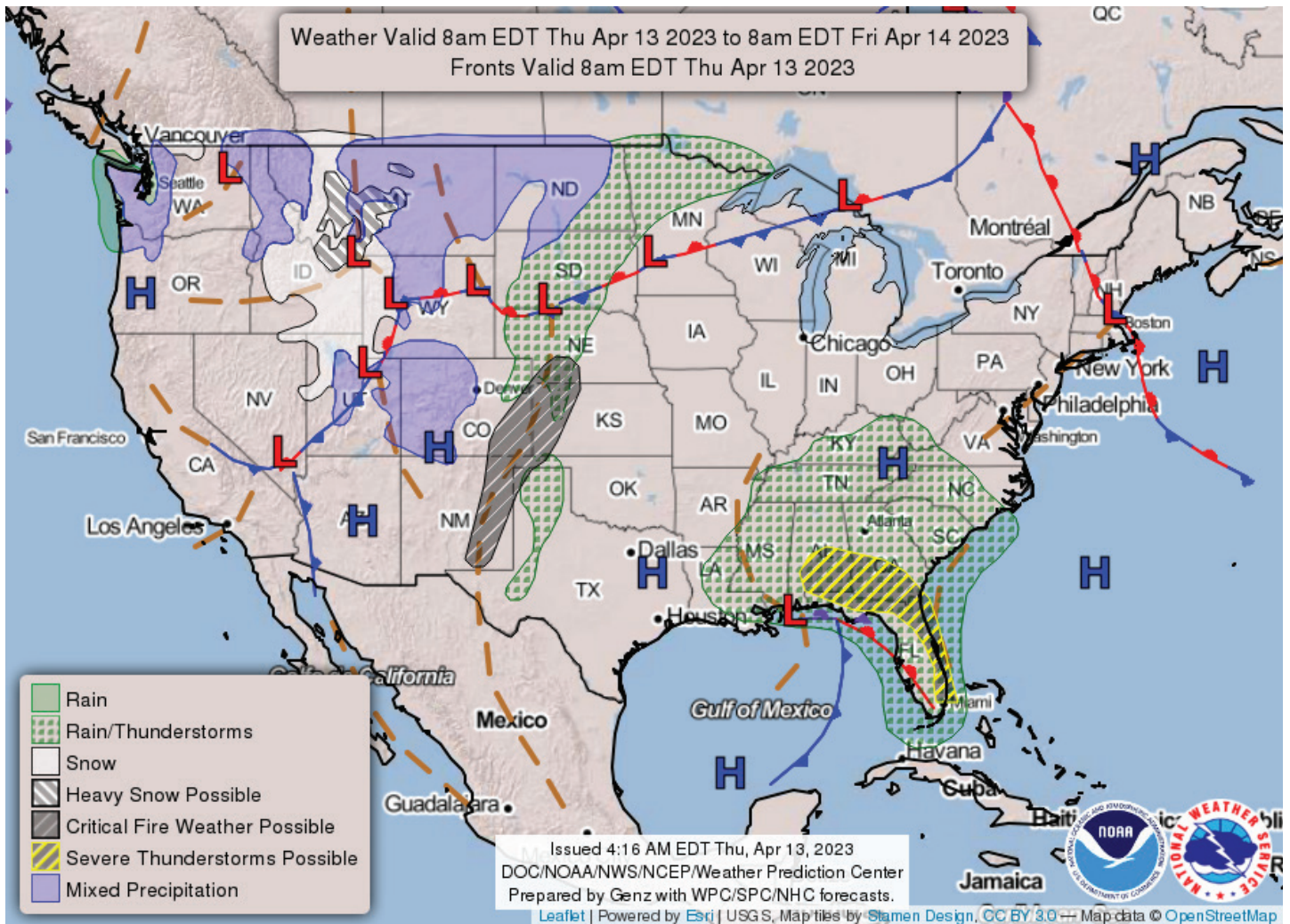
Precip to date in April.: 0.48

Average Precip to date: 2.68

Precip Year to Date: 4.41

Sunset Tonight: 8:17:03 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:46:59 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 15 of 70

Today in Weather History

April 13, 1986: A significant spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas, it was the worst blizzard ever.

April 13, 1995: Flooding, resulting from snowmelt from the two major snowstorms in April and saturated soils, caused extensive road damage and inundation. The flooding caused several road closings and numerous flooded basements in many counties. Also, many lakes were overfull in Day and Campbell Counties. Flooded farmland caused severe delays in small grain planting. Spink, Sully, McPherson, and Brown Counties were declared disasters.

April 13, 2010: Unyielding south winds developed over central and northeast South Dakota in the early afternoon and continued into the early evening hours. South winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts to near 70 mph caused some structural and shingled damage across the area. A pickup on Interstate-90 lost a camper to the high winds. The high winds, combined with lowered humidity and dry fuels, helped fan several grassland fires across the region. The most substantial fire started from a downed power line in Campbell County near the town of Glenham. The fire grew to be five miles long by two miles wide and traveled eight miles before it was under control. Almost 6000 acres were burned with nearly 20 fire departments dispatched.

1877 - The second coastal storm in just three days hit Virginia and the Carolinas. The first storm flattened the sand dunes at Hatteras, and widened the Oregon inlet three quarters of a mile. The second storm produced hurricane force winds along the coast of North Carolina causing more beach erosion and land transformation. (David Ludlum)

1955 - The town of Axis, AL, was deluged with 20.33 inches of rain in 24 hours establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A major spring storm quickly intensified bringing blizzard conditions to much of the Northern Plains Region. Up to 18 inches of snow was reported in North Dakota, and in South Dakota, winds gusting to 90 mph whipped the snow into drifts fifteen feet high. Livestock losses were in the millions of dollars, and for some areas it was the worst blizzard ever. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms in northern Texas produced wind gusts to 98 mph at the Killeen Airport causing a million dollars property damage. Two airplanes were totally destroyed by the high winds, and ten others were damaged. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure off the Atlantic coast produced high winds across North Carolina, with gusts to 78 mph reported at Waves. The high winds combined with high tides to cause coastal flooding and erosion. About 275 feet of land was eroded from the northern tip of Pea Island. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms in central Florida produced golf ball size hail and a tornado near Lakeland FL. Fair and mild weather prevailed across most of the rest of the nation. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1999: A two-mile-wide area of wind-driven hail pounded residences and farm equipment for about a 5 mile stretch at least as far as State Highway 158 in west Texas near Midland/Odessa. Hail grew up to about golf ball size and winds peaked at approximately 80 mph. The wind-driven hail broke windows in houses and blasted paint off the wooden siding. The strong winds took roofs off several mobile homes and at least one single-family house. Utility crews stated that the winds downed a total of 27 poles. The American Red Cross determined that 324 units were affected with 18 mobile homes and four houses destroyed. About 50-60 families were at least temporarily displaced.

2004 - The latest measurable snowfall on record hits Jackson, TN, causing six traffic fatalities.

2006: An F2 tornado hit Iowa City, Iowa and trekked across other Southeast parts of the University of Iowa campus doing 15+ million dollars damage hurting 30 people and damaging or destroying 1051 buildings. The roof/steeple/ bricks fell from the St. Patrick's Church shortly after 75 parishioners had taken to the rectory basement next door.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 16 of 70

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

TIME TO ASK

It was one of those days that every mother tries to avoid. First, the washing machine stopped in the middle of the spin cycle. Then she discovered that the toaster was not working. When she opened the door to the refrigerator, she discovered that it had been on "defrost" all night, and everything in the freezer was thawed. The last straw was a raging migraine headache.

She reached down, picked up her small son, placed him on her lap, held him tightly, and began to weep softly as the tears ran down her cheeks.

Without saying a word, Ronnie took the pacifier out of his mouth and placed it in hers.

Some days just seem to unravel. We awaken to a shining sun only to have dark clouds appear from nowhere. What we thought would be a day of joy suddenly turned into a night of despair. Bad days come into each of our lives, and we end up feeling alone and abandoned, overwhelmed and oppressed. Problems pile up like flakes of snow in a blizzard.

When days do not unfold as we want them to, what is our option? We can be grateful for the grace of God. In the midst of the most draining and demanding experiences that life has to offer, He is with us. He has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Even though God seems far away, He is always close at hand offering His help. "Ask anything in My name," He offered, "and I will do it!" It's His promise to each of us! So, ask for the "Son" to appear!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, how thankful we ought to be that Your power exceeds our problems! Help us to believe that You are with us and willing to rescue us. Always! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. John 14:13



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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 17 of 70

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
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 18 of 70

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$15.98
- 3 Months..... \$26.63
- 6 Months..... \$31.95
- 9 Months..... \$42.60
- 12 Months..... \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 19 of 70



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.11.23

31 35 53 54 55 24

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$476,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.12.23

18 36 45 48 51 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,250,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.12.23

12 17 21 31 46 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 20 Mins
DRAW: 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.12.23

5 10 22 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$25,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.12.23

16 19 32 33 41 19

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 49
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.12.23

9 36 41 44 59 4

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$219,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 49
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Chasing Horse's Nevada sex abuse trial on hold indefinitely

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The sexual abuse trial of a “Dances With Wolves” actor charged in Nevada with abusing Indigenous women and girls for more than a decade is on hold indefinitely, a state judge announced Wednesday.

Nathan Chasing Horse, 46, was originally set to stand trial May 1. He is charged with 18 felonies, including sexual assault of a minor, kidnapping, lewdness and child abuse.

Shortly after a grand jury in Las Vegas indicted him in February, Chasing Horse invoked his right to a trial within 60 days. But on Wednesday, his public defender, Kristy Holston, asked to put a pause on proceedings while they ask the Nevada Supreme Court to toss his indictment.

Clark County District Judge Carli Kierny said she would set a new trial date if the high court upholds her recent decision denying Chasing Horse's request to dismiss the case. Chasing Horse and his attorneys argued that two women identified as his victims wanted to have sex with him.

Kierny, in her ruling issued Friday, said state prosecutors presented enough evidence for “a reasonable grand juror to conclude that the sexual assaults occurred.” While Kierny upheld the sexual abuse charges, she dismissed a drug trafficking charge, saying that there was no substantive testimony tying Chasing Horse to the psilocybin mushrooms investigators found while searching his home.

Holston and lead prosecutor Stacy Kollins declined to comment further after the hearing.

Kierny set a new hearing for May 10 to check on the status of Chasing Horse's appeal to the high court, which had yet to be filed on Wednesday.

Chasing Horse was born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and is widely known for his portrayal of Smiles a Lot in Kevin Costner's 1990 film.

But police and prosecutors have said that in the decades since appearing in the Oscar-winning movie, Chasing Horse marketed himself to tribes nationwide as a medicine man with healing powers who could communicate with higher beings. They accuse him of using his position to lead a cult, gain access to vulnerable girls and women, and take underage wives starting in the early 2000s.

Chasing Horse's indictment in state court stems from allegations made by two women — including one who says she was 14 when the sexual abuse began — but court records show authorities have identified at least four other victims in the U.S. and in Canada.

The former actor's arrest on Jan. 31 in Nevada sent shockwaves throughout Indian Country and led to more criminal charges in other jurisdictions, including in Canada and the U.S. District Court in Nevada, as well as on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana.

Chasing Horse is being held on \$300,000 bail at a county jail in Las Vegas. If he posts bail, he likely would be turned over to federal authorities in Nevada.

Judge temporarily blocks clean water rule in 24 states

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A federal judge on Wednesday temporarily blocked a federal rule in 24 states that is intended to protect thousands of small streams, wetlands and other waterways throughout the nation.

U.S. District Judge Daniel L. Hovland in Bismarck, North Dakota, halted the regulations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers pending the outcome of a lawsuit filed by the 24 states, most of which are led by Republicans. The regulations were finalized in December 2022, repealing a rule implemented during President Donald Trump's administration but thrown out by federal courts.

Opponents of the regulations, which define which “waters of the United States” are protected by the Clean Water Act, have called the rules an example of federal overreach and argued they would unfairly

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 21 of 70

burden farmers and ranchers.

The preliminary injunction affects Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. An injunction was previously issued that halted the rules in Texas and Idaho.

In his 45-page order, Hovland wrote that the federal regulation "raises a litany of ... statutory and constitutional concerns and would cause great harm to the states."

"Once again, the courts have affirmed that the Biden administration's WOTUS rule is overreaching and harmful to America's beef farmers and ranchers," said Todd Wilkinson, a South Dakota cattle producer and president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. "Cattle producers in 26 states now have some additional certainty while this rule is being litigated and we are optimistic that the Supreme Court will provide nationwide clarity on the federal government's proper jurisdiction over water."

The EPA said in a statement that the agency and the Army Corps of Engineers were reviewing the decision but still believe the regulations were "the best" interpretation of the Clean Water Act. The agency says its rules would still stand in states not included in the injunction.

"The agencies remain committed to establishing and implementing a durable definition of 'waters of the United States' informed by diverse perspectives," the EPA said in the statement. "Our goal is to protect public health, the environment, and downstream communities while supporting economic opportunity, agriculture, and industries that depend on clean water."

The injunction comes less than a week after President Joe Biden vetoed a congressional resolution that would have overturned the rule. The House and Senate had used the Congressional Review Act to block the regulations, with several Democrats joining Republicans in opposing the regulations.

John Rumpler, clean water program director at Environment America, a national network of state environmental organizations, said the EPA rule blocked by the judge is supported by science and the law and that the judge was misreading the purpose of the Clean Water Act.

"From a favorite stream for fishing to the water flowing from our kitchen sinks, we all depend on clean water to survive and thrive," Rumpler said in a statement. "That is why an overwhelming number of Americans support stronger protections for our waterways."

However, West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey said the key is finding the right balance between powers given to states and the federal government.

"This rule would harm jobs and economic growth by taking jurisdiction from states and asserting federal authority over nearly any body of water, including roadside ditches, short-lived streams and many other areas where water may flow only once every 100 years," Morrisey said.

Court preserves access to abortion pill but tightens rules

By PAUL J. WEBER and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal appeals court preserved access to the abortion pill mifepristone for now but reduced the period of pregnancy when the drug can be used and said it could not be dispensed by mail.

The ruling late Wednesday temporarily narrowed a decision by a lower court judge in Texas that had completely blocked the Food and Drug Administration's approval of the nation's most commonly used method of abortion. The Texas order unsettled abortion providers less than a year after the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* already dramatically curtailed abortion access.

The case may now be headed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mifepristone was approved for use by the FDA more than two decades ago and is used in combination with a second drug, misoprostol.

In a far-reaching ruling last week, a federal judge blocked the FDA's approval of the pill following a lawsuit by the drug's opponents. There is virtually no precedent for a lone judge overturning the regulator's medical recommendations.

The ruling was put on pause to allow an appeal.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 22 of 70

Just before midnight Wednesday, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans ruled that the FDA's initial approval of mifepristone in 2000 could remain in effect.

But in the 2-1 vote, the panel of judges put on hold changes made by the regulator since 2016 that relaxed the rules for prescribing and dispensing mifepristone. Those included extending the period of pregnancy when the drug can be used from seven weeks to 10, and also allowing it to be dispensed by mail, without any need to visit a doctor's office.

The two judges who voted to tighten restrictions, Kurt Engelhardt and Andrew Oldham, are both appointees of former President Donald Trump. The third judge, Catharina Haynes, is an appointee of former President George W. Bush. She said she would have put the lower court ruling on hold entirely for now to allow oral arguments in the case.

Either side, or both, could take the case to the Supreme Court. Opponents of the drug could seek to keep the full lower court ruling in effect. The Biden administration, meanwhile, could ask the high court to allow all the FDA changes to remain in place while the case continues to play out.

The appeals court judges in the majority noted that the Biden administration and mifepristone's manufacturer "warn us of significant public consequences" that would result if mifepristone were withdrawn entirely from the market under the lower court ruling.

But the judges suggested changes the FDA made making mifepristone easier to obtain since 2016 were less consequential than its initial approval of the drug in 2000. It would be "difficult" to argue the changes were "so critical to the public given that the nation operated — and mifepristone was administered to millions of women — without them for sixteen years" the judges wrote.

When the drug was initially approved in 2000, the FDA limited its use to up to seven weeks of pregnancy. It also required three in-person office visits: the first to administer mifepristone, the next to administer the second drug misoprostol and the third to address any complications. It also required a doctor's supervision and a reporting system for any serious consequences associated with the drug.

If the appeals court's action stands, those would again be the terms under which mifepristone could be dispensed for now.

Democratic leaders in states where abortion remains legal since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year say they are preparing in case mifepristone becomes restricted.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said Tuesday that her state would stockpile 150,000 doses of misoprostol.

Pharmaceutical executives this week also signed a letter that condemned the Texas ruling and warned that FDA approval of other drugs could be at risk if U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk's decision stands.

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

Mifepristone has been used by millions of women over the past 23 years, and complications from mifepristone occur at a lower rate than problems in wisdom teeth removal, colonoscopies and other routine procedures, medical groups have recently noted.

Gresko reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Mark Sherman also contributed from Washington.

Haven't filed taxes yet? Don't panic. Here's what to know

By ADRIANA MORGA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The deadline to file your taxes is Tuesday, which is just around the corner. Filing U.S. tax returns — especially for the first time — can seem like a daunting task, but there are steps you can take to make it less stressful.

Whether you do your taxes yourself, go to a tax clinic or hire a professional, navigating the tax system can be complicated and stressful. Courtney Alev, a consumer financial advocate for Credit Karma, recom-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 23 of 70

mends you go easy on yourself.

"Take a breath. Take some time, set out an hour, or go through it over the weekend. You'll hopefully see that it's a lot simpler than you think," Alev said.

If you find the process too confusing, there are plenty of free resources to help you get through it.

If you are worried that you might not have enough time to file your taxes before the deadline, you can file for an extension, though it's not ideal (more on that below.)

Here's what you need to know:

WHEN IS THE DEADLINE TO FILE TAXES?

Taxpayers have until Tuesday to submit their returns from 2022.

WHAT DO I NEED TO FILE MY TAX RETURN?

While the required documents might depend on your individual case, here is a general list of what everyone needs:

- Social Security number
- W-2 forms, if you are employed
- 1099-G, if you are unemployed
- 1099 forms, if you are self-employed
- Savings and investment records
- Any eligible deduction, such as educational expenses, medical bills, charitable donations, etc.
- Tax credits, such as child tax credit, retirement savings contributions credit, etc.

To find a more detailed document list, visit the IRS website.

Tom O'Saben, director of tax content and government relations at the National Association of Tax Professionals, recommends gathering all of your documents in one place before you start your tax return and also having your documents from last year if your financial situation has drastically changed.

Theresa Grover, site coordinator for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, also recommends taxpayers create an identity protection PIN number with the IRS to guard against identity theft. Once you create a number, the IRS will require it to file your tax return.

HOW DO I FILE MY TAXES?

You can either file your taxes online or on paper. However, there is a big time difference between the two options. Paper filing can take up to six months for the IRS to process, while electronic filing cuts it down to three weeks.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE OUT THERE?

For those who make \$73,000 or less per year, the IRS offers free guided tax preparation that does the math for you. If you have questions while working on your tax forms, the IRS also offers an interactive tax assistant tool that can provide answers based on your information.

Beyond the popular companies such as TurboTax and H&R Block, taxpayers can also hire licensed professionals, such as certified public accountants. The IRS offers a directory of tax preparers across the United States.

The IRS also funds two types of programs that offer free tax help: VITA and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly program (TCE). People who earn \$60,000 or less a year, have disabilities or are limited English speakers, qualify for the VITA program. Those who are 60 or older, qualify for the TCE program. The IRS has a site for locating organizations hosting VITA and TCE clinics.

If you have a tax problem, there are clinics around the country that can help you resolve these issues. Generally, these tax clinics also offer services in other languages such as Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.

HOW CAN I AVOID MISTAKES IN MY TAX RETURN?

Many people fear getting in trouble with the IRS if they make a mistake. Here's how to avoid some of the most common ones:

- Double check your name on your Social Security card.

When working with clients, O'Saben always asks them to bring their Social Security card to double-check their number and their legal name, which can change when when people get married.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 24 of 70

"You may have changed your name but you didn't change it with Social Security," O'Saben said. "If the Social Security number doesn't match to the first four letters of the last name, the return will be rejected and that will delay processing."

— Search for tax statements if you have opted out of paper mail.

Many people like to opt out of snail mail, but paper mail can also include your tax documents.

"If you didn't get anything in the mail doesn't mean that there isn't an information document out there that you need to be aware of and report accordingly," O'Saben said.

— Make sure you report all of your income.

If you had more than one job in 2022, you need the W-2 forms for each — not just the one from the job you ended the year with, says Christina Wease, interim director of the tax clinic at Michigan State University.

Additionally, if you have a business that uses PayPal or Venmo as a service, it must be reported in your tax return. For 2022, the use of those services needs to be reported if they amounted to 200 transactions in the calendar year and more than \$20,000 in sales from goods or services.

WHAT IF I MAKE A MISTAKE?

Mistakes happen, and the IRS takes different approaches depending on each case. In general, if you make a mistake or you're missing something in your tax records, the IRS will audit you, Alev said. An audit means that the IRS will ask you for more documentation.

"Generally, they are very understanding and willing to work with folks. You're not going to get arrested if you type in the wrong field," Alev said.

WHAT IF I NEED AN EXTENSION?

If you run out of time to file your tax return, you can file for an extension. However, it is important to remember that the extension is only to file your taxes, not to pay them. If you owe taxes, you should pay an estimated amount before the deadline so you avoid paying penalties and interest. If you expect to receive a refund, you will still receive your money when you file your taxes.

The deadline to file for an extension is Tuesday, which will give you until Oct. 16 to file your taxes. You can file for an extension through your tax software or preparer of preference, the IRS Free File tool or via mail.

WHAT IF I MISS THE TAX DEADLINE?

If you missed the tax deadline and you didn't file for an extension, there are several penalties that you might receive. If you missed the deadline you might receive a failure-to-file penalty. This penalty will be 5% of the unpaid taxes for each month the tax return is late, according to the IRS.

If you owe taxes and you didn't pay them prior to the tax deadline, you will receive a failure-to-pay penalty. Interest will also be charged on both taxes and penalties owed. If you are due for a refund, you will not receive a penalty and you will receive your tax return payment. If you had special circumstances that meant you were unable to file or pay your taxes on time, you might be able to remove or reduce your penalty.

If the amount of taxes you owe becomes too large, you can apply for a payment plan. Payment plans will allow you to pay off over time.

WHAT IF I HAVEN'T FILED FOR YEARS?

Wease explains that you can file taxes late and, if you were supposed to get a refund, you might still get it. If you haven't filed for years and you owe money to the IRS, you may be hit with penalties but the agency will can work with you to manage payment plans.

HOW CAN I AVOID SCAMS?

Tax season is prime time for tax scams, according to the IRS. These scams can come via phone, text, email and social media. The IRS uses none of those means to contact taxpayers.

Sometimes scams are even operated by tax preparers so it's important to ask lots of questions. If a tax preparer says you will get a refund that is larger than what you've received in previous years, for example, that may be a red flag, O'Saben said.

If you can't see what your tax preparer is working on, get a copy of the tax return and ask questions

about each of the entries.

HOW LONG SHOULD I KEEP COPIES OF MY TAX RETURNS?

It's always good practice to keep a record of your tax returns, just in case the IRS audits you for an item you reported years ago. Both Wease and O'Saben recommend keeping copies of your tax return documents for up to seven years.

Follow all of AP's financial wellness coverage at: <https://apnews.com/hub/financial-wellness>

The Associated Press receives support from Charles Schwab Foundation for educational and explanatory reporting to improve financial literacy. The independent foundation is separate from Charles Schwab and Co. Inc. The AP is solely responsible for its journalism.

N. Korea fires missile that may have been new type of weapon

By HYUNG-JIN KIM, KIM TONG-HYUNG and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Thursday conducted its first intercontinental ballistic missile launch in a month, possibly testing a new more mobile, harder-to-detect missile for the first time, its neighbors said, as it extends its provocative run of weapons tests.

Japan briefly urged residents on a northern island to take shelter in an indication of its vigilance over North Korea's evolving missile threats.

The missile was launched on a high angle from near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang and fell in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan following a 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) flight, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staffs said in a statement.

It described its range as medium or longer. The U.S. National Security Council called it a long-range missile and Japan's government said it likely had an intercontinental range.

South Korea's military believes North Korea launched a new type of ballistic missile, possibly using solid fuel, a defense official said under the condition of anonymity because of office rules.

If the launch involved a solid-fuel ICBM, it would be the North's first test of such a weapon. North Korea's known ICBMs all use liquid propellants that must be fueled before launches. But the fuel in a solid-propellant weapon is already loaded, allowing it to be moved easier and fired faster.

A solid-fuel ICBM is one of the key high-tech weapons that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to build to better cope with what he calls U.S. military threats. He also wants a multiwarhead missile, a nuclear-powered submarine, a hypersonic missile and a spy satellite.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said the launch may have involved a new intermediate- or long-range missile powered by solid propellants, or be linked to North Korean preparation to launch a spy satellite.

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson said the latest launch "needlessly raises tensions and risks destabilizing the security situation in the region." Watson said the United States will take all necessary measures to ensure the security of the American homeland and South Korean and Japanese allies.

During an emergency meeting of Seoul's National Security Council, officials stressed the need to tighten three-way security cooperation with Washington and Tokyo. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a meeting of his NSC to analyze the launch and Japan's response.

The nuclear envoys of Seoul, Washington and Tokyo held a telephone conversation where they called for a "decisive and united international response" to North Korean provocations and stronger efforts to stem illicit North Korean funding of its weapons program.

North Korea commonly test-launches missiles toward the international waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, using elevated trajectories to avoid neighboring countries. South Korea and Japan typically don't issue evacuation orders unless they determine the North Korean weapon is flying in their direction.

Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada told reporters the North Korean missile launched Thursday

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 26 of 70

did not reach Japan's exclusive economic zone. But Japanese authorities still urged people on the northernmost island of Hokkaido to seek shelter and temporarily suspended train, bus and subway services there. Local communities also activated alert sirens through community speakers, urging people to evacuate.

The government then retracted its missile alert, saying there was no possibility of the missile landing near Hokkaido. Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters the alert was based on the Japanese Defense Ministry's early assessment of the missile's path and was an "appropriate" step to prioritize people's safety.

Japanese authorities issued a similar evacuation order in October when a North Korean intermediate-range missile flew over Japan in a launch that demonstrated the weapon's potential to reach the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam.

Thursday's launch was the North's first long-range missile firing since the country tested its longest-range, liquid-fueled Hwasong-17 ICBM on March 16. Kim Jong Un reviewed his country's attack plans Monday and vowed to enhance his nuclear arsenal in more "practical and offensive" ways.

North Korea has launched about 100 missiles since the start of 2022, many of them nuclear-capable weapons that place the U.S. mainland, South Korea or Japan within striking distance.

The North's testing spree is largely in protest of South Korean-U.S. military drills that it views as a rehearsal for an invasion. Some observers say North Korea uses its rivals' drills as a pretext to modernize its weapons arsenal and pressure Washington and Seoul to make concessions such as the lifting of economic sanctions. South Korean and U.S. officials say their drills are defensive in nature and were arranged to respond to North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats.

Later Thursday, China, North Korea's last major ally, reiterated its blame for the heightened animosities on the U.S. and South Korea.

"The negative impact of the U.S. military exercises and strategic weapons deployed around the peninsula a few days ago is obvious to all," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said in a briefing.

North Korea unveiled a new type of nuclear warhead in late March, raising concerns it could conduct its first nuclear test in more than five years. Foreign experts debate whether North Korea has developed warheads small and light enough to fit on its more advanced missiles.

South Korean officials say North Korea has not been responding to South Korean calls on a set of cross-border inter-Korean hotlines for about a week. Communications on those channels are meant to prevent accidental clashes along the rivals' disputed western sea boundary.

On Tuesday, South Korean Unification Minister Kwon Youngse expressed "strong regret" over what he called North Korea's "unilateral and irresponsible attitude" over the hotlines.

North Korea's advancing nuclear arsenal is expected to be a major topic during a summit between South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and U.S. President Joe Biden later this month in Washington.

Experts say the discussions between world leaders at Japan's Group of Seven meetings in May could be crucial for maintaining diplomatic pressure on North Korea. U.N. Security Council permanent members China and Russia have blocked tighter sanctions on North Korea in recent months, underscoring a divide deepened by Russia's war on Ukraine.

Yamaguchi reported from Tokyo.

Expelled to reinstated: Pearson to return to Tennessee House

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The second of two Black Democrats expelled from the Republican-led Tennessee House will follow his colleague in a return to work at the Capitol on Thursday, a week after their banishments for a gun control protest on the House floor that propelled them into the national spotlight.

Justin Pearson was easily reappointed to his position by Shelby County commissioners Wednesday, and delivered a speech like a fiery pastor to a throng of jubilant supporters outside in a churchlike celebration. The Memphis lawmaker plans to be sworn in outside the Capitol on Thursday before returning for the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 27 of 70

House floor session that morning.

Republicans expelled Pearson and Rep. Justin Jones last week over their role in a gun control protest on the House floor after a Nashville school shooting that left three children and three adults dead.

The appointments are interim and special elections for the seats will take place in the coming months. Jones and Pearson have said they plan to run.

The House's vote to remove Pearson and Jones but keep white Rep. Gloria Johnson drew accusations of racism. Johnson survived by one vote. Republican leadership denied that race was a factor, however, and noted that Johnson's role in the protest didn't involve some steps that Jones and Pearson took, including speaking into a bullhorn.

On Monday, the Nashville Metropolitan Council took only a few minutes to unanimously restore Jones to office. He was quickly reinstated to his House seat the same day.

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

Political tensions rose when Pearson, Johnson and Jones, from the House floor, joined with hundreds of demonstrators who packed the Capitol last month to call for passage of gun control measures.

As protesters filled the 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. Their participation from the front of the chamber broke House rules because the three did not have permission from the House speaker.

In Tennessee, Republican lawmakers have been more supportive of the idea to strengthen school safety than to address gun control as they prepare to finish their work in the coming weeks.

Republican Gov. Bill Lee has avoided commenting on the lawmakers' expulsion and instead said the controversy was an issue concerning the House. He has since called on the General Assembly to pass legislation that would keep dangerous people from acquiring weapons.

Destructive cyclone forecast to hit northwest Australia

By ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — A tropical cyclone is expected to intensify to the most destructive category before it crosses the northwest Australian coast with winds gusting at more than 280 kph (170 mph), meteorologists said Thursday.

Cyclones are common along the sparsely populated Pilbara coast of Western Australia state and fatalities are rare, but authorities fear that Cyclone Ilsa's extraordinary wind speeds could take some in its path by surprise.

Ilsa reached Category 4 intensity Thursday over the Indian Ocean and is expected to strengthen to the maximum destructive category on a five-tier scale before it crosses the Pilbara coast by early Friday, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said.

Category 5 cyclones have a maximum mean wind speed exceeding 200 kph (124 mph) with gusts exceeding 280 kph (174 mph). They typically cause widespread destruction, the bureau said.

The last Category 5 storm to cross the Australian coast was Cyclone Yasi in 2011. Yasi caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage in the east coast state of Queensland. The only death blamed on the disaster was a man killed by exhaust fumes from a electricity generator he had used in a confined space.

In 2019, Cyclone Veronica did not cross the Pilbara coast, but damaged infrastructure and disrupted the region's mining and offshore gas industries.

Ilsa is expected to cross the coast somewhere in a 220-km (137-mile) span between the iron ore export town of Port Hedland and Wallal Downs Station, a 200,000-hectare (500,000-acre) cattle ranch to the east.

Those close to where Ilsa makes landfall would experience gusts of up to 285 kph (177 mph), the bureau said.

On Thursday, police closed the highway along the Pilbara coast between Port Hedland and the tourist

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 28 of 70

town of Broome, 610 km (380 miles) to the northeast, to prevent motorists from risking the worsening conditions. Authorities expect the North West Coastal Highway will be impassable due to flooding before Ilsa passes.

Port Hedland and Broome are the largest population centers in the Pilbara region with 16,000 and 15,000 people.

Bidyadanga, home to around 700 people midway between Wallal Downs Station and Broome, stocked enough food and fuel by Thursday to last a week in case the community is isolated by floodwater. Bidyadanga CEO Tania Baxter said maintaining the community's electricity would be critical to how they weathered the storm.

"Without power, we haven't got water and possibly even communications," Baxter said. "So if we can maintain power supply, then we'll be fine. We'll manage everything else that comes with it and any damage that comes."

Many in the cyclone's path have evacuated in recent days. In Port Hedland, from which the world's largest bulk export port sends Australian iron ore around the globe, evacuation centers had opened to people whose homes might not withstand the storm, said mayor Peter Carter.

"Everyone is on edge," Carter said. "They understand that cyclones are what they are. They're very, very unpredictable."

Long-term Port Hedland resident Julie Arif, who has experienced several cyclones, said she was concerned for those in Ilsa's path.

"They'll be prepared and riding it out. But it is still terrifying, absolutely terrifying," Arif said. "When you're inside in a house and there's just the roar of the wind outside and thumping and banging and crashing. And cyclones happen at nighttime. You don't know what it is and it's frightening."

The bureau warned of damaging winds, flooding rain and abnormally high tides along the Pilbara coast as Ilsa passes.

Many people in the Pilbara region are involved in the mining and cattle industry or are tourists taking advantage of the school vacation period that began this week.

Holy Land Christians say attacks rising in far-right Israel

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The head of the Roman Catholic Church in the Holy Land has warned in an interview that the rise of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government has made life worse for Christians in the birthplace of Christianity.

The influential Vatican-appointed Latin Patriarch, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, told The Associated Press that the region's 2,000-year-old Christian community has come under increasing attack, with the most right-wing government in Israel's history emboldening extremists who have harassed clergy and vandalized religious property at a quickening pace.

The uptick in anti-Christian incidents comes as the Israeli settler movement, galvanized by its allies in government, appears to have seized the moment to expand its enterprise in the contested capital.

"The frequency of these attacks, the aggressions, has become something new," Pizzaballa said during Easter week from his office, tucked in the limestone passageways of the Old City's Christian Quarter. "These people feel they are protected ... that the cultural and political atmosphere now can justify, or tolerate, actions against Christians."

Pizzaballa's concerns appear to undercut Israel's stated commitment to freedom of worship, enshrined in the declaration that marked its founding 75 years ago. The Israeli government stressed it prioritizes religious freedom and relations with the churches, which have powerful links abroad.

"Israel's commitment to freedom of religion has been important to us forever," said Tania Berg-Rafaeli, the director of the world religions department at the Israeli Foreign Ministry. "It's the case for all religions and all minorities that have free access to holy sites."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 29 of 70

But Christians say they feel authorities don't protect their sites from targeted attacks. And tensions have surged after an Israeli police raid on the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque compound set off outrage among Muslims, and a regional confrontation last week.

For Christians, Jerusalem is where Jesus was crucified and resurrected. For Jews, it's the ancient capital, home to two biblical Jewish temples. For Muslims, it's where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven.

The scorn heaped upon minority Christians is nothing new in the teeming Old City, a crucible of tension that the Israeli government annexed in 1967. Many Christians feel squeezed between Jews and Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians.

But now Netanyahu's far-right government includes settler leaders in key roles — such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who holds criminal convictions from 2007 for incitement of anti-Arab racism and support for a Jewish militant group.

Their influence has empowered Israeli settlers seeking to entrench Jewish control of the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, alarming church leaders who see such efforts — including government plans to create a national park on the Mount of Olives — as a threat to the Christian presence in the holy city. Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their hoped-for state.

"The right-wing elements are out to Judaize the Old City and the other lands, and we feel nothing is holding them back now," said Father Don Binder, a pastor at St. George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem. "Churches have been the major stumbling block."

The roughly 15,000 Christians in Jerusalem today, the majority of them Palestinians, were once 27,000 — before hardships that followed the 1967 Mideast war spurred many in the traditionally prosperous group to emigrate.

Now, 2023 is shaping up to be the worst year for Christians in a decade, according to Yusef Daher from the Inter-Church Center, a group that coordinates between the denominations.

Physical assaults and harassment of clergy often go unreported, the center said. It has documented at least seven serious cases of vandalism of church properties from January to mid-March — a sharp increase from six anti-Christian cases recorded in all of 2022. Church leaders blame Israeli extremists for most of the incidents, and say they fear an even greater surge.

"This escalation will bring more and more violence," Pizzaballa said. "It will create a situation that will be very difficult to correct."

In March, a pair of Israelis burst into the basilica beside the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Virgin Mary is said to have been buried. They pounced on a priest with a metal rod before being arrested.

In February, a religious American Jew yanked a 10-foot rendering of Christ from its pedestal and smashed it onto the floor, striking its face with a hammer a dozen times at the Church of the Flagellation on the Via Dolorosa, along which it's believed Jesus hauled his cross toward his crucifixion. "No idols in the holy city of Jerusalem!" he yelled.

Armenians found hateful graffiti on the walls of their convent. Priests of all denominations say they've been stalked, spat on and beaten during their walks to church. In January, religious Jews knocked over and vandalized 30 graves marked with stone crosses at a historic Christian cemetery in the city. Two teenagers were arrested and charged with causing damage and insulting religion.

But Christians allege that Israeli police haven't taken most attacks seriously. In one case, 25-year-old George Kahkejian said he was the one beaten, arrested and detained for 17 hours after a mob of Jewish settlers scaled his Armenian Christian convent to tear down its flag earlier this year. The police had no immediate comment.

"We see that most incidents in our quarter have gone unpunished," complained Father Aghan Gogchian, chancellor of the Armenian Patriarchate. He expressed disappointment with how authorities frequently insist cases of desecration and harassment hinge not on religious hatred but on mental illness.

The Israeli police said they have "thoroughly investigated (incidents) regardless of background or religion" and made "speedy arrests." The Jerusalem municipality is boosting security at upcoming Orthodox Easter processions and creating a new police department to handle religiously motivated threats, said Jerusalem deputy mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 30 of 70

Most top Israeli officials have stayed quiet on the vandalism, while government moves — including the introduction of a law criminalizing Christian proselytizing and the promotion of plans to turn the Mount of Olives into a national park — have stoked outrage in the Holy Land and beyond.

Netanyahu vowed to block the bill from moving forward, following pressure from outraged evangelical Christians in the United States. Among the strongest backers of Israel, evangelicals view a Jewish state as the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy.

Meanwhile Jerusalem officials confirmed that they're pressing on with the contentious zoning plan for the Mount of Olives — a holy pilgrimage site with some dozen historic churches. Christian leaders fear the park could stem their growth and encroach on their lands. Jewish settlements home to over 200,000 Israelis already encircle the Old City.

The Israeli National Parks Authority promised buy-in from churches and said it hopes the park will "preserve valuable areas as open areas."

Pizzaballa pushed back. "It's a kind of confiscation," he said.

Simmering tensions in the community came to a head over Orthodox Easter rituals as Israeli police announced strict quotas on the thousands of pilgrims seeking to attend the rite of the "Holy Fire" at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Citing safety concerns over lit torches being thrust through massive crowds in the church, authorities capped Saturday's ceremony at 1,800 people. Priests who saw police open gates wide for Jews celebrating Passover, which coincided this year with Easter, alleged religious discrimination on Wednesday.

These days, Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem said he struggles for answers when his congregants ask why they should even bear the bitter price of living in the Holy Land.

"There are things that make us worry about our very existence," he said. "But without hope, more and more of us will leave."

Associated Press writer Maria Grazia Murru in Rome contributed to this report.

Can France's constitutional body halt disputed pension bill?

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — French unions are staging new nationwide protests Thursday, on the eve of an expected ruling by a top constitutional body that they hope will derail President Emmanuel Macron's unpopular pension reform plan.

If the Constitutional Council greenlights the reform, the bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 can enter into force. Yet the body has the power to reject the text, fully or partially. Here's a look at what's at stake ahead of Friday's decision.

WHAT'S THE CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL?

The body's role is to make sure a law is in line with France's Constitution prior to enactment.

In this case, it comes after Macron's centrist government forced the pension bill through parliament without a vote, using a special constitutional power.

The council is currently composed of three women and six men aged between 64 and 77, and is headed by former Socialist Prime Minister Laurent Fabius. Most members are centrists and conservatives, including two named by Macron. The council's discussions and votes are not made public.

Anne Levade, professor of public law at Paris university, said the ruling will be on strictly legal grounds. "The Constitutional Council won't say if the pension reform is right or wrong, if it is politically in favor or against it," she said. "The argument that will be made will be a legal reasoning."

POTENTIAL SCENARIOS

Opponents challenged the government's choice to include the pension plan in a budget bill, which significantly accelerated the legislative process, arguing it should have been a regular bill instead. They hope it will provide grounds for the Constitutional Council to reject the text as a whole.

Most likely, the council will approve the biggest part of the bill while rejecting some of its articles — the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 31 of 70

body often rejects measures which have an insufficient link with the main purpose of the text, in this case social security financing.

The age measure in that perspective appears in line with a budget bill, experts said.

Rejecting a bill as a whole is "a very rare option," Levade said, noting that only five such decisions have been made since 1959.

Political scientist Benjamin Morel said such a scenario would mean that "the bill disappears ... because the procedure that has been used (to pass it) would be considered as wrong."

"We don't really know whether a pension reform can go through a social security budget bill," Morel added. "It doesn't seem the natural way (of doing it). But there's nothing ruling it out in the Constitution."

A LONG SHOT AT A REFERENDUM

Legislators opposing the pension reforms have also filed a request to start a lengthy process that could ultimately lead to a referendum on a proposal for the legal retirement age not to exceed 62.

The Constitutional Council on Friday is also expected to rule on whether that proposal meets the conditions provided by law. If so, opponents to Macron's pension plan will have a nine-month period to register at least 4.8 million signatures — or 10% of voters.

Still, it doesn't mean the proposal would automatically be put to referendum, Levade stressed. Macron's government would instead be able to send it for debate at parliament. A nationwide vote would be organized only if it's not examined by legislators.

In any case, Friday's ruling on the referendum issue would not suspend the pension bill.

WHAT'S NEXT ?

If the Constitutional Council gives its green light, Macron will be able to enact the bill within 15 days — except for any measures that are rejected.

Macron said last month he wants pension reform to be implemented by the end of the year. Some political observers suggest he could try to appease critics with a government reshuffle in the coming weeks or months.

Meanwhile, unions have vowed to continue their strikes and protests until the withdrawal of the pension plan.

They have in mind the big protests of 2006 against the creation of special contracts to more easily hire and fire people under 26. That law was withdrawn just after being enacted, under pressure of strong public opposition.

On the other hand, previous pension reforms that prompted massive protests in 2010 were still implemented.

New India-born World Bank chief: Real change or rebranding?

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — The incoming president of the World Bank was born in India and forged his early business success there, a fact supporters say gives Ajay Banga valuable insight into the challenges faced by the developing countries the bank is supposed to help.

But not everyone is sure that Banga, who has spent most of the last two decades in the U.S. corporate world, can be counted on to shake up the bank in the way some think it should be.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen talked up Banga's credentials this week on the sidelines of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's spring meetings in Washington. Banga, currently vice chairman at private equity firm General Atlantic, has more than 30 years of business experience, including as CEO of Mastercard and on the boards of the American Red Cross, Kraft Foods and Dow Inc.

"He has the right leadership and management skills, background, and financial expertise to lead the World Bank at a critical moment in its history," Yellen said.

That came after President Joe Biden, in nominating Banga in February, heralded his "critical experience" dealing with urgent world challenges like climate change, even though his resume shows little to do with climate credentials.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 32 of 70

The World Bank — the world's largest and oldest development bank — includes 189 member countries with a mission to reduce poverty and build prosperity in the developing world. The threat of climate change is a major focus, with the bank billing itself as the largest financier of climate action in developing countries.

But leaders and activists from poorer nations, especially those vulnerable to the extreme weather made worse by climate change, have called for massive reforms in the entire multinational development bank system. Led by Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley and embraced by French President Emmanuel Macron, they have pushed something called the Bridgetown Initiative, which would make it easier and faster for developing countries hit by weather disasters to get money with lower interest rates for both recovery and for building to be more resilient.

Banga will replace David Malpass, a Donald Trump appointee who announced he would step down this June, a year early, after coming under pressure for declining to say whether he agreed with scientific consensus on climate change.

Climate finance analysts are relieved that Banga at least believes climate change is caused by fossil fuels. But many are skeptical that his experience — which includes stints at Nestle, Pizza Hut and Mastercard — is a natural fit for climate finance. And while he comes from a climate-stressed state in India, a nation that's simultaneously battling growing energy demands and climate change effects, his long career in America adds to their wait-and-see attitude.

Anit Mukherjee, a senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, a think tank devoted to India's global development, called Banga's ascension "a proud moment for India."

"Growing up in India, Banga will likely understand the issues developing countries face. It is also clear he understands markets around the world," said Mukherjee, who has worked closely on reforming multilateral development banks. "Whether he will understand the challenges of climate financing and development is still unclear."

Harjeet Singh, head of global political strategy at Climate Action Network International, called Malpass's departure a historic opportunity to "change the system." But Banga is just old wine in a new bottle, Singh said.

"He has worked in corporations whose prime motive is profit. When it comes to development, especially climate change, it is about justice and equity," said Singh. Banga's background "doesn't inspire confidence," he said.

"We are facing multiple crises including climate change, the debt crisis, and the banking crisis. We cannot continue with the same systems that are responsible for these crises," said Singh.

Luiz Viera, coordinator of the Bretton Woods Project, which watchdogs the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, lamented as unfair the tradition by which the U.S. typically appoints the World Bank head and Europe appoints the IMF head. Banga "doesn't even meet the bare bones criteria," he said.

The son of an Indian army officer, Banga was born in 1959 and educated in some of India's premier institutions. When India's economy liberalized in the early '90s, Banga was able to work and rise through the ranks of multinational corporations breaking into India.

Since moving to the U.S. in the early 2000s, Banga has held prestigious positions in the corporate world, including heading Mastercard and serving as director of Exor and Temasek, large holding companies whose portfolios are diverse and include media companies such as Mediacorp and the Economist as well as automobile companies like Ferrari.

"Appointing someone like Banga is a great way to open the conversation with developing countries," said Suranjali Tandon, an assistant professor at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, a research institute affiliated to the Indian government.

But Tandon wondered whether Banga will be able or willing to drastically change how the World Bank works.

"His private sector experience makes him well versed with taking high risks and getting high returns," she said.

"Development finance, especially climate finance though, is about high risk and low return investments.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 33 of 70

Given this, I don't see the World Bank radically transforming under his leadership."

Fatima Hussein and Seth Borenstein in Washington, D.C., contributed to this report.

Follow Sibi Arasu on Twitter at @sibi123

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Brazil's Lula in Shanghai on visit to boost ties with China

BEIJING (AP) — Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was in the Chinese financial hub of Shanghai on Thursday as he looks to boost ties with the South American giant's biggest trade partner and win political support for attempts to mediate the conflict in Ukraine.

Lula arrived late Wednesday and is due to meet with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Beijing on Friday before concluding his visit on Saturday.

The Brazilian government says the sides are expected to sign at least 20 bilateral agreements during Lula's trip, underscoring the improvement in relations following a rocky patch under predecessor Jair Bolsonaro.

In Shanghai, Lula will also attend the official swearing in of close adviser and former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff as head of the Chinese-backed New Development Bank.

The institution posits itself as an alternative to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that are controlled mainly by the U.S. and its Western allies. It is focused on the so-called BRICS group of developing nations made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Established more than seven years ago, the bank has approved 99 loan projects totaling more than \$34 billion, mainly for infrastructure projects, according to China's Foreign Ministry.

Much of that credit has gone to Brazil for projects such as a metro system in the business capital of Sao Paulo.

During his meeting with Xi, Lula is expected to discuss trade, investment, reindustrialization, energy transition, climate change and peace agreements, according to the Brazilian government.

China is Brazil's biggest export market, each year buying tens of billions of dollars worth of soybeans, beef, iron ore, poultry, pulp, sugar cane, cotton and crude oil. Brazil is the biggest recipient of Chinese investment in Latin America, according to Chinese state media, although Lula has spoken against outright Chinese ownership of Brazilian companies.

One of the agreements Lula will sign in China will be for construction of the sixth satellite built under a binational program that will monitor biomes such as the Amazon rainforest.

China also recently ended a ban on Brazilian beef imposed in February following the discovery of an atypical case of mad cow disease.

Politically, the left-leaning Lula's visit is a sign of Brazil's reemergence in global relations since he replaced Bolsonaro in January.

The often-abrasive right-wing populist and members of his family at times caused friction with Chinese authorities on issues from the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic to controversial telecommunications company Huawei. Bolsonaro was a noted admirer of right-wing nationalists and showed little interest in international affairs or travel abroad.

Lula, who will visit a Huawei research center in Shanghai on Thursday, made trips to Argentina and Uruguay in January and the U.S. in February, signaling the importance he gives to international affairs, experts said. He toured the world during his first presidency from 2003-2010, particularly in his second term, when he visited dozens of countries, and has visited China twice before.

A key piece of Lula's outreach abroad is his proposal that Brazil and other developing countries, including China, mediate peace over Ukraine. However, his suggestion that Ukraine cede Crimea as a means to forge peace has angered Kyiv and its closest backers.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 34 of 70

China has also sought to play a role in ending the conflict, though in a manner highly supportive of Moscow. It has refused to condemn the invasion, criticized economic sanctions on Russia and accused the U.S. and NATO of provoking the conflict.

Russia and China declared a "no limits" relationship in a joint statement last year and Xi reaffirmed the closeness of ties by meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow last month.

A Chinese peace proposal presented in February contains aspects in common with Lula's, such as ceasing hostilities and starting negotiations, but says nothing about the return of Ukrainian territory seized by Russia and its separatist allies.

In new book, Murakami explores walled city and shadows

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Haruki Murakami wrote a story of a walled city when he was fresh off his debut. More than four decades later, as a seasoned and acclaimed novelist, he gave it a new life as "The City and Its Uncertain Walls."

It was three years ago when he felt the time had come to revisit the story that he thought was imperfect but had important elements, such as the wall and the shadow, and tackle them again based on what he was feeling on his skin.

"Because of the coronavirus ... I hardly went out and stayed home most of the time, and I tended to look at my inner self. Then I thought, perhaps it's time to write that story," Murakami said. And he did, "as if recovering it from the back of a drawer."

He started writing it in January 2020 and finished in December 2022, years that overlapped with multiple earthshattering events. "When I write a novel, I just know it's time," he said.

There were also Russia's war on Ukraine, shaken globalism and the Pandora's box of social media, Murakami noted.

"In an age when society is going through rattling changes, whether to stay holed up inside the wall or to go to the other side of the wall has become a greater proposition than ever," Murakami said in an interview ahead of the book release in Tokyo with selected journalists including The Associated Press.

"The City and Its Uncertain Walls" was released Thursday in print and in digital formats by Shinchosha Publishing Co. The availability of an English translation is not yet known. It's his first novel since the 2017 bestseller, "Killing Commendatore."

Murakami wasn't in Japan when the book was released. He has been holding seminars about female protagonists in his stories at Wellesley College, the women's school in Massachusetts once attended by former U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and late Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Initially, Murakami's intention was to rewrite the 1980 story "The City, and Its Uncertain Walls" to improve it. But the story didn't end there, and Murakami kept writing. The version published in the "Bungakukai" literary magazine was rewritten, then became the first chapter of what turned into a three-part, 672-page novel.

In Part 2, the protagonist gets a job as head of a library in a small town in Fukushima, where he meets his mysterious predecessor and a teenage boy as the story leads up to the final section.

Dozens of enthusiasts of Murakami novels celebrated the release of his new book outside a landmark bookstore in downtown Tokyo at a midnight countdown event Wednesday, and many who didn't make it showed up for a special early morning sale Thursday.

"I'm so excited," said Kaori Otoh, a longtime fan of Murakami's work, as she gently held her new purchase. "I have to fight my temptation of reading the book at work." Kotaro Watanabe, 32, said he planned to read all night at a café with his friends. He has read the two previous stories of the walled city and said: "I really look forward to finding out how this story ends differently."

Going to the other side of the wall requires determination, belief and physical strength, Murakami says. "You have to squeeze out all your might, or you can't go to the other side of the world."

His stories are "by no means pessimistic," he says. "Despite many bizarre things and a dark side, my

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 35 of 70

stories are fundamentally positive," he said. "I think stories must be positive."

In some of his earlier stories, protagonists travel between two worlds, through a wall, a well or a cave.

"I think that sliding through a wall, a process that involves going to the other side of the world and coming back from there, is an extremely important step," Murakami said.

There are many kinds of walls — between conscious and unconscious, real and unreal, and the physical walls that separate societies, like what used to stand in Berlin and the barriers between Israel and the Palestinian territories, he said.

He kept thinking about the meaning of the wall in this story while writing it, Murakami said. Walls can carry different meanings and purpose, depending on who are inside, he said.

Equally important to Murakami and his stories is the shadow. He says the shadow is a form of his subconscious, or an alter ego, which resembles his negative side and helps him to know himself.

"Writing a novel, for me, is to dig down to that depth," he said. The distinction between the main body and the shadow becomes blurry in the book, which broadened its scope of the story. He said it was a difficult process and he had to rewrite many times.

"I'm now in my mid-70s, and I don't know how many more novels I can write. So I strongly felt that I must write this story with affection, and spend ample time to do so," he said.

Murakami, who debuted with a 1979 story "Hear the Wind Sing," says the original version of his new novel contained the key elements of the wall and the shadow but it also had potential that was too complex for a second-year novelist to handle.

It then evolved as part of "Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World," a 1985 bestseller of two intertwined stories of pop and action-filled science fiction and an imaginary world of a secluded walled city of the dead.

Looking back, Murakami said even that attempt was premature. He shelved a rewriting attempt for another 35 years, though the story stayed on his mind, "like a tiny fishbone stuck in the throat," he said.

Murakami said he started feeling confident about his storytelling ability in midcareer, around 2000, just before he wrote "Kafka on the Shore," the bestselling novel released in 2002. "From there I have come thus far, I thought perhaps now I can finally rewrite the incomplete work of 'The City and Its Uncertain Walls.'"

Twice as old now at age 74, Murakami says he is more intrigued by the tranquility as in the "End of the World" part of the 1985 novel than the pop and action depicted in the "Hard-Boiled Wonderland" side of that novel.

"You can't help it, and I think it's only natural," he says, but he never tires of balancing writing novels, translating his favorite Western literature and in recent years hosting his own radio show. "I really enjoy writing. It's fun to write, and rewriting is more fun."

The driving force for his multiformat operation, he says, is running. It's his daily morning routine and he has run 40 marathons. "Translation, running, and collecting used records," he said, citing his hobbies. "I don't have time for a night life, which might have been a good thing."

Trump set to give 2nd deposition in New York fraud lawsuit

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump was expected to visit the offices of New York's attorney general Thursday for his second deposition in a legal battle over his company's business practices.

The Republican was scheduled to meet with lawyers for Attorney General Letitia James, who sued Trump last year. Her lawsuit claims Trump and his family misled banks and business associates by giving them false information about his net worth and the value of assets such as hotels and golf courses.

The lawsuit is unrelated to the felony criminal charges filed against Trump by the Manhattan district attorney, which led last week to his historic arraignment, the first for a former president.

Trump and his lawyers have said the Democrat's lawsuit against him is politically motivated and legally baseless. He and the company have denied doing anything wrong. James declined to answer a question about the planned deposition at a news conference on an unrelated matter Wednesday.

Trump previously met with James' lawyers Aug. 10, but refused to answer all but a few procedural ques-

tions, invoking his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination more than 400 times.

"Anyone in my position not taking the Fifth Amendment would be a fool, an absolute fool," he said in the session, which was recorded on video and later released publicly. Trump predicted a "renegade" prosecutor would try to make a criminal case out of his answers, if he gave them.

"One statement or answer that is ever so slightly off, just ever so slightly, by accident, by mistake, such as it was a sunny, beautiful day, when actually it was slightly overcast, would be met by law enforcement at a level seldom seen in this country, because I've experienced it," he said.

A trial for the lawsuit is scheduled for October.

It is unclear whether Trump might answer any questions in his second deposition, which will be conducted in private if it takes place as planned.

Death penalty looms over Pittsburgh synagogue massacre trial

By MARK SCOLFARO Associated Press

The man charged in the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history tried for years to avoid a federal jury trial, which would decide whether to convict him of shooting to death 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue. Ultimately those efforts failed, and jury selection is less than two weeks away.

Court filings show 46-year-old Robert Bowers had offered to plead guilty in the 2018 attack on the Tree of Life synagogue, a crime for which he was arrested at the scene and made incriminating statements to police. He indicated he was willing to accept life without parole and relinquish appeals rights.

But his offer came with a condition that the U.S. Justice Department declined: In return for a guilty plea, he would no longer face the death penalty. Much of the legal battling that has stretched on for more than four years has been looking to the critical sentencing phase after the guilt-or-innocence portion of the trial is over.

The families of some victims have endorsed the deal for life without parole, which would avoid days or even weeks of painful testimony and the grisly details of autopsy results, crime scene photos and 911 recordings, including calls from two of those slain.

In the end, the Justice Department said no to Bowers' offer and flatly declined his lawyers' request for details about the secretive process by which federal death penalty decisions are made.

"It will be the jury's ultimate decision whether to impose the death penalty — not the government's," federal prosecutors told U.S. District Judge Robert Colville in an April 3 filing. "The United States' 'goal' in this prosecution is the pursuit of justice, not punishment."

Bowers' lawyers wrote this month that the federal death penalty lacks "a discernable, principled basis for why the Department of Justice continues to pursue death sentences for Mr. Bowers but not in very recent comparable cases."

The 2019 announcement that the federal government would pursue the death penalty against Bowers was opposed by some of those directly affected by the killings. One of the three congregations he's charged with attacking — Dor Hadash — put their objections in writing.

A month after taking office, Gov. Josh Shapiro cited those objections as one reason he would keep the state's moratorium on the death penalty. He urged state lawmakers to end the state's death penalty through legislation.

Shapiro, a Democrat, said in February that his "first reaction back in 2018 was that that killer deserved to be put to death. In fact I stated so publicly, at the time. Over time, my thoughts on this issue have evolved."

The synagogue massacre case has already spanned two presidencies — Republican President Donald Trump was in office when the massacre occurred. Even before Bowers was identified as the suspect, Trump declared that the killer should "suffer the ultimate price" and that the death penalty should be brought back "into vogue." Federal executions resumed during Trump's presidency after a 17-year hiatus, and 13 federal inmates were put to death during his last six months in office.

Democrat Joe Biden indicated during the 2020 campaign he would work to end the federal death penalty but critics say he has done nothing to make that happen. He has, however, put in place a moratorium in

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 37 of 70

order to study current policies and procedures — although that has not prevented his federal prosecutors from pursuing a death sentence for Bowers.

Bowers was charged with dozens of federal crimes for the October 2018 massacre. Investigators have tied him to virulent anti-Jewish social media posts. Prosecutors say he told police at the crime scene that he wanted to kill Jewish people.

"As far as I'm concerned, personally, and many of the people that I know, we support the death penalty in some cases," said Sam DeMarco, who heads the Republican Committee of Allegheny County, an area that encompasses Pittsburgh. "An egregious case like this seems to be what it was made for."

State Rep. Emily Kinkead, a Democrat and death penalty opponent who represents part of Pittsburgh, was disappointed federal prosecutors didn't take Bowers' offer to plead guilty in exchange for life in prison.

"Are we so focused on killing people as a state, as a government, that we wouldn't give these families closure so they wouldn't have to sit through this trial and listen to their loved ones beg for help from 911? Talk about cruel and unusual — that seems an awful thing to ask the families to do," Kinkead said.

The Pittsburgh synagogue case bears some similarities to the 2015 racist slayings of nine members of a Black South Carolina congregation for which Dylann Roof was convicted and sentenced to death. In that case, there was a range of feelings about the death penalty among the victims' loved ones, from a belief that taking a life is never justified to those who say there's justice in "an eye for an eye." The death sentence for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was also not universally supported by his victims' families.

A federal jury ended up split on the question of a death sentence for the man who killed eight people on a New York bike path in a terrorist attack. Instead, Sayfullo Saipov received a life sentence last month — the first federal death penalty case tried under Biden.

And in February, the white supremacist gunman who killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo supermarket was sentenced to life in state prison — New York does not have capital punishment. He has offered to plead guilty in federal court to avoid the death penalty.

Torrential storms batter South Florida, close key airport

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Nearly a foot (30 centimeters) of rain fell in a matter of hours in Fort Lauderdale — causing widespread flooding, the closure of the city's airport and the suspension of high-speed commuter rail service for the Broward County region.

The city of Fort Lauderdale released a statement Wednesday evening urging residents and visitors to stay off the roads until the water has subsided.

"Police and Fire Rescue continue to answer calls for service," the statement said. "Public Works staff are clearing drains and operating pumps to mitigate the water as quickly as possible."

The National Weather Service issued a flash flood emergency for Fort Lauderdale and other areas will run into pre-dawn hours Thursday as the chance of thunderstorms continued across the region, warning: "This is a life-threatening situation. Seek higher ground now!"

There have been no immediate reports of injuries or deaths.

Up to 14 inches had fallen across the area through Wednesday and the National Weather Service said another 2 to 4 inches were possible as a warm front continued to push northward, bringing a chance of thunderstorms.

Hollywood Mayor Josh Levy told CNN that the area already had seen days of rain. "The ground was already saturated so there is extensive flooding all over our city and throughout South Florida. Many roadways are impassable. Lots of vehicles got stuck and left abandoned in the middle of our roadways," Levy said. "I've lived here my whole life. This is the most severe flooding that I've ever seen."

More than 22,000 customers in Florida were without electricity Wednesday night, according to power-outage.us.

All Broward County Public Schools will be closed Thursday, the district tweeted, adding "All afterschool activities, events, and extracurricular activities are also cancelled tomorrow."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 38 of 70

Wednesday's relentless showers prompted the airport, one of the largest in the region, to suspend all arriving and departing flights, the airport tweeted around 4:15 p.m.

At around 5 p.m., the airport announced it shut down ground transportation shuttle service in response to recurring tornado warnings and ongoing heavy rainfall.

The main roadways entering and exiting the airport were flooded and impassable, the airport said around 5:15 p.m.

"Please do not attempt to enter or leave the airport at this time," it warned.

It said airport operations would restart once the weather improves in the Fort Lauderdale area.

The heavy rains also prompted South Florida's high-speed commuter rail service to shut down. Brightline posted on Twitter Wednesday evening that train service between Miami and Fort Lauderdale was suspended.

The National Weather Service in Miami declared a flash flood emergency around 8 p.m. Wednesday for Fort Lauderdale, along with the areas around Hollywood and Dania Beach. A short time later, forecasters issued a tornado warning for nearby Davie, Plantation and Lauderdale.

Video taken by witnesses showed water coming in the door at an airport terminal and a virtual river rushing down the tarmac between planes.

On Broward Boulevard, a man was seen swimming to the curb on the flooded street at rush hour as cars rolled by.

Drivers recorded themselves rolling through streets where brown, swirling water was up to the wheel wells or nearly to the hood of cars.

US, Ukraine say many war secrets safe from intel leaks

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and HANNA ARHIROVA undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukraine's leaders say they don't see a major U.S. intelligence leak as gravely damaging future offensives. A key reason: They have long held back on sharing their most sensitive operational information, doubting Washington's ability to keep their secrets safe.

Ukrainian and U.S. officials said this week that only Ukrainians know some battle plans and other operational information, not the Americans, their most important ally. That means the leak of secret military documents, including some assessing Ukraine's battlefield strengths and weaknesses against Russia, may not have been enough — so far — to change the course of the war.

"If military operations are planned, then only a very narrow circle of people know about the planning of the special operation," Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said Wednesday on Ukrainian television. "The risk of leaks is very minimal" for the most important war matters.

Still, the U.S. sees the leaks as grave. The documents include previously unreported sensitive disclosures about Ukraine, South Korea, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and others. Senior Biden administration officials are working to stop the flow of classified information onto social media and websites and head off any lasting damage to relationships with allies and strategic partners.

And more damaging material could still surface. Leaked documents are continuing to appear online, and future revelations may be more detrimental to Ukraine than the ones that have been publicized so far.

Meanwhile, Russia is making clear that it is avidly studying each spilled secret. "Quite interesting," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said of the leaks.

Still, online Russian-language discussions groups showed Russian military bloggers arguing over whether the leaks themselves are U.S. disinformation, intended to mislead Russia by creating an impression that Ukraine's military is vulnerable.

Ukrainian officials and ordinary Ukrainians have made clear they could afford no open split over the leaks with the United States, which has given Ukraine more than \$100 billion in military and civilian support.

"It is a pity that such things happen," said one woman, Nataliia Maltseva, in Kyiv, where many people said their thoughts were on matters other than the U.S. intelligence breach.

But "I trust Joe Biden, I know that he is an experienced person who loves Ukraine. I am sure that everything will only get better," Maltseva said Wednesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 39 of 70

Secrecy in one vital area, Ukraine's plans for any upcoming offenses to repel Russian forces, remains unbreached, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told reporters in Washington on Tuesday after speaking with his Ukrainian counterpart.

"They have a great plan ... but only President Zelenskyy and his leadership really know the full details of that plan," the U.S. defense chief said.

Ukrainian civilian and military chiefs — speaking in European and North American capitals on their continual tours to round up the Western arms and cash to keep Ukraine's fight going — responded to questions about whether the leaks would harm relations with the United States by saying that unity among allies was one of Ukraine's most vital war needs.

The details disclosed "are not pleasant to hear," Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov told reporters in Madrid on Wednesday.

"There is a lot of information that is not true," Reznikov added, without elaborating. "And the true information has already lost its relevance."

He called the leaks a purposeful information operation, benefiting Russia, with an aim "to lower the level of trust between the allies."

Concerns over the impact of the U.S. intelligence leaks came up "everywhere" in meetings with Ukrainian officials in Kyiv on Wednesday, said Sen. Joe Manchin. The West Virginia Democrat was accompanied by Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska as well as country music singer Brad Paisley on a one-day official visit that included meetings with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other top officials.

The leaks include photographs of paper documents creased by folding. U.S. defense officials say information on some of the papers has been altered.

The documents show real-time details from February and March of Ukraine's and Russia's battlefield positions and precise numbers of battlefield gear lost and newly flowing into Ukraine from its allies.

They also reveal just how close Ukraine's vital air defense systems are to running out of missiles — with stocks expected to be exhausted as soon as late this month or May, absent significant resupply. That would open Ukraine's skies to more of the Russian air and artillery strikes that already have devastated cities and infrastructure.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, speaking to reporters in Toronto before arriving for talks with Austin in Washington on Wednesday, played down the danger, expressing optimism that Ukraine would get the new stocks of the Soviet-era air defense missiles it needs.

"Our air defense will be very effective," Shmyhal told Canada's CTV. "We will have all the equipment."

Although the leaked information was more detailed, Ukraine and its allies have been warning publicly about the desperate resupply needs of Ukraine's air defense system.

John Sipher, a former senior CIA official and expert on Russia, said while the leak of classified information is "despicable," he doesn't think it really hurts Ukraine's war effort. The intelligence community's most protected and sensitive secrets typically don't wind up on the kind of Defense Department summaries that the documents appear to be, he said.

And since much of the information from Russia appears to come from signal intelligence — electronic monitoring of communication and weapons systems — "it is really hard for Russia to change its procedures and equipment on the fly during a war," Sipher said.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak described the leaks regarding the war assessments as free of actual operational information, and partly fake. Ukraine's strategy and tactics are developed by the military command and that work was not directly damaged, he told The Associated Press.

"Operations scenarios are still in development because the front line is flexible and changes are made every day," he said.

Ever since Russia invaded in February 2022, U.S. officials are reported to have commented on how close Ukrainian leaders kept their war secrets. One common complaint was that the Americans knew more about Russia's war status than they did about Ukraine's.

On the streets of Kyiv, another Ukrainian, Serhii Bos, expressed hope that "our American partners" were

learning from the breach, but he said it would have no impact on Ukrainians' morale.

"Nothing changes," he said. "Everything remains as it is. We need to reclaim our lands."

Arhirova contributed from Kyiv. Mary Clare Jalonick in Washington, Ciaran Giles in Madrid and Samya Kullab in Kyiv contributed.

US intelligence leak complicates summit with South Korea

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Leaked U.S. intelligence documents suggesting Washington spied on South Korea have put the country's president in a delicate situation ahead of a state visit to the U.S., the first such trip by a South Korean leader in 12 years.

The documents contain purportedly private conversations between senior South Korean officials about Ukraine, indicating that Washington may have conducted surveillance on a key Asian ally even as the two nations publicly vowed to reinforce their alliance.

Since taking office last year, conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol has put a bolstered military partnership with the United States at the heart of his foreign policy to address intensifying North Korean nuclear threats and other challenges. The April 26 summit with President Joe Biden is seen as crucial to winning a stronger U.S. security commitment and resolving grievances over the Biden administration's economic and technology policies.

The leaked documents were posted online as part of a major U.S. intelligence breach. The papers viewed by The Associated Press indicate that South Korea's National Security Council "grappled" with the U.S. in early March over an American request to provide artillery ammunition to Ukraine.

The documents, which cited a signals intelligence report, said then-NSC Director Kim Sung-han suggested the possibility of selling the 330,000 rounds of 155 mm munitions to Poland, since getting the ammunition to Ukraine quickly was the United States' ultimate goal.

South Korea, a growing arms exporter, has a policy of not supplying weapons to countries at war. It has not provided arms directly to Ukraine, although it has shipped humanitarian aid and joined U.S.-led economic sanctions against Russia.

Yoon's government said it discussed the leaked papers with the United States, and they agreed that "a considerable number" of the documents were fabricated. The South Korean government avoided any public complaints about the U.S. and did not specify which documents were faked.

"There's no indication that the U.S., which is our ally, conducted (eavesdropping) on us with malicious intent," Kim Tae-hyo, Seoul's deputy national security director, told reporters Tuesday at Dulles Airport near Washington at the start of a trip aimed at preparing for the summit.

Senior Biden administration have discussed the leaks with allies at high levels and sought to reassure them of the U.S. government's commitment to safe-guarding intelligence. The administration also sought to downplay the impact the leak would have on Yoon's upcoming visit.

"Our commitment to the Republic of Korea remains ironclad, and President Biden looks forward to welcoming President Yoon to the White House for the upcoming state visit to discuss their shared commitment for a strong and deeply integrated U.S.-ROK Alliance that maintains peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and beyond," the White House National Security Council said in a statement, using South Korea's official name.

The Yoon government's stance invited criticism from liberal rivals, who called on the government to lodge strong protests with the U.S. They also suspected what they call Yoon's hasty relocation of his presidential office to a Defense Ministry compound in central Seoul may have left the office vulnerable to wiretapping.

"As a sovereign nation, we must sternly respond to the spying of state secrets, even if it was committed by an ally with whom (South Korea) has bonded over blood," said Park Hong-geun, floor leader of the main liberal opposition Democratic Party.

In an official statement, Yoon's office said it maintains tight security, including anti-eavesdropping systems.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 41 of 70

It called the opposition party's attempts to link the office relocation to the spying allegation "diplomatic suicidal acts" that shake South Korea's national interests and its alliance with the U.S.

The situation is unlikely to threaten the country's alliance with the U.S. that was forged during the 1950-53 Korean War, many experts say.

"No big damage is expected on the Korea-U.S. alliance as it seems both governments share the view that they would focus on the alliance, more concretely on a successful state visit by Yoon," said Bong Young-shik, an expert at Seoul's Yonsei Institute for North Korean Studies.

If Yoon returns with some achievements, Koreans will conclude that he put up with the spying allegations "because bigger matters were at stake," Bong said. But if the visit amounts to "a pomp-only trip," people could question whether South Korea "made lots of concessions."

One possible achievement for Yoon would be if South Korea takes on a role in the management of U.S. nuclear weapons in the face of North Korea's advancing nuclear arsenal.

Other wins would be securing U.S. benefits for major South Korean businesses involved in the making of electric vehicles and easing U.S. restrictions on technology exports to China, which has been a major manufacturing base for South Korean chipmakers.

If the U.S. intends to help Yoon, "the latest incident on the documents could end up strengthening the Korea-U.S. alliance and helping South Korea win something from the U.S.," said Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs.

Kim Tae-hyung, a professor at Seoul's Soongsil University, said the exposure of possible U.S. spying could help Seoul maintain its existing policy of not supplying weapons to Ukraine. But it's also possible that the Yoon government reconsiders that policy now that the U.S. demands are public, Kim said.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, South Korea has agreed to provide billions of dollars' worth of tanks, howitzers, fighter jets and other weapons to Poland, a NATO member.

An American official said in November that the United States had agreed to buy 100,000 artillery rounds from South Korean manufacturers to provide to Ukraine, although South Korean officials have maintained that the munitions were meant to refill depleted U.S. stocks.

Choi Jin, director of the Seoul-based Institute of Presidential Leadership, said it's also no secret that allies spy on each other, as well as their adversaries.

The U.S. wiretapping activities "are something that everyone already knows," although it becomes a more sensitive matter when the practice is made public, Choi said.

"I think South Koreans also try to wiretap (U.S. officials) as well," Choi said. "People feel animosity toward the word 'wiretapping.' But in other words, it's called intelligence gathering." _____

Associated Press writer Amer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

States confront medical debt that's bankrupting millions

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — Cindy Powers was driven into bankruptcy by 19 life-saving abdominal operations. Medical debt started stacking up for Lindsey Vance after she crashed her skateboard and had to get nine stitches in her chin. And for Misty Castaneda, open heart surgery for a disease she'd had since birth saddled her with \$200,000 in bills.

These are three of an estimated 100 million Americans who have amassed nearly \$200 billion in collective medical debt — almost the size of Greece's economy — according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Now lawmakers in at least a dozen states and the U.S. Congress have pushed legislation to curtail the financial burden that's pushed many into untenable situations: forgoing needed care for fear of added debt, taking a second mortgage to pay for cancer treatment or slashing grocery budgets to keep up with payments.

Some of the bills would create medical debt relief programs or protect personal property from collections, while others would lower interest rates, keep medical debt from tanking credit scores or require greater transparency in the costs of care.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 42 of 70

In Colorado, House lawmakers approved a measure Wednesday that would lower the maximum interest rate for medical debt to 3%, require greater transparency in costs of treatment and prohibit debt collection during an appeals process.

If it became law, Colorado would join Arizona in having one of the lowest medical debt interest rates in the country. North Carolina lawmakers have also started mulling a 5% interest ceiling.

But there are opponents. Colorado Republican state Sen. Janice Rich said she worried that the proposal could "constrain hospitals' debt collecting ability and hurt their cash flow."

For patients, medical debt has become a leading cause of personal bankruptcy, with an estimated \$88 billion of that debt in collections nationwide, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Roughly 530,000 people reported falling into bankruptcy annually due partly to medical bills and time away from work, according to a 2019 study from the American Journal of Public Health.

Powers' family ended up owing \$250,000 for the 19 life-saving abdominal surgeries. They declared bankruptcy in 2009, then the bank foreclosed on their home.

"Only recently have we begun to pick up the pieces," said James Powers, Cindy's husband, during his February testimony in favor of Colorado's bill.

In Pennsylvania and Arizona, lawmakers are considering medical debt relief programs that would use state funds to help eradicate debt for residents. A New Jersey proposal would use federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act to achieve the same end.

Bills in Florida and Massachusetts would protect some personal property — such as a car that is needed for work — from medical debt collections and force providers to be more transparent about costs. Florida's legislation received unanimous approval in House and Senate committees on its way to votes in both chambers.

In Colorado, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts and the U.S. Congress lawmakers are contemplating bills that would bar medical debt from being included on consumer reports, thereby protecting debtors' credit scores.

Castaneda, who was born with a congenital heart defect, found herself \$200,000 in debt when she was 23 and had to have surgery. The debt tanked her credit score and, she said, forced her to rely on her emotionally abusive husband's credit.

For over a decade Castaneda wanted out of the relationship, but everything they owned was in her husband's name, making it nearly impossible to break away. She finally divorced her husband in 2017.

"I'm trying to play catch-up for the last 20 years," said Castaneda, 45, a hairstylist from Grand Junction on Colorado's Western Slope.

Medical debt isn't a strong indicator of people's credit-worthiness, said Isabel Cruz, policy director at the Colorado Consumer Health Initiative.

While buying a car beyond your means or overspending on vacation can partly be chalked up to poor decision making, medical debt often comes from short, acute-care treatments that are unexpected — leaving patients with hefty bills that exceed their budgets.

For both Colorado bills — to limit interest rates and remove medical debt from consumer reports — a spokesperson for Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said the governor will "review these policies with a lens towards saving people money on health care."

While neither bill garnered stiff political opposition, a spokesperson for the Colorado Hospital Association said the organization is working with sponsors to amend the interest rate bill "to align the legislation with the multitude of existing protections."

The association did not provide further details.

To Vance, protecting her credit score early could have had a major impact. Vance's medical debt began at age 19 from the skateboard crash, and then was compounded when she broke her arm soon after. Now 39, she has never been able to qualify for a credit card or car loan. Her in-laws cosigned for her Colorado apartment.

"My credit identity was medical debt," she said, "and that set the tone for my life."

Jesse Bedayn is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

After calls to resign, Feinstein seeks Judiciary replacement

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Recuperating U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California asked Wednesday to be temporarily replaced on the Judiciary Committee, shortly after two House Democrats called on her to resign after her extended absence from Washington.

In a statement, the long-serving Democratic senator said her recovery from a case of shingles she disclosed in early March had been delayed because of complications. She provided no date for her return to the Senate and said she had asked Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to ask the Senate to allow another Democratic senator to serve in her committee seat until she was able to return.

"I intend to return as soon as possible once my medical team advises that it's safe for me to travel," Feinstein said. "In the meantime, I remain committed to the job and will continue to work from home in San Francisco."

Feinstein's decision to seek a committee stand-in during her recovery comes amid increasing anxiety within her party that her lengthy absence has damaged Democratic efforts to confirm President Joe Biden's nominees for federal courts in a narrowly divided chamber.

She is the oldest member of Congress, at 89.

California Rep. Ro Khanna, one of two Democratic House members who called Wednesday for Feinstein to resign, said in a statement Wednesday: "This is a moment of crisis for women's rights and voting rights. It's unacceptable to have Sen. Feinstein miss vote after vote to confirm judges who will uphold reproductive rights."

Khanna, a California progressive, wrote on Twitter that Feinstein should step aside. She announced in February that she would not seek reelection in 2024, opening up her seat for the first time in over 30 years.

"We need to put the country ahead of personal loyalty," wrote Khanna, who has endorsed the Senate campaign of Democratic Rep. Barbara Lee. "While she has had a lifetime of public service, it is obvious she can no longer fulfill her duties."

Not long afterward, Democratic Rep. Dean Phillips of Minnesota tweeted that he agreed with Khanna.

Feinstein, he wrote, "is a remarkable American whose contributions to our country are immeasurable. But I believe it's now a dereliction of duty to remain in the Senate and a dereliction of duty for those who agree to remain quiet."

The senator, who turns 90 in June, has faced questions in recent years about her cognitive health and memory, though she has defended her effectiveness representing a state that is home to nearly 40 million people.

Already, Democratic Reps. Lee, Katie Porter and Adam Schiff have launched Senate campaigns to succeed Feinstein.

If Feinstein decides to step down during her term, it would be up to Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom to fill the vacancy, potentially reordering the highly competitive race. Newsom said in 2021 that he would nominate a Black woman to fill the seat if Feinstein were to step aside.

Lee is Black, and becoming the incumbent could be a decisive advantage in the contest, but it's not known if Newsom would consider Lee, given her candidacy. Porter and Schiff are white.

Newsom declined through a spokesperson to comment on Khanna's statement.

"The governor is not calling on her to resign," the spokesman, Anthony York, said in an email.

Before the calls for her resignation, Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, acknowledged in remarks to CNN that Feinstein's absence has slowed down their push to confirm nominees in the closely divided panel.

"I can't consider nominees in these circumstances because a tie vote is a losing vote in committee,"

Durbin said.

Feinstein has had a groundbreaking political career and shattered gender barriers from San Francisco's City Hall to the corridors of Capitol Hill.

She was the first woman to serve as president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in the 1970s and the first female mayor of San Francisco. She ascended to that post after the November 1978 assassinations of then-Mayor George Moscone and City Supervisor Harvey Milk by a former supervisor, Dan White. Feinstein found Milk's body.

In the Senate, she was the first woman to head the Senate Intelligence Committee and the first woman to serve as the Judiciary Committee's top Democrat. She gained a reputation as a pragmatic centrist who left a mark on political battles over issues ranging from reproductive rights to environmental protection.

Ukraine's outrage grows over video seeming to show beheading

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine launched an investigation Wednesday into a gruesome video that purportedly shows the beheading of a Ukrainian soldier, in the latest accusation of atrocities said to have been committed by Russia since it invaded in February 2022.

The video spread quickly online and drew outrage from officials in Kyiv, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as international organizations. The Kremlin called the footage "horrible" but said it needed to be verified.

The Associated Press was not able to independently verify the authenticity of the video or the circumstances of where and when it was shot. The AP is not distributing the video or using frame grabs due to its extremely graphic nature.

Meanwhile, a Russian defense official claimed that fighters from Russia's paramilitary Wagner group have seized three districts of Bakhmut, the embattled city that for months has been the focus of Moscow's grinding campaign in the east.

The video circulating online appears to show a man in green fatigues wearing a yellow armband, typically donned by Ukrainian fighters. His screams are heard before another man in camouflage uses a knife to decapitate him.

A third man holds up a flak jacket apparently belonging to the man being beheaded. All three men speak in Russian.

Since Russia's forces invaded on Feb. 24, 2022, they have committed widespread abuses and alleged war crimes, according to the United Nations, rights groups and reporting by The Associated Press. Ukraine has repeatedly accused Russia of targeting apartment buildings and other civilian structures and equipment in its strikes, and images of hundreds of dead civilians in the streets and in mass graves in Bucha after Russian forces withdrew from the city have horrified the world.

The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

The Kremlin denies it has committed war crimes or that it has targeted civilians.

Ukrainian troops have also been accused of abuses, and last year Kyiv said it would investigate video circulating online that Moscow alleged showed Ukrainian forces killing Russian troops who may have been trying to surrender.

Zelenskyy said the violence in the latest video would not be forgotten, and that Russian forces would be held responsible.

"Everyone must react, every leader. Do not expect that it will be forgotten, that time will pass," he said in a video.

In it, he used strong language to describe Russian soldiers, calling them "beasts."

Later Wednesday, at a roundtable of IMF and World Bank meetings, Zelenskyy called in a video for a moment of silence for the Ukrainian soldier killed in the apparent beheading.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the video was "horrible" but must be verified.

"In the world of fakes we live in, the authenticity of the footage must be checked," he said in a confer-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 45 of 70

ence call with reporters.

Ukraine's state security service opened an investigation, according to a statement from Vasyl Maliuk, the head of the agency, known as the SBU. Officials are studying the video to identify those responsible, as well as the victim, according to Hanna Maliar, the deputy head of the Defense Ministry.

Posters on pro-Kremlin Russian Telegram channels, while not confirming the video's authenticity, did not dispute it. Some sought to justify it by saying combat has hardened Russian troops.

Andrei Medvedev, a Russian state TV journalist and a member of the Moscow city legislature, speculated that the video's release was "fairly opportune" for the Ukrainian army, saying it could help "fire up personnel ideologically" ahead of a planned major counteroffensive.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, also linked the video's release to the expected offensive but said it was meant to "demoralize the public mood or at least change the psychological perception of the war right now."

Ukraine's human rights chief said he will request that the U.N. Human Rights Committee investigate. Dmytro Lubinets said he has also written to the U.N. Commissioner for Human Rights, the U.N. Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

He wrote on Telegram that "a public execution of a captive is yet another indication of a breach of Geneva Convention norms, international humanitarian law, a breach of the fundamental right to life."

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine said it had previously documented "serious violations of international humanitarian law, including those committed against prisoners of war," adding that "the latest incidents must also be properly investigated and the perpetrators must be held accountable."

Guterres "had also seen the video and was horrified by it and supports the call for the perpetrators to be held to account," said U.N. spokesman, Stephane Dujarric.

The video provoked an outcry among Ukrainians.

"This is horrifying," said Mykola Drobot, 44, of Kyiv. "Such things cannot happen without the consent -- silent or not -- of the military and political leadership."

Another Kyiv resident, Yuliia Sievierina, 40, speculated the video was meant as "moral pressure on us to consider ourselves even more oppressed and emotionally torn."

"It doesn't work," she told the AP. "It only creates more anger and thirst for resistance."

The war's front lines have been largely frozen for months, with much of the fighting focused around the city of Bakhmut.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Wagner forces had made progress there. Ukrainian officials did not immediately comment, but Zelenskyy has said before that his troops could pull out if they face a threat of encirclement.

Konashenkov did not specify which neighborhoods of Bakhmut are under Russian control, or how much of the city remains in Ukrainian hands.

Elsewhere, at least four civilians were wounded as Russian forces shelled a Ukrainian-held town near the shut-down Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, said regional Gov. Serhii Lysak.

He said in a Telegram post that "people are being pulled out from under the rubble" after Russian shelling destroyed 13 houses and cars in Nikopol, across the Dnieper River from the plant.

Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko alleged Russian forces attacked a town in the eastern Donetsk province with cluster munitions — banned by an international treaty — wounding one person. An AP and Frontline database called War Crimes Watch Ukraine has cataloged how Russia has used cluster bombs.

Associated Press writer Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

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

Mexican migration chief to be charged in fire but keep job

By MARÍA VERZA and SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's immigration head will face criminal charges in a fire that killed 40 migrants in a detention center last month, but President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Wednesday that he will not dismiss the official known for his hard line on northbound migration.

Obrador's decision to keep Francisco Garduño as head of the Mexican Immigration Institute appeared to conflict with the federal Attorney General's Office announcement late Tuesday to charge Garduño in connection with the blaze.

That shows both some separation of powers in Mexico and the conundrum faced by the Mexican government. López Obrador and his administration are struggling with U.S. pressure to slow the flow of migrants while the international community calls on them to treat migrants humanely and safely.

López Obrador's comments came on the same day that relatives gathered in rural Guatemala to hold funerals for some of the victims of the deadly fire.

Thousands of people gathered in the Guatemalan village of Chicacao for the funeral of Francisco Gaspar Rojché Chiquival and his uncle Miguel Rojché Zapalu, two of the 19 Guatemalans who died of smoke inhalation or burns in the March 27 fire.

"I am destroyed, I am wounded," said the younger man's father, Manuel Rojché. "This is a very hard blow."

The family had handed over title to their land to raise the \$15,000 that—smugglers demanded to get Rojché Chiquival to the United States. They stand to lose the land. The only possession the 21-year-old left behind — his beloved motorcycle — traveled with his coffin in the procession to the local cemetery.

The men died after a migrant set fire to foam mattresses in protest, and guards fled without opening the cell doors.

"That president is a coward," Manuel Rojché said of López Obrador. "How can you treat people like that, not even an animal ... much less a human being."

Garduño, a lawyer and criminologist, was called to take over the immigration job in June 2019 as Mexico was under pressure from the Trump administration to decrease the flow of migrants.

The Mexican immigration institute has been hit for years with repeated complaints of human-rights violations and unhealthy conditions in center for migrants, conditions including inadequate ventilation, clean water and food. There also have been numerous corruption complaints. Under Garduño, the institute took a harder line.

Calls have come from within Mexico, and from some Central American nations, not to stop the case of last month's fire at the five low-level officials, guards and a Venezuelan migrant already facing homicide charges.

Federal prosecutors said late Tuesday that Garduño was remiss in not preventing the disaster in Ciudad Juarez despite earlier indications of problems at his agency's detention centers. Prosecutors said that government audits had found "a pattern of irresponsibility and repeated omissions" in the immigration institute. However, charges being brought in Mexico, especially against public officials, do not always result in prison time.

On Wednesday, López Obrador said that even though the Attorney General's Office was investigating Garduño, prosecutors had revealed few details and it was not exactly clear how they would charge him.

"We are going to wait and we are going to make decisions in the (right) moment," López Obrador said.

The president defended Garduño, saying "his work is good in general; he has always had good performance," despite "the misfortune" that happened in Juarez.

Garduño has been close to López Obrador since the latter was Mexico City mayor, and Garduño has overseen a strategy to contain migrants in southern Mexico with the help of the National Guard, which has been criticized as the start of a militarization of Mexico's immigration policy. It included placing retired or active military officers in leadership positions inside the immigration agency.

Garduño's predecessor at the immigration institute, sociologist Tonatiuh Guillén, said the prosecutor's decision "is a good signal, given that the expectation at first was just an investigation of those who were

directly responsible.”

Guillén said, however, that keeping Garduño in his position generated an “unnecessary tension” because he should have been dismissed in order to make the case against him more straightforward.

Guillén resigned in 2019 because of his disagreement with hardening migration policy, as Washington was demanding.

Anger in Mexico initially focused on two guards who were seen fleeing the March 27 fire, without unlocking the cell door to allow the migrants to escape. But López Obrador had said earlier Tuesday that they didn’t have the keys.

A video from a security camera inside the facility shows guards walking away when the fire started in late March inside the cell holding migrants without making an effort to release them.

The Attorney General’s Office said several other officers will also face charges for failing to carry out their duties, the statement said, but prosecutors did not explain what specific charges or identify the officials.

An immigration official said on Wednesday morning that Garduño had not yet been called to testify. The official asked for anonymity because was not authorized to speak on the record.

One migrant allegedly set fire to foam mattresses at the detention center to protest detention conditions and what he apparently thought were plans to move or deport the migrants. Mexico has returned the bodies of 31 migrants to their home countries.

Dozens of mourners turned out on the dusty streets of the village of Protección, in Honduras, where the coffins of three local men arrived from Mexico.

Cindy Umaña received the coffin of her brother, Edin Umaña, in her house. The only thing she could ask was that those responsible be prosecuted.

“I know that locking them up will not give us our relatives’ lives back,” Umaña said. “But at least we will know that justice has been done.”

Complaints about corruption and bad conditions at Mexico’s migrant detention facilities have never been seriously addressed: Prosecutors said that after a fire at another detention center in the Gulf coast state of Tabasco killed one person and injured 14 in 2020, the immigration agency knew there were problems that needed to be corrected, but alleged they failed to act.

911 calls show chaotic moments during Kentucky bank shooting

By DYLAN LOVAN, REBECCA REYNOLDS and JOHN RABY Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Frantic calls from witnesses reporting a mass shooting at a Louisville bank were released Wednesday by police — including from a woman who was on a virtual meeting and saw the shooter, as well as one from the man’s mother, who told a 911 operator that her son “currently has a gun and is heading toward” the bank.

“I need your help. He’s never hurt anyone, he’s a good kid,” said the woman, who identified herself as the gunman’s mother. It turned out that at the time of her call, the gunman was already at the bank. The emergency dispatcher informed the woman that other calls were coming in about the shooting.

None of the callers are identified by name and other information is edited out of the calls, but the first call that came in was from a woman who was on a video call inside the bank. She screams and cries throughout the four-minute call and says there is an active shooter at the downtown branch of the bank.

“I just watched it on a Teams meeting,” she says. “We were having a board meeting. With our commercial (lending) team.”

“We heard multiple shots and everybody started saying, ‘Oh my God and then he came into the board room.’”

Bank employee Connor Sturgeon, 25, used an AR-15 assault-style rifle in the attack Monday at Old National Bank, where he killed five coworkers while livestreaming before police fatally shot him. Eight others were injured, including a police officer who was shot in the head and remains hospitalized in critical condition.

After the first call, others began streaming in. One of the callers says she’s calling from within the building as numerous gunshots are heard in the background.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 48 of 70

"I'm in a closet hiding," the caller says. She says people have been shot and gives a description of the shooting, saying she knows the shooter. "He works with us."

"How long will it be before they get here?" she whispers and the dispatcher tells her that authorities are on the way and advises her to keep quiet.

Asked what kind of injuries there were, the caller replies: "I don't know. I just saw a lot of blood."

Another call came from a man inside the bank, who told dispatchers the address and said, "We have an active shooting in our building. White male. He's an employee of Old National Bank. Get here now. We need somebody now."

Another call came from a motorist driving down Main Street, who reported seeing a man about five minutes prior with an assault rifle and a bulletproof vest walking around. The caller asks if anyone else has reported the man.

The dispatcher then describes what others reported the suspect was wearing and the caller confirms it.

The woman identifying herself as Sturgeon's mother asks during the call if she can go to the bank but is told by the dispatcher that she should not because "there's a situation going on down there" and "it's dangerous."

"You've had calls from other people, so he's already there?" the mother asks with shock in her voice.

Wednesday's release included a half-hour of emergency responder radio traffic.

The release came hours before hundreds of people gathered at the Muhammad Ali Center in downtown Louisville Wednesday evening to remember the victims and allow the public to offer prayers for the injured. The center has an outdoor auditorium just a mile from the site of Monday's shooting. Louisville mayor Craig Greenberg was among the speakers.

The mood at the vigil was somber, but there were cheers for the officers who responded to Monday's shooting. Many attendees were dressed in business clothes, and some had walked to the memorial after their workday in downtown Louisville.

That same night, a moment of silence preceded a college baseball game between Louisville and neighboring Bellarmine University at Jim Patterson Stadium. Players from both schools stood in alternating patterns along the first- and third-base lines as the names and pictures of the victims were displayed on an outfield video screen.

On Tuesday, police released body camera video that showed the chaotic moments when officers arrived at the bank.

Sturgeon's parents said in a statement that their son had mental health challenges that were being addressed, but "there were never any warning signs or indications he was capable of this shocking act."

They said they are mourning for the victims and the loss of their son, and working with police to understand what happened.

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) south of Louisville.

The five bank employees killed in the shooting were Joshua Barrick, 40, a senior vice president; Deana Eckert, 57, an executive administrative officer; Tommy Elliott, 63, also a senior vice president; Juliana Farmer, 45, a loan analyst; and Jim Tutt Jr., 64, a commercial real estate market executive.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear has said Elliott was one of his closest friends.

"I'll admit that while I am not angry, I am empty. And I'm sad," Beshear said at the vigil, his voice breaking. "And I just keep thinking that maybe we'll wake up. What I know is, I just wish I'd taken an extra moment, made an extra call, tell him how much I care about him. And I know we are all feeling the same. But I also know they hear us now. And that they feel our love."

Later, speaker Whitney Austin said she was shot 12 times in a September 2018 mass shooting at a Cincinnati bank and that "Monday morning was heartbreakingly familiar to me."

Just as she was wrapped in love by her community since then, Austin asked those at the vigil to do the same for the families involved in Monday's shooting.

"Please don't forget about them next week. Don't forget about them next month. And don't forget about them next year," Austin said. "They are going to need your support for the rest of their lives."

Raby reported from Charleston, W.Va. AP Sports Writer Gary B. Graves in Louisville contributed.

Mexican migration chief to be charged in fire but keep job

By MARÍA VERZA and SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's immigration head will face criminal charges in a fire that killed 40 migrants in a detention center last month, but President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Wednesday that he will not dismiss the official known for his hard line on northbound migration.

Obrador's decision to keep Francisco Garduño as head of the Mexican Immigration Institute appeared to conflict with the federal Attorney General's Office announcement late Tuesday to charge Garduño in connection with the blaze.

That shows both some separation of powers in Mexico and the conundrum faced by the Mexican government. López Obrador and his administration are struggling with U.S. pressure to slow the flow of migrants while the international community calls on them to treat migrants humanely and safely.

López Obrador's comments came on the same day that relatives gathered in rural Guatemala to hold funerals for some of the victims of the deadly fire.

Thousands of people gathered in the Guatemalan village of Chicacao for the funeral of Francisco Gaspar Rojché Chiquival and his uncle Miguel Rojché Zapalu, two of the 19 Guatemalans who died of smoke inhalation or burns in the March 27 fire.

"I am destroyed, I am wounded," said the younger man's father, Manuel Rojché. "This is a very hard blow."

The family had handed over title to their land to raise the \$15,000 that—smugglers demanded to get Rojché Chiquival to the United States. They stand to lose the land. The only possession the 21-year-old left behind — his beloved motorcycle — traveled with his coffin in the procession to the local cemetery.

The men died after a migrant set fire to foam mattresses in protest, and guards fled without opening the cell doors.

"That president is a coward," Manuel Rojché said of López Obrador. "How can you treat people like that, not even an animal ... much less a human being."

Garduño, a lawyer and criminologist, was called to take over the immigration job in June 2019 as Mexico was under pressure from the Trump administration to decrease the flow of migrants.

The Mexican immigration institute has been hit for years with repeated complaints of human-rights violations and unhealthy conditions in center for migrants, conditions including inadequate ventilation, clean water and food. There also have been numerous corruption complaints. Under Garduño, the institute took a harder line.

Calls have come from within Mexico, and from some Central American nations, not to stop the case of last month's fire at the five low-level officials, guards and a Venezuelan migrant already facing homicide charges.

Federal prosecutors said late Tuesday that Garduño was remiss in not preventing the disaster in Ciudad Juarez despite earlier indications of problems at his agency's detention centers. Prosecutors said that government audits had found "a pattern of irresponsibility and repeated omissions" in the immigration institute. However, charges being brought in Mexico, especially against public officials, do not always result in prison time.

On Wednesday, López Obrador said that even though the Attorney General's Office was investigating Garduño, prosecutors had revealed few details and it was not exactly clear how they would charge him.

"We are going to wait and we are going to make decisions in the (right) moment," López Obrador said.

The president defended Garduño, saying "his work is good in general; he has always had good performance," despite "the misfortune" that happened in Juarez.

Garduño has been close to López Obrador since the latter was Mexico City mayor, and Garduño has

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 50 of 70

overseen a strategy to contain migrants in southern Mexico with the help of the National Guard, which has been criticized as the start of a militarization of Mexico's immigration policy. It included placing retired or active military officers in leadership positions inside the immigration agency.

Garduño's predecessor at the immigration institute, sociologist Tonatiuh Guillén, said the prosecutor's decision "is a good signal, given that the expectation at first was just an investigation of those who were directly responsible."

Guillén said, however, that keeping Garduño in his position generated an "unnecessary tension" because he should have been dismissed in order to make the case against him more straightforward.

Guillén resigned in 2019 because of his disagreement with hardening migration policy, as Washington was demanding.

Anger in Mexico initially focused on two guards who were seen fleeing the March 27 fire, without unlocking the cell door to allow the migrants to escape. But López Obrador had said earlier Tuesday that they didn't have the keys.

A video from a security camera inside the facility shows guards walking away when the fire started in late March inside the cell holding migrants without making an effort to release them.

The Attorney General's Office said several other officers will also face charges for failing to carry out their duties, the statement said, but prosecutors did not explain what specific charges or identify the officials.

An immigration official said on Wednesday morning that Garduño had not yet been called to testify. The official asked for anonymity because was not authorized to speak on the record.

Complaints about corruption and bad conditions at Mexico's migrant detention facilities have never been seriously addressed: Prosecutors said that after a fire at another detention center in the Gulf coast state of Tabasco killed one person and injured 14 in 2020, the immigration agency knew there were problems that needed to be corrected, but alleged they failed to act.

The fire case could also put López Obrador in a difficult position on his promise not to tolerate any corruption. Prosecutors said they are investigating a no-bid contract to the firm providing private security at the Ciudad Juarez facility. Investigators found a series of irregularities in the company's work, but prosecutors did not specify if Garduño was involved in that contract's approval.

One migrant allegedly set fire to foam mattresses at the detention center to protest detention conditions and what he apparently thought were plans to move or deport the migrants. Mexico has returned the bodies of 31 migrants to their home countries.

Ukraine's outrage grows over video seeming to show beheading

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIRIOVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine launched an investigation Wednesday into a gruesome video that purportedly shows the beheading of a Ukrainian soldier, in the latest accusation of atrocities said to have been committed by Russia since it invaded in February 2022.

The video spread quickly online and drew outrage from officials in Kyiv, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, as well as international organizations. The Kremlin called the footage "horrible" but said it needed to be verified.

The Associated Press was not able to independently verify the authenticity of the video or the circumstances of where and when it was shot. The AP is not distributing the video or using frame grabs due to its extremely graphic nature.

Meanwhile, a Russian defense official claimed that fighters from Russia's paramilitary Wagner group have seized three districts of Bakhmut, the embattled city that for months has been the focus of Moscow's grinding campaign in the east.

The video circulating online appears to show a man in green fatigues wearing a yellow armband, typically donned by Ukrainian fighters. His screams are heard before another man in camouflage uses a knife to decapitate him.

A third man holds up a flak jacket apparently belonging to the man being beheaded. All three men speak

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 51 of 70

in Russian.

Since Russia's forces invaded on Feb. 24, 2022, they have committed widespread abuses and alleged war crimes, according to the United Nations, rights groups and reporting by The Associated Press. Ukraine has repeatedly accused Russia of targeting apartment buildings and other civilian structures and equipment in its strikes, and images of hundreds of dead civilians in the streets and in mass graves in Bucha after Russian forces withdrew from the city have horrified the world.

The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes, accusing him of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

The Kremlin denies it has committed war crimes or that it has targeted civilians.

Ukrainian troops have also been accused of abuses, and last year Kyiv said it would investigate video circulating online that Moscow alleged showed Ukrainian forces killing Russian troops who may have been trying to surrender.

Zelenskyy said the violence in the latest video would not be forgotten, and that Russian forces would be held responsible.

"Everyone must react, every leader. Do not expect that it will be forgotten, that time will pass," he said in a video.

In it, he used strong language to describe Russian soldiers, calling them "beasts."

Later Wednesday, at a roundtable of IMF and World Bank meetings, Zelenskyy called in a video for a moment of silence for the Ukrainian soldier killed in the apparent beheading.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the video was "horrible" but must be verified.

"In the world of fakes we live in, the authenticity of the footage must be checked," he said in a conference call with reporters.

Ukraine's state security service opened an investigation, according to a statement from Vasyl Maliuk, the head of the agency, known as the SBU. Officials are studying the video to identify those responsible, as well as the victim, according to Hanna Maliar, the deputy head of the Defense Ministry.

Posters on pro-Kremlin Russian Telegram channels, while not confirming the video's authenticity, did not dispute it. Some sought to justify it by saying combat has hardened Russian troops.

Andrei Medvedev, a Russian state TV journalist and a member of the Moscow city legislature, speculated that the video's release was "fairly opportune" for the Ukrainian army, saying it could help "fire up personnel ideologically" ahead of a planned major counteroffensive.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Zelenskyy, also linked the video's release to the expected offensive but said it was meant to "demoralize the public mood or at least change the psychological perception of the war right now."

Ukraine's human rights chief said he will request that the U.N. Human Rights Committee investigate. Dmytro Lubinets said he has also written to the U.N. Commissioner for Human Rights, the U.N. Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

He wrote on Telegram that "a public execution of a captive is yet another indication of a breach of Geneva Convention norms, international humanitarian law, a breach of the fundamental right to life."

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine said it had previously documented "serious violations of international humanitarian law, including those committed against prisoners of war," adding that "the latest incidents must also be properly investigated and the perpetrators must be held accountable."

Guterres "had also seen the video and was horrified by it and supports the call for the perpetrators to be held to account," said U.N. spokesman, Stephane Dujarric.

The video provoked an outcry among Ukrainians.

"This is horrifying," said Mykola Drobot, 44, of Kyiv. "Such things cannot happen without the consent -- silent or not -- of the military and political leadership."

Another Kyiv resident, Yuliia Sievierina, 40, speculated the video was meant as "moral pressure on us to consider ourselves even more oppressed and emotionally torn."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 52 of 70

"It doesn't work," she told the AP. "It only creates more anger and thirst for resistance."

The war's front lines have been largely frozen for months, with much of the fighting focused around the city of Bakhmut.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Wagner forces had made progress there. Ukrainian officials did not immediately comment, but Zelenskyy has said before that his troops could pull out if they face a threat of encirclement.

Konashenkov did not specify which neighborhoods of Bakhmut are under Russian control, or how much of the city remains in Ukrainian hands.

Elsewhere, at least four civilians were wounded as Russian forces shelled a Ukrainian-held town near the shut-down Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, said regional Gov. Serhii Lysak.

He said in a Telegram post that "people are being pulled out from under the rubble" after Russian shelling destroyed 13 houses and cars in Nikopol, across the Dnieper River from the plant.

Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko alleged Russian forces attacked a town in the eastern Donetsk province with cluster munitions — banned by an international treaty — wounding one person. An AP and Frontline database called War Crimes Watch Ukraine has cataloged how Russia has used cluster bombs.

Associated Press writer Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

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

Expelled Black lawmaker Pearson to return to Tennessee House

By ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — The second of two Black Democrats expelled from the Republican-led Tennessee House will return to the Legislature after a Memphis commission voted to reinstate him Wednesday, nearly a week after his banishment for supporting gun control protesters propelled him into the national spotlight.

Hundreds of supporters marched Justin Pearson through Memphis to the Shelby County Board of Commissioners meeting, chanting and cheering before entering the commission chambers, where officials quickly voted 7-0 to restore him to his position.

"The message for all the people in Nashville who decided to expel us: You can't expel hope. You can't expel justice," Pearson said at the meeting, his voice rising as he spoke. "You can't expel our voice. And you sure can't expel our fight."

The House's vote last Thursday to remove Pearson and Rep. Justin Jones but keep white Rep. Gloria Johnson drew accusations of racism. Johnson survived by one vote. The Republican leadership denied that race was a factor.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and four other senators sent a letter Wednesday asking the Department of Justice to investigate whether the expulsions violated the Constitution or federal civil rights laws and "to take all steps necessary to uphold the democratic integrity of our nation's legislative bodies."

After the reinstatement vote, a throng of jubilant supporters greeted Pearson outside in a churchlike celebration. Pearson adopted the cadence of a preacher as he delivered a rousing speech with call-and-response crowd interaction. Accompanied by his fiancée, mother and four brothers, Pearson pumped his fist, jumped up and down and hugged relatives.

"They've awakened a sleeping giant," he said, as a drumbeat and roaring cheers echoed his voice.

Pearson is expected to return to the Capitol in Nashville on Thursday, when the House holds its next floor session, and plans to be sworn in there.

Republicans expelled Pearson and Jones over their role in a gun control protest on the House floor after a Nashville school shooting that left three children and three adults dead. The Nashville Metropolitan Council took only a few minutes Monday to unanimously restore Jones to office. He was quickly reinstated to his House seat.

Shelby County's commission has 13 members, but only seven voted — all Democrats in favor of Pearson.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 53 of 70

Two Democrats were out of the country and did not vote. The four Republicans on the commission did not attend the meeting.

The appointments are interim and special elections for the seats will take place in the coming months. Jones and Pearson have said they plan to run in the special elections.

Marcus DeWayne Belton said he attended the rally outside the Shelby County government building after the vote because he supports Pearson's call for gun law reform.

"It's not even a Black thing anymore," he said of gun violence. "This is Black and white. Any time you go inside a school and you're killing kids, Black and white, it's serious. Things are getting worse."

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

Political tensions rose when Pearson, Johnson and Jones on the House floor 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. Their participation from the front of the chamber broke House rules because the three did not have permission from the House speaker.

Republican Gov. Bill Lee has avoided commenting on the lawmakers' expulsion and instead said the controversy was an issue concerning the House. He has since called on the General Assembly to pass legislation that would keep dangerous people from acquiring weapons.

In their return to the Tennessee Capitol, Pearson and Jones still face the same political divisions between the state's few Democratic strongholds and the Republican supermajority, which were already reaching boiling point before the expulsions.

GOP members this year introduced a wave of punishing proposals to strip away Nashville's autonomy. Others have pushed to abolish the state's few community oversight boards that investigate police misconduct and replace them with advisory panels that would be blocked from investigating complaints.

Lawmakers are also nearing passage of a bill that would move control of the board that oversees Nashville's airport from local appointments to selections by Republican state government leaders.

Republicans have so far refused to consider placing any new restrictions on firearms in the wake of the Nashville school shooting. Instead, lawmakers have advanced legislation designed to add more armed guards in public and private schools and are considering a proposal that would allow teachers to carry guns.

Meanwhile, House Speaker Cameron Sexton's office confirmed this week that a Republican lawmaker was stripped of a top committee assignment more than a month after he asked during a hearing if "hanging by a tree" could be added to the state's execution methods. The speaker's office declined to specify the reason for removing him from the committee.

Rep. Paul Sherrell was taken off the Criminal Justice Committee and transferred to another, and was "very agreeable" to the change, Sexton spokesperson Doug Kufner said.

Sherrell, who is white, later apologized for what he said amid outcry from Black lawmakers, who pointed to the state's dark history of lynching. Sherrell said his comments were "exaggerated" to show "support of families who often wait decades for justice."

Pearson has referenced Sherrell's comments throughout the expulsions and their aftermath. On Wednesday, Pearson said Sexton should resign his post, asserting the House speaker is "more willing to expel people who are asking for the end of gun violence than expel a member of the House who advocated for lynching."

Reporters Jonathan Mattise and Kimberlee Kruesi in Nashville contributed to this report.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 54 of 70

New streaming app to 'Max' programming from HBO, Discovery

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

Warner Bros. Discovery unveiled a streaming service Wednesday combining iconic HBO programming such as "The Sopranos" with a mix of unscripted TV series in a push to reap more subscribers from what so far has been a muddled media merger.

The \$16-per-month service, called Max, will be released May 23 in the U.S. and automatically replace the company's existing HBO Max service in what is being promised as a seamless transition. Max will gradually become available in the rest of the world, with Latin America next up on the slate.

The existing Discovery Plus app featuring reality and unscripted series such as "Fixer Upper" and "Naked and Afraid" from a collection of TV networks will continue to be offered. That's even as all that programming is made available within the new Max app, which will be marketed with the tagline "The One To Watch."

The transition comes a year after the completion of a roughly \$43 billion deal that spun off the AT&T's WarnerMedia Division that includes HBO, CNN and TBS into Discovery, whose stable includes the TLC, HGTV, Magnolia and Food networks.

When the deal was announced in 2021, Warner Bros. Discover CEO David Zaslav envisioned it creating "the best media company in the world" backed by a vast library of movies, TV series, documentaries and children's programming. The goal was to stand out among an array of streaming options competing for subscribers at a time many households are trimming discretionary spending amid stubbornly high inflation.

With Max now on the verge of rolling out, Zaslav said he still sees big things ahead.

"This is our rendezvous with destiny," he declared during a presentation in the same studio where movies such as "Casablanca" and "A Streetcar Named Desire" were made. Those movies, as well as other Warner Bros. films, will be available in Max, which Zaslav hailed as "the streaming version of must-see TV." Zaslav hinted that live sports events and news will be added to Max before the end of the year.

Given that the Max app will bring more pedestrian programming from the Discovery networks alongside the boundary-breaking series that have been HBO's hallmark, Warner Bros. Discovery executives periodically emphasized HBO would remain the same groundbreaking network that recently caused a stir with the series "The Last of Us," and is currently making waves with the final season of "Succession."

Toward that end, the company said it would be announcing another offshoot of its most watched series, "Game of Thrones," and is developing a new live-action "Harry Potter" series featuring a different cast from the popular film franchise based on the books by J.K. Rowling.

Warner Bros. Discovery is hoping the Max app helps turn the tide after a year of turbulence.

Since taking over the combined company, Zaslav has been shedding thousands workers and slashing other expenses to cope with the roughly \$50 billion debt that the company took on largely because of the merger. The cost cutting included a decision to pull the plug on CNN's streaming service a month after its launch in a move that quickly raised doubts about whether the Warner Bros. Discovery deal would turn out to be a flop.

The ongoing skepticism has been reflected in New York-based Warner Bros. Discovery's stock price, which has dropped by more than 40% since the merger's completion, including further erosion Wednesday that occurred after the company laid out its plans for the Max app.

Shares in Netflix, the world's top streaming services, have fallen by 7% during same stretch amid concerns about its own slowing growth, which included a loss of 920,000 subscribers in the U.S. and Canada territory in 2022 that represents its biggest market.

Netflix, which ended last year with 231 million worldwide subscribers, is just one of a bevy of deep-pocketed streamers that the new Max app will be competing against. Other notables include Apple, Amazon, and Walt Disney Co., which offers apps for Hulu TV and ESPN in addition to Disney Plus.

The stiff competition prompted Netflix to introduce a lower-cost streaming plan that includes ads, an option that Max will offer for \$10 per month for viewers willing to tolerate periodic commercial interruptions.

NPR quits Elon Musk's Twitter over 'government-funded' label

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

National Public Radio is quitting Twitter after the social media platform owned by Elon Musk stamped NPR's account with labels the news organization says are intended to undermine its credibility.

Twitter labeled NPR's main account last week as "state-affiliated media," a term also used to identify media outlets controlled or heavily influenced by authoritarian governments, such as Russia and China. Twitter later changed the label to "government-funded media," but to NPR — which relies on the government for a tiny fraction of its funding — it's still misleading.

NPR said in a statement Wednesday that it "will no longer be active on Twitter because the platform is taking actions that undermine our credibility by falsely implying that we are not editorially independent."

"Defund @NPR," was Musk's tweeted response. His latest tiff with a news organization reflects a gamble for the social media platform he bought last year.

Twitter, more than any of its rivals, has said its users come to it to keep track of current events. That made it an attractive place for news outlets to share their stories and reinforced Twitter's moves to combat the spread of misinformation. But Musk has long expressed disdain for professional journalists and said he wants to elevate the views and expertise of the "average citizen."

The Public Broadcasting Service said Wednesday it has also stopped tweeting from its main account and that the public TV organization has no plans to resume because "Twitter's simplistic label leaves the inaccurate impression that PBS is wholly funded by the federal government."

Media analysts say growing friction between Twitter and news organizations since Musk bought the platform is bad for Twitter, and bad for the public.

"It's a shame to have proceeded in a direction where, intentionally or otherwise, Twitter is categorizing Russian propaganda outlets in a similar way to very legitimate news sources that get a very modest amount of funding from the U.S. government," said Paul Barrett, deputy director of the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights.

This is just the latest example of Musk tangling with mainstream news organizations. He abruptly suspended the accounts of individual journalists who wrote about Twitter late last year, claiming some were trying to reveal his location.

Twitter earlier in April removed the verification check mark on the main account of The New York Times, singling out the newspaper and disparaging its reporting after it said it would not pay Twitter for verification of its institutional accounts.

Twitter used to tag journalists and other high-profile accounts with blue check marks to verify their identity and distinguish them from impostors. But Musk has derided the marks as an undeserved status symbol and plans to take them away from anyone not buying a premium subscription. Those cost as little as \$8 a month for individuals and a minimum of \$1,000 a month for organizations.

Barrett said Musk appears to be intent on "insulting and antagonizing individuals and organizations that he considers to be too liberal for his taste." But by driving away legitimate news outlets, Twitter is only harming itself, he said.

"The drift is in an unfortunate direction," Barrett said. "You want to encourage sources of reliable, well-reported news to be present and prolific on your platform."

NPR's main account, which joined Twitter in 2007, had not tweeted since April 4. On Wednesday, it sent a series of tweets listing other places to find its journalism.

NPR spokesperson Isabel Lara said its journalists, employees and member stations can decide on their own if they want to keep using the platform. NPR journalists have not been given the "government-funded" label, at least not yet.

NPR does receive U.S. government funding through grants from federal agencies and departments, along with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The company has said it accounts for less than 1% of NPR's annual operating budget. Much of its funding comes from sponsorships and dues from its member stations around the U.S., which in turn get revenue from a range of funders including public institutions, corporate donors and listeners.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 56 of 70

Twitter's new labels have often appeared arbitrarily assigned. For example, Twitter hasn't added the "government-funded" label for many other public broadcasting organizations, such as those in Canada and Australia. It also has changed some labels without explanation, such as when it removed a "United Arab Emirates state-affiliated media" tag from the profile of Abu Dhabi's The National newspaper earlier this year.

In an interview Tuesday with a BBC technology reporter at Twitter's San Francisco headquarters, Musk acknowledged that the British organization "is not thrilled" about the label it received and asked the reporter for feedback.

"Our goal was simply to be as truthful and accurate as possible," Musk said. "So I think we're adjusting the label to be 'publicly funded,' which I think is perhaps not too objectionable. We're trying to be accurate."

The BBC said Wednesday it would welcome being described as publicly funded instead of government-funded. Hours later, BBC got its "publicly funded media" label, but not NPR or PBS.

The literary organization PEN America said news organizations are making understandable responses to Twitter's "unpredictable and capricious" policy decisions but the loss to consumers will be significant.

Liz Woolery, PEN America's digital policy leader, said "Musk's approach to managing Twitter has come at the expense of information integrity and user trust, and it has only made it harder for users to sift through the maelstrom of online content to find what is credible."

AP Writers David Bauder and Kelvin Chan contributed to this report.

Juul Labs agrees to pay \$462 million settlement to 6 states

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Electronic cigarette-maker Juul Labs Inc. will pay \$462 million to six states and the District of Columbia, marking the largest settlement the company has reached so far for its role in the youth vaping surge, the attorneys general in several states announced Wednesday.

The agreement with New York, California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Mexico and Washington, D.C. is the latest in a string of recent legal agreements Juul has reached to settle lawsuits related to the way it marketed addictive nicotine products. Critics said Juul was trying to lure children too young to smoke.

Like some other settlements reached by Juul, this latest includes restrictions on the marketing and distribution of the company's vaping products. For example, it is barred from any direct or indirect marketing that targets youth, which includes anyone under age 35. Juul will also limit the amount of purchases customers can make in retail stores and online.

"Juul lit a nationwide public health crisis by putting addictive products in the hands of minors and convincing them that it's harmless," New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement. "Today they are paying the price for the harm they caused."

A spokesperson for Juul said with Wednesday's settlement, the Washington D.C.-based company was "nearing total resolution of the company's historical legal challenges and securing certainty for our future."

The spokesperson added that underage use of Juul products has declined by 95% since 2019 based on the National Youth Tobacco Survey. According to the CDC though, since surveys were administered online instead of on school campuses during the pandemic, the results cannot be compared to prior years.

Juul rocketed to the top of the U.S. vaping market about five years ago with the popularity of flavors like mango, mint and crème brûlée. But the startup's rise was fueled by use among teenagers, some of whom became hooked on Juul's high-nicotine pods.

Parents, school administrators and politicians have largely blamed the company for a surge in underage vaping.

District of Columbia Attorney General Brian Schwalb said in a statement that Juul "knew how addictive and dangerous its products were and actively tried to cover up that medical truth."

In September, Juul agreed to pay nearly \$440 million over a period of six to 10 years to settle a two-year investigation by 33 states into the marketing of its high-nicotine vaping products to young people. That settlement amounted to about 25% of Juul's U.S. sales of \$1.9 billion in 2021.

Three months later, the company said it had secured an equity investment to settle thousands of lawsuits

over its e-cigarettes brought by individuals and families of Juul users, school districts, city governments and Native American tribes.

The vaping company, which has laid off hundreds of employees, recently agreed to pay West Virginia \$7.9 million to settle a lawsuit alleging the company violated the state's Consumer Credit and Protection Act by marketing to underage users, West Virginia Attorney General Patrick Morrisey announced Monday. Last month, the company paid Chicago \$23.8 million to settle a lawsuit.

Minnesota's case against Juul went to trial last month with the state's Attorney General Keith Ellison asserting that the company "baited, deceived and addicted a whole new generation of kids" as youth cigarette smoking rates fell.

White House wants rule to protect abortion patients' records

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Wednesday proposed a new federal rule to limit how law enforcement and state officials collect medical records if they investigate women who flee their home states to seek abortions elsewhere.

The proposal, prompted by a string of blows to abortion across the country, comes as the White House is staring down a legal challenge to a commonly used abortion pill that could upend access to the care across the entire country by Friday.

Vice President Kamala Harris told reporters that it's one of several new actions the administration is taking to push back against a wave of abortion restrictions that have been introduced since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion. The administration is also launching a hotline for people to call and ask questions about prenatal, infant and reproductive care.

"The women in America in particular have been in a state of fear about what this means for them, what this means for the people they love," Harris said.

The White House's proposed rule would prohibit health care organizations from sharing personal medical records with authorities for investigations related to reproductive care in states where a woman legally obtained an abortion. While medical records are protected by federal privacy laws, health providers and insurers can be compelled to turn over medical records with a court order.

Doctors around the country have voiced concerns about protecting that medical information from law enforcement officials, said Melanie Fontes Rainer, the director of the office of civil rights at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which proposed the rule change. The public can weigh in on the proposed rule for the next 60 days.

"We've had many conversations with providers, major medical associations and patient advocates about what they're seeing on the ground and how the federal government can be helpful in ensuring medical records are kept private," she said in a statement.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion last year, some women living in a stretch of Southern and Midwestern states that have largely outlawed abortion now travel hours to other states to get abortions legally.

The federal health agency's new national phone number will provide information about prenatal, infant and abortion care as well as adoption, Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra announced Wednesday. Becerra did not provide a phone number with his announcement.

The Biden administration is racing to roll out these new initiatives ahead of a pressing deadline imposed by a Texas judge that could revoke the Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone, one of two drugs used in what is considered the most effective and safest way to carry out a medication abortion.

Texas Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk's order to pull the drug off the market goes into effect Friday, unless another court steps in. The Justice Department appealed the ruling on Monday. There is no precedent for a lone judge to overrule the FDA's medical decisions.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said Wednesday the judge's ruling might embolden others to use a similar method to challenge the FDA's approval other medicines, drugs and vaccines.

"This could happen to any medication Americans rely on, no matter how essential it is and no matter how long ago it was approved," Garland said. Pharmaceutical companies filed a brief in support of the White House's case on Tuesday night warning that the ruling could have ripple effects on life-saving medications.

Further complicating things for the Biden administration: a competing ruling by a federal judge in Spokane, Washington, issued on the same day directed federal officials not to hinder access to the drug in at least 17 states where Democrats sued to keep the drug's availability intact. The issue is likely to be decided by the Supreme Court.

Follow the AP's coverage of abortion at <https://apnews.com/hub/abortion>.

An emerging threat: Drug mix of xylazine, fentanyl

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

The U.S. has named a veterinary tranquilizer as an "emerging threat" when it's mixed with the powerful opioid fentanyl, clearing the way for more efforts to stop the spread of xylazine.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy announced the designation Wednesday, the first time the office has used it since the category for fast-growing drug dangers was created in 2019.

Dr. Rahul Gupta, director of the drug policy office, said xylazine (pronounced ZAI'-luh-zeen) has become increasingly common in all regions of the country.

It was detected in about 800 drug deaths in the U.S. in 2020 — most of them in the Northeast. By 2021, it was present in more than 3,000 fatalities — with the most in the South — according to a report last year from the Drug Enforcement Administration.

"We cannot ignore what we're seeing," Gupta said. "We must act and act now."

Xylazine was approved for veterinary use in 1971. Sometimes known as "tranq," it's been showing up in supplies of illicit drugs used by humans in major quantities in only the last several years.

It's believed to be added to other drugs to increase profits. Officials are trying to understand how much of it is diverted from veterinary uses and how much is made illicitly.

The drug causes breathing and heart rates to slow down, sometimes to deadly levels, and causes skin abscesses and ulcers that can require amputation. Withdrawal is also painful.

While it's often used in conjunction with opioids, including fentanyl and related illicit lab-made drugs, it's not an opioid. And there are no known antidotes.

Gupta said his office is requesting \$11 million as part of its budget to develop a strategy to tackle the drug's spread. Plans include developing an antidote, learning more about how it is introduced into illicit drug supplies so that can be disrupted, and looking into whether Congress should classify it as a controlled substance.

Gupta said it needs to be available for veterinary uses even amid crackdowns on the supply used by people. He also said systems to detect the drug and data about where it's being used need to be improved.

The Drug Policy Alliance, a group that advocates the harm done by drugs, applauds parts of the Biden administration's plan, including looking for antidotes to reverse overdoses and developing quick tests to determine whether xylazine is present. But the group is wary of trying to stop it through law enforcement action. It asserts that crackdowns on prescription opioids and heroin created the condition for fentanyl and now xylazine to overtake some drug markets.

"Focusing on supply-side interdiction will only dig us deeper into this crisis and inevitably result in more loss of life," Martiza Perez Medina, director of the group's office of federal affairs, said in a statement.

The drug is part of an overdose crisis plaguing the U.S.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 107,000 people died from overdoses in the 12 months that ended Nov. 30, 2022. Before 2020, the number of overdose deaths had never topped 100,000.

Most of the deaths were linked to fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. Like xylazine, they're often added to other drugs — and users don't always know they're getting them.

Space race! Meteorites hit Maine, museum offers \$25K reward

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Somewhere in a remote stretch of forest near Maine's border with Canada, rocks from space crashed to Earth and may be scattered across the ground — just waiting to be picked up.

If you're the first person to find a big one, a museum says it'll pay out a \$25,000 reward.

The unusually bright fireball could be seen in broad daylight around noon Saturday, said Darryl Pitt, chair of the meteorite division at the Maine Mineral and Gem Museum in Bethel.

NASA says four radar sweeps detected "signatures consistent with falling meteorites seen at the time and location reported by eyewitnesses," and people also heard sonic booms. It's the first time radar spotted a meteorite fall in Maine, the space agency said.

The Maine Mineral and Gem Museum wants to add to its collection, which includes moon and Mars rocks, Pitt said, so the first meteorite hunters to deliver a 1-kilogram (2.2-pound) specimen will claim the \$25,000 prize. That could be about the size of a softball.

"With more people having an awareness, the more people will look — and the greater the likelihood of a recovery," Pitt said Wednesday.

Pitt said that because the descent was spotted by radar, he's confident meteorites can be found on the ground.

Still, there's no guarantee there are any meteorites big enough to claim the payout.

NASA said on its website that the "meteorite masses calculated from the radar signatures range from 1.59g (0.004 pounds) to 322g (0.7 pounds) although larger masses may have fallen."

The meteorites likely impacted across a swath of ground spanning from the town of Waite, Maine, to Canoose, New Brunswick. According to NASA, the largest specimens will be strewn at the west end of the debris field, closest to Waite — about a 3 1/2 hour drive from Portland.

Locating a softball-sized space rock in the wilderness may be similar to finding a needle in a haystack: Pitt said the estimated area where the meteorites hit is about a mile wide (1.6 km) and stretches for 10-12 miles (16-19 km), all the way into Canada.

The museum is asking aspiring meteorite hunters to brush up on what meteorites look like before searching, so they know what they're looking for, and avoid private property unless they have permission.

The museum has an extensive collection of specimens, including the largest intact Mars rock on Earth.

Pitt said the museum is also looking to purchase any other specimens found by meteorite hunters. He said the specimens "could easily be worth their weight in gold."

Biden urges Northern Ireland to sustain peace, reap gains

By COLLEEN LONG, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — President Joe Biden said Wednesday that Northern Ireland must "not go back" to the violence that scarred it for years before a U.S.-brokered peace deal 25 years ago, nudging politicians to resolve a political crisis that has left this part of the United Kingdom without a functioning government.

Speaking of the economic growth Northern Ireland has experienced since the Good Friday Agreement ended 30 years of sectarian bloodshed, Biden said: "It's up to us to keep this going."

On his first presidential visit to Northern Ireland, Biden dangled the prospect of more American investment to help fuel economic growth — especially if Belfast's fractious politicians resolve a stalemate that has put their government on pause.

"The simple truth is that peace and economic opportunity go together," Biden said during a speech at Ulster University's new campus in Belfast. He said the glass-clad downtown building would have been unthinkable during the years of bombings and shootings known as "The Troubles."

"Where barbed wire once sliced up the city, today we find a cathedral of learning, built of glass," he said.

Noting that Northern Ireland's total economic output had doubled in the quarter-century since the Good Friday peace deal was signed in April 1998, Biden urged people in Northern Ireland to "sustain the peace,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 60 of 70

unleash this incredible economic opportunity, which is just beginning.”

Biden urged all political parties to get back to work, saying “democracy needs champions” and that Northern Ireland’s future is in their hands.

“I hope the assembly and the executive will soon be restored,” he said. “That’s a judgement for you to make, not me, but I hope it happens.”

Biden’s visit was timed to mark the anniversary of the Good Friday accord, which the U.S. was key to striking. Biden credited people who were willing to “risk boldly for the future” by reaching the agreement, reminding the audience that “peace was not inevitable.”

Referring to a February gun attack on a senior police officer — blamed by authorities on Irish Republican Army dissidents opposed to the peace process — Biden said “the enemies of peace will not prevail. Northern Ireland will not go back, pray God.”

While peace has endured, Northern Ireland has been without a functioning government since the Democratic Unionist Party, which formed half of a power-sharing government, walked out a year ago over a post-Brexit trade dispute.

Biden met briefly before his speech with the leaders of the DUP and Northern Ireland’s four other main political parties.

Biden has faced mistrust from pro-British unionists because of his Irish American heritage. Sammy Wilson, a DUP lawmaker in the U.K. Parliament, told Talk TV that Biden “has got a record of being pro-republican, anti-unionist, anti-British” — a claim the White House firmly denied.

Biden’s speech carefully navigated Northern Ireland’s complex political currents, referring to both his British and his Irish ancestry, and noting the contribution to the U.S. of largely Protestant Ulster Scots as well as Irish Catholics like his own forebears.

Such things don’t go unnoticed in Northern Ireland. DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson said Biden’s “reference also to his own British ancestry I think indicates hopefully that we have a president that recognizes the United Kingdom is a close ally and friend of the United States.”

But Donaldson doubted whether the president’s visit would “change the political dynamic.”

“I am clear what needs to happen to make the progress that we all desire — and that is that Northern Ireland’s place within the United Kingdom is both respected and protected, and we want to see that in law,” he said.

Michelle O’Neill from Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein said Biden had “sent a clear message to the DUP” about the need to get back to work.

Biden also had tea with U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak during his Belfast stopover. The president spent less than 24 hours in Northern Ireland before moving on to the Republic of Ireland to begin a three-day visit, scheduled to include an address to the Dublin parliament, attendance at a gala dinner and trips to two ancestral hometowns.

U.K. officials denied that the brevity of the visit amounted to a snub. Sunak said he and Biden had a “very good discussion” about investment in Northern Ireland, along with foreign policy issues.

“We’re very close partners and allies. We cooperate on a range of things,” Sunak said.

Northern Ireland’s political crisis stems, in part, from Brexit. Britain’s departure from the European Union left Northern Ireland poised uneasily between the rest of the U.K. and EU member Ireland and put the peace agreement under increased strain.

After much wrangling, Britain and the EU struck a deal in February to address the tensions over trade, eliminating many of the customs checks that had irked businesses and angered unionists. The Democratic Unionist Party, though, says the agreement doesn’t go far enough to address concerns about Northern Ireland’s place in the U.K., and has refused to return to government.

Biden, who has urged Britain and the bloc to put Brexit squabbling behind them, praised U.K. and EU leaders for trying to sort out the “complex challenges” created by Brexit.

Neil Given, a civil servant who lives in Belfast, welcomed Biden’s visit but said his “expectations are not great” that it would unblock the political logjam.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 61 of 70

"We have prevaricated for well over a year now, and ever since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement there have been numerous stoppages of the institutions of Stormont," he said. "Whether or not Mr. Biden's visit can in 24, 48 hours pull people together and perhaps get a message we really do need to get back to government, I don't know.

"But hopefully he can do that. I know there is no more powerful person certainly to be over that can give out that message."

Lawless reported from London. Chris Megerian contributed from Washington.

Your tax refund could be smaller than last year. Here's why

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Expecting a tax refund? It could be smaller than last year. And with inflation still high, that money won't go as far as it did a year ago.

The 90 million taxpayers who have filed as of March 31 got refunds that were an average of nearly 10% less than last year, in part due to pandemic relief programs expiring. The filing deadline for most taxpayers is Tuesday.

The average refund is \$2,910, down from \$3,226, a difference of more than \$300, according to the most recent IRS data.

For many households, especially working families, the tax refund is the biggest one-time financial windfall of the year, said Kathy Pickering, chief tax officer of H&R Block.

"We know that working families in general are the most cash-strapped," she said, adding that the expanded earned income tax and child tax credits during the COVID pandemic provided a lot of benefits for families with children.

The child tax credit, for example, is reverting to \$2,000 per child, while the pandemic credit was as high as \$3,600 per child. The child and dependent care credit, a tax break available to parents and those who care for family members while they work, had been expanded to a maximum of \$8,000 in 2021 and is now a maximum of \$2,100.

"As those provisions expired, that's had a big impact," Pickering said.

Rachel Zhou, 20, a college student in Boston whose father works in food delivery and whose stepmother is a social worker, said her family has used refunds in the past for things like home repairs that require big one-time payments. One rebate they received during the pandemic went toward fixing her house's heating, air, and ventilation system, she said.

Zhou has worked since she was a teenager, and has already filed her taxes this year. Her refund? \$1. Last year and the previous year she received "upwards of several hundred dollars," she said.

"Overall it does make the situation a bit more tenuous," said Zhou. "It is nice to have (the refund) at the end of the year — tax season — for when there are gaps to be made up for in the budget."

Zhou has worked as a receptionist, at a grill and an ice cream shop, and in other jobs. For her father, who has shifted more towards self employment in the past few years (receiving 1099 forms for DoorDash and other delivery work), she said taxes have also become "more of a hit and less of a refund."

Pickering said that more Americans took on side hustles, gig and freelance work during and since the pandemic, and so they may be experiencing the self-employment tax and the consequences of a lack of withholding. A traditional employer who provides a W2 would withhold taxes from each paycheck, meaning less of a potential shock at the end of the tax year.

Ted Rossman, an analyst with Bankrate.com, said those who receive refunds tend to use the money "very practically," often to pay off debt and boost savings.

"What I do think is definitely significant is the fact that other costs have gone up," Rossman said. "It's bad enough that this is taking 10% off your tax refund, but on top of that, your groceries might be up, and rent, and gas prices. This is money that a lot of people really count on every year."

"Even a difference of \$300 on the tax refund, that does pale in comparison to the stimulus people re-

ceived during the pandemic," he said. "Psychologically, economically speaking, it probably feels like, 'Just one more thing.' So maybe it weighs on confidence more than actual spending."

Alaina, 32, a Florida-based fiber artist who asked to be identified by her first name to protect her privacy, said her refund will go toward house repairs and "clearing up debt."

"I have a lot on credit cards and have had to borrow money from people that I need to pay back," she said. "I wish it could go for fun stuff, but money is too tight."

Alaina, who sells her work online, has been self-employed since she lost her job in the healthcare sector in 2021. She said she hasn't yet filed her taxes this year but that last year she and her husband, who is unemployed, received about \$3,600 after filing jointly.

According to Bankrate's Rossman, there's a possibility that this year's lower tax refunds could weaken consumer spending and, as result, help slow inflation.

"It's bad news for households because people want higher refunds, obviously, but I think perhaps quietly the Fed might cheer," he said.

To combat inflation, the Fed has been raising interest rates to increase the cost of borrowing money, with the hope of slowing the economy.

Unfortunately, for those households that have spent through their savings, who are now relying on credit cards to get by month to month, those higher interest rates have also led to average credit card interest rates of over 20%.

"That becomes a tough cycle to break," Rossman said. "We are dealing with fairly blunt tools when you talk about raising interest rates and changing the price of money. High inflation left unchecked will be bad for everyone — but it will be worst for the lowest end of the income spectrum."

The Associated Press receives support from Charles Schwab Foundation for educational and explanatory reporting to improve financial literacy. The independent foundation is separate from Charles Schwab and Co. Inc. The AP is solely responsible for its journalism.

Michigan researchers find 1914 shipwrecks in Lake Superior

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Michigan researchers have found the wreckage of two ships that disappeared into Lake Superior in 1914 and hope the discovery will lead them to a third that sank at the same time, killing nearly 30 people aboard the trio of lumber-shipping vessels.

The Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society announced the discoveries this month after confirming details with other researchers. Ric Mixter, a board member of the society and a maritime historian, called witnessing the discoveries "a career highlight."

"It not only solved a chapter in the nation's darkest day in lumber history, but also showcased a team of historians who have dedicated their lives towards making sure these stories aren't forgotten," Mixter said.

The vessels owned by the Edward Hines Lumber Company sank into the ice-cold lake on Nov. 18, 1914, when a storm swept through as they moved lumber from Baraga, Michigan, to Tonawanda, New York. The steamship C.F. Curtis was towing the schooner barges Selden E. Marvin and Annie M. Peterson; all 28 people aboard were killed.

The society's team found the wreck of the Curtis during the summer of 2021 and the Marvin a year later within a few miles of the first discovery. The organization operates a museum in Whitefish Point and regularly runs searches for shipwrecks, aiming to tell "the lost history of all the Great Lakes" with a focus on Lake Superior, said Corey Adkins, the society's content and communications director.

"One of the things that makes us proud when we discover these things is helping piece the puzzle together of what happened to these 28 people," Adkins said. "It's been 109 years, but maybe there are still some family members that want to know what happened. We're able to start answering those questions."

Both wrecks were discovered about 20 miles (32 kilometers) north of Grand Marais, Michigan, farther into the lake than the 1914 accounts suggested the ships sank, Adkins said. There was also damage to the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 63 of 70

Marvin's bow and the Curtis' stern, making researchers wonder whether a collision contributed, he said. "Those are all questions we want to consider when we go back out this summer," Adkins said. Video footage from the Curtis wreckage showed the maintained hull of the steamship, its wheel, anchor, boiler and still shining gauges — all preserved by Lake Superior's cold waters, along with other artifacts. Another recording captured the team's jubilant cheers as the words "Selden E. Marvin" on the hull came into clear view for the first time on a video feed shot by an underwater drone at the barge wreck site. "We're the first human eyes to see it since 1914, since World War I," one team member mused.

Cheaper gas and food provide some relief from US inflation

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. consumer inflation eased in March, with less expensive gas and food providing some relief to households that have struggled under the weight of surging prices. Yet prices are still rising fast enough to keep the Federal Reserve on track to raise interest rates at least once more, beginning in May.

The government said Wednesday that consumer prices rose just 0.1% from February to March, down from 0.4% from January to February and the smallest increase since December.

Measured from a year earlier, prices were up just 5% in March, down sharply from February's 6% year-over-year increase and the mildest such rise in nearly two years. Much of the drop resulted from price declines for such goods as gas, used cars and furniture, which had soared a year ago after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, though, so-called core inflation is still stubbornly high. Core prices rose 0.4% from February to March and 5.6% from a year earlier. The Fed and many private economists regard core prices as a better measure of underlying inflation. The year-over-year figure edged up for the first time in six months.

As goods prices have risen more slowly, helping cool inflation, costs in the nation's services sector — everything from rents and restaurant meals to haircuts and auto insurance — have jumped, keeping core prices elevated.

"It's comforting that headline inflation is coming down, but the inflation story has had some shifts under the hood in the last couple of years," said Sonia Meskin, head of U.S. economics at BNY Mellon's investment division. "Overall inflation still remains much too strong."

Even so, the March data offered some signs that suggest inflation is slowly but steadily headed lower. Rental costs, which have been one of the main drivers of core inflation, rose at the slowest pace in a year. And grocery prices fell for the first time in 2 1/2 years.

Grocery prices dropped 0.3% from February to March. The cost of beef fell 0.3%, milk 1% and fresh fruits and vegetables 1.3%. Egg prices, which had soared after an outbreak of avian flu, plunged nearly 11% just in March, though they remain 36% more expensive than a year ago.

Despite last month's decline, food costs are still up more than 8% in the past year. And restaurant prices, up 0.6% from February to March, have risen nearly 9% from a year ago.

Paul Saginaw, who owns Saginaw's deli in Las Vegas, said nearly all the costs of a Reuben sandwich — his most popular — including corned beef, cheese and bread, have soared. He charges 10% more for a Reuben than he did 2 1/2 years ago, although he said "our costs have gone up a lot more" than that.

Saginaw is also paying more for paper goods and packaging, just as takeout and delivery orders have become a much bigger part of his business. One clamshell-style food container has jumped from 43 cents apiece to 98 cents.

"Everything we use has gone up," he said.

Rich Pierson, a semi-retired owner of a financial planning business who was shopping this week at Doris Italian Market and Bakery in North Palm Beach, Florida, said high restaurant prices have led him and his wife to eat much more at home.

"We cook more at home than we ever have due to the rising costs," he said. "You do look for the oc-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 64 of 70

casional deals and add value when you can — that's for sure."

Gas prices fell 4.6% just from February to March, a drop that partly reflected seasonal factors: Prices at the pump usually rise during spring. Gas costs have tumbled 17% over the past year.

Yet price increases in the service sector are keeping core inflation high, at least for now. That trend is widely expected to lead the Fed to raise its benchmark interest rate for a 10th straight time when it meets in May.

Travel costs are still rising as Americans make up for lost vacation time during the pandemic. Airline fares rose 4% from February to March and are up nearly 18% in the past year. Hotel prices jumped 2.7% last month and are up 7.3% from a year ago.

Among the biggest drivers of inflation has been rental costs, which make up one-third of the government's consumer price index. Rental costs rose 0.5% from February to March. Though still high, that was the smallest such increase in a year.

According to Wednesday's government report, rents have risen by about 9% from a year ago. Yet Apartment List, which tracks real-time changes in new leases, shows rents rising at a 2.6% annual pace. As more apartments reset with those smaller increases, the government's inflation data should show milder increases in coming months.

"It's something that's certainly coming, there has been some moderation in rents," said Mark Vitner, chief economist at Piedmont Crescent Capital.

Fed officials have projected that after one additional quarter-point hike next month — which would raise their benchmark rate to about 5.1%, its highest point in 16 years — they will pause their hikes but leave their key rate unchanged through 2023. But officials have cautioned that they could raise rates further if they deem it necessary to curb inflation.

When the Fed tightens credit with the goal of cooling the economy and inflation, it typically leads to higher rates on mortgages, auto loans, credit card borrowing and many business loans. The risk is that ever-higher borrowing rates can weaken the economy so much as to cause a recession.

On Tuesday, the International Monetary Fund, a 190-nation lending organization, warned that persistently high inflation around the world — and efforts by central banks, including the Fed, to fight it — would likely slow global growth this year and next.

There are other signs that inflation pressures are easing. The Fed's year-long streak of rate hikes are also starting to cool a hot labor market, with recent data showing that companies are advertising fewer openings and that wage growth has been slowing from historically elevated levels.

A more worrisome trend is the possibility that banks will pull sharply back on lending to conserve funds, after two large banks collapsed last month, igniting turmoil in the United States and overseas. Many smaller banks have lost customer deposits to huge global banks that are perceived to be too big to fail. The loss of those deposits will likely mean that those banks will extend fewer loans to companies and individuals.

Some small businesses say they are already having trouble getting loans, according to a survey by the National Federation for Independent Business. The IMF said Tuesday that pullbacks in lending could slow growth by nearly a half-percentage point over the next 12 months.

A slowdown in the economy could cool inflation and as a result would help the Fed achieve its objectives. But the blow to the economy might prove larger than expected. Under the worst-case scenario, it could mean a full-blown recession with the loss of millions of jobs.

Associated Press Video Journalist Cody Jackson contributed to this report from North Palm Beach, Florida.

Prince Harry will attend father's coronation, Meghan won't

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry will attend his father's coronation, Buckingham Palace said Wednesday, ending months of speculation about whether the prince would be welcome after leveling charges of racism and media manipulation at the royal family.

His wife Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, will remain at the couple's home in Southern California with

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 65 of 70

their two young children, Prince Archie and Princess Lilibet, the palace said. A nearly identical statement from the Sussex's representatives confirmed the news.

The May 6 date of the coronation at Westminster Abbey coincides with their son's birthday.

While the announcement should silence the "will he or won't he" debate in the British media, it won't end the royal soap opera swirling around Harry and Meghan as King Charles III prepares for his coronation.

When the prince attended the funerals of his grandfather, Prince Philip, and his grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, commentators discussed everything from whether Harry would be allowed to wear his military uniform to exactly where he was seated. And there is always the question of whether he will meet face-to-face with his father and older brother, Prince William.

That intrigue will only be heightened after Harry and Meghan stoked their critique of the royal family in a six-part Netflix series about their decision to step back from royal duties three years ago, which was followed by Harry's decision to reveal family secrets in his bestselling memoir "Spare."

Harry and Meghan, who is biracial, have alleged she faced racist attitudes from both the palace and the U.K. press. The treatment contributed to their decision to leave the country.

The revelations in "Spare," including details of private conversations with his father and brother, Prince William, fanned tensions between Harry and his family that became public when he and his wife moved to North America in 2020.

The book also included allegations that members of the royal family regularly feed the press unflattering information about other members of the House of Windsor in exchange for positive coverage of themselves.

The prince singled out Camilla, the queen consort, accusing her of leaking private conversations to the media as she sought to rehabilitate her image after marrying Charles. Camilla was once reviled for her long-term affair with Charles, which contributed to the breakdown of his marriage to the late Prince Diana, Harry and William's mother.

The acrimony between Harry and his family once again spilled into public view last month when the Sussexes said that they had been asked to vacate their home in Britain.

Frogmore Cottage, a royal residence on the grounds of Windsor Castle west of London, was the couple's main residence before they gave up royal duties and moved to Montecito, a wealthy enclave in Southern California.

Russia: Bill to allow electronic conscription notices passes

MOSCOW (AP) — The upper house of Russia's parliament on Wednesday swiftly approved a bill that would allow authorities to issue electronic summonses to draftees and reservists amid the fighting in Ukraine.

The Federation Council's vote was the last step needed before the bill goes to President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to quickly sign it into law.

Lawmakers in Russia's lower house, the State Duma, passed the measure on Tuesday. The legislation was put on fast track as the Russian military is preparing for an expected Ukrainian counteroffensive, which Ukraine and its Western allies say could start within weeks.

Russia's current military service rules require the in-person delivery of notices to conscripts and reservists who are called up for duty. In the past, many Russians avoided the draft in the past by staying away from their address of record. The proposed bill would close that loophole.

Under the new bill, the notices issued by local military conscription offices will continue to be sent by mail but they would be considered valid from the moment they are put on a state portal for electronic services.

Recipients who fail to show up would be prohibited from leaving Russia, have their drivers' licenses suspended and be barred from selling their apartments and other assets.

Kremlin critics and rights activists denounced the new legislation as a step toward a "digital prison camp" that gives unprecedented powers to the military conscription offices.

When the Federation Council considered the bill Wednesday, Lyudmila Narusova, the widow of Anatoly Sobchak, the former mayor of St. Petersburg who was Putin's mentor, was the only house member who spoke against the measure.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 66 of 70

Narusova charged that the bill contradicts the country's constitution and various laws, and strongly objected to its hasty approval.

The swift passage of the bill fueled fears of the government initiating another wave of mobilization following the one that Putin ordered in the fall.

The authorities have said that another mobilization isn't planned. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov emphasized that the proposed bill was needed to streamline the outdated call-up system in view of the flaws that were revealed by last fall's partial mobilization.

Peskov said Wednesday that the quick passage of the bill was prompted by the "need to streamline the system of military records and draft."

"There was a lot of mess in military conscription offices," he said in a conference call with reporters. "The purpose of the bill is to clean up this mess and make the system modern, effective and convenient for citizens."

Putin announced a call-up of 300,000 reservists in September after a Ukrainian counteroffensive that pushed Russian forces out of broad areas in the east.

The mobilization order prompted an exodus of Russian men that was estimated to number in the hundreds of thousands.

Today in History: April 13, Apollo 13 damaged by explosion

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 13, the 103rd day of 2023. There are 262 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 13, 1970, Apollo 13, four-fifths of the way to the moon, was crippled when a tank containing liquid oxygen burst. (The astronauts managed to return safely.)

On this date:

In 1743, the third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, was born in Shadwell in the Virginia Colony.

In 1861, at the start of the Civil War, Fort Sumter in South Carolina fell to Confederate forces.

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt dedicated the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., on the 200th anniversary of the third American president's birth.

In 1953, "Casino Royale," Ian Fleming's first book as well as the first James Bond novel, was published in London by Jonathan Cape Ltd.

In 1964, Sidney Poitier became the first Black performer in a leading role to win an Academy Award for his performance in "Lilies of the Field."

In 1997, Tiger Woods became the youngest person to win the Masters Tournament and the first player of partly African heritage to claim a major golf title.

In 1999, right-to-die advocate Dr. Jack Kevorkian was sentenced in Pontiac, Michigan, to 10 to 25 years in prison for second-degree murder in the lethal injection of a Lou Gehrig's disease patient. (Kevorkian ended up serving eight years.)

In 2005, a defiant Eric Rudolph pleaded guilty to carrying out the deadly bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and three other attacks in back-to-back court appearances in Birmingham, Alabama, and Atlanta.

In 2009, music producer Phil Spector was found guilty by a Los Angeles jury of second-degree murder in the shooting of actor Lana Clarkson (he was later sentenced to 19 years to life in prison; he died in prison in January 2021).

In 2011, A federal jury in San Francisco convicted baseball slugger Barry Bonds of a single charge of obstruction of justice, but failed to reach a verdict on the three counts at the heart of allegations that he'd knowingly used steroids and human growth hormone and lied to a grand jury about it. (Bonds' conviction for obstruction was ultimately overturned.)

In 2016, the Golden State Warriors became the NBA's first 73-win team by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 125-104, breaking the 1996 72-win record of the Chicago Bulls. Kobe Bryant of the Lakers scored 60

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 67 of 70

points in his final game, wrapping up 20 years in the NBA.

In 2020, Charles Thacker Jr., a crew member on the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, died at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Guam, becoming the first active-duty military member to die from the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Francine Wheeler, the mother of a 6-year-old boy killed in the Connecticut school shooting, used the opportunity to fill in for President Barack Obama during his weekly radio and Internet address to make a personal plea from the White House for action to combat gun violence. All 108 passengers and crew survived after a new Lion Air Boeing 737 crashed into the ocean and snapped in two while attempting to land on the Indonesian resort island of Bali. Hundreds of opponents of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher partied in London's Trafalgar Square to celebrate her death, sipping champagne and chanting, "Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead."

Five years ago: President Donald Trump announced that the United States, France and Britain had carried out joint airstrikes in Syria meant to punish President Bashar Assad for his alleged use of chemical weapons. Trump issued a pardon to I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, suggesting that the former top aide to Vice President Dick Cheney had been "treated unfairly" by a special counsel. Responding to a stinging new memoir from former FBI Director James Comey, Trump laced into Comey, describing him as an "untruthful slime ball."

One year ago: Frank James, a 62-year-old man accused of shooting and wounding 10 people on a Brooklyn subway train was arrested about 30 hours later and charged with a federal terrorism offense after calling police to come get him. (James would plead guilty months later.) The presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, four countries on Russia's doorstep, visited Ukraine and underscored their support for the embattled country, where they saw heavily damaged buildings and demanded accountability for what they called war crimes carried out by Russian forces.

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., is 90. Actor Edward Fox is 86. R&B singer Lester Chambers is 83. Movie-TV composer Bill Conti is 81. Rock musician Jack Casady is 79. Singer Al Green is 77. Actor Ron Perlman is 73. Actor William Sadler is 73. Singer Peabo Bryson is 72. Bandleader/rock musician Max Weinberg is 72. Bluegrass singer-musician Sam Bush is 71. Rock musician Jimmy Destri (Blondie) is 69. Comedian Gary Kroeger is 66. Actor Sandra Santiago is 66. Sen. Bob Casey Jr., D-Pa., is 63. Chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov is 60. Actor Page Hannah is 59. Actor-comedian Caroline Rhea (RAY) is 59. Rock musician Marc Ford (The Black Crowes) is 57. Reggae singer Capleton is 56. Actor Ricky Schroder is 53. Rock singer Aaron Lewis (Staind) is 51. Actor Bokeem Woodbine is 50. Singer Lou Bega is 48. Actor-producer Glenn Howerton is 47. Actor Kyle Howard is 45. Actor Kelli Giddish is 43. Actor Courtney Peldon is 42. Pop singer Nellie McKay (mih-KY') is 41. Rapper/singer Ty Dolla \$ign is 41. Actor Allison Williams is 35. Actor Hannah Marks is 30.

Schools to vote on recruitment, game ejection amendments

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — At its annual meeting Wednesday, the South Dakota High School Activities Association offered member schools two constitutional amendments that they must vote on by May 31.

The amendments deal with prohibitions on schools recruiting students and clearing up the standards for how long senior athletes must sit out after a game ejection.

The recruitment prohibition amendment seeks to add language in the constitution about "other inducements" and "other undue influence" as it defines what those terms mean. It also adds penalties for schools and coaches for violations of the policy.

"It seemed odd that the only specific reference to penalties was just students," said SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos. "It takes two to tango on these types of things."

Currently member schools may not offer scholarships, free tuition, free bus transportation or free school lunch to try to recruit a student. The amendment clarifies "other inducements" as prohibiting school personnel or non-school individuals from offering jobs or housing to parents, residential relocation offers, promotional efforts, promises of playing time, financial aid to parents or students or any other benefit not

authorized by SDHSAA guidelines.

In the amendment, "other undue influence" is described as texts, emails, letters, cards or questionnaires sent to student athletes, their families or their guardians designed to persuade the student to change schools; invitations to summer camps or open gyms; or contact of any kind designed to persuade the athlete to switch schools.

Penalties for breaking the recruitment rules include suspension of a school or program from regular season or post-season play, suspension of a coach from all coaching activities or the banning of parents/alumni/supporters from attendance at sanctioned activities.

"We had an accusation of this (recruitment) in the last year," Swartos said, noting that recruitment is difficult to prove since students are allowed one school transfer. "It's really hard to prove any of this."

The amendment on ejections seeks to clarify a senior athlete's eligibility if an ejection occurs in the final contest of the season. Currently, the SDHSAA constitution calls for a student or coach ejected from a contest to be ineligible for participation in the next contest. A second ejection makes the athlete or coach ineligible for the next four contests and a third ejection means ineligibility for the remainder of the season.

In the case of a senior athlete ejected in the last contest of a season, the amendment allows that the athlete's ineligibility would carry over to the next scheduled varsity contest in any sport where the student has previously established team membership.

Swartos said there was an incident this year in which a senior athlete who belonged to both the soccer team and the football team was ejected from his last soccer game. When the association sought to bar the student from his next football game, it was served with a temporary restraining order and the student played in that game.

In order for an amendment to pass, it must be endorsed by 60% of the SDHSAA member schools that cast ballots.

—30—

SDHSAA tables name, image, likeness amendment

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — At its annual meeting on Wednesday, the South Dakota High School Activities Association decided to table a constitutional amendment outlining how athletes could be paid for the use of their name, image and likeness. Currently the SDHSAA constitution says that an athlete's image or a personal appearance cannot be used to promote a commercial or profit-making event.

The tabled amendment clarifies the rules for student-athletes who seek to be paid for the use of their name, likeness, image or for a personal appearance. According to the amendment, the activity must not interfere with academic obligations; remuneration must not be tied to athletic performance such as pay to play; the remuneration must not be used to induce an athlete to attend a particular school; the remuneration must not be provided by the school or agents of the school like booster clubs or foundations; SDHSAA or a member school's marks or logos must not be used nor the school's name or mascot; member school uniforms must not be worn or displayed; member school facilities must not be used; SDHSAA or member school awards or trophies must not be displayed; and students must not promote or endorse activities associated with alcohol, tobacco, vaping, controlled substances, gambling, banned athletic substances or other illegal substances or activities.

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos said the standards set forth in the amendment were taken from rules already in place in North Dakota, Iowa and Kansas. "This is not an easy subject," Swartos said, noting much of it rests on the semantics of whether a student is allowing his likeness to be used as a student or as an athlete.

A violation of the name, image and likeness rule can cause a player to lose his or her amateur standing, a consequence that will keep them from competing in high school athletics. It's important, said board member Eric Denning of Mount Vernon, "to make sure you're not jeopardizing your amateur standing."

Swartos cited one study that said nationwide, less than 1% of high school athletes would be involved in a name, image or likeness business deals. "We're talking about a very small percentage of kids," Swartos said.

Board member Jeff Danielsen of Watertown said he wondered if making such a rule would eventually lead to having the problem of policing name, image and likeness cases. "I'd like to think there's not a lot of under-the-table money being passed around," Danielsen said.

Pierre Activities Director Brian Moser said it would ultimately be up to schools to police violations of the policy. He said it would add to the challenge schools face as they try to recruit coaches.

Moser said he would be the one who would have to tell a student who broke the rules that he would no longer be able to play football. "I don't want to be that person."

SDHSAA Assistant Executive Director Randy Soma said the association would likely have to start some sort of registration process for students who sell their name, image or likeness. If they're registered, Soma said, the association could catch it before they made a mistake and lost their amateur standing.

The association decided to table the amendment and continue working on the subject.

—30—

SDHSAA hears plea for greater penalties for poor sportsmanship

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — At its annual meeting Wednesday, the South Dakota High School Activities Association heard an impassioned plea from the Pierre athletic director for greater consequences for people at games who display poor sportsmanship.

"There has to, at some point, be consequences," Brian Moser said. "If we don't do something, it only has to get worse."

Moser described his experience when Pierre served as the neutral host site of a basketball playoff game. He said a coach was using vulgar language with his players. Moser had to escort the officials out of the gym after the game because some fans were waiting for them.

"This was not a fun atmosphere," Moser said.

An ejection can cost a coach a \$200 fine, which some schools will pay for the coach. "What's the coach learning?" Moser asked.

According to Moser, at the game he hosted, some problems were caused by a school athletic director who failed to take action when the game started to get out of hand. He said there have to be greater consequences for the student body, coaches, athletic directors and administrators.

Board member Eric Denning of Mount Vernon said perhaps it was time for the association to form an ethics committee. It might help allay the problem of poor sportsmanship "if we had some ethical guidance," Denning said.

—30—

White River seeks apology, answers for mistakes at Class B Tournament game

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — During the open forum portion of its meeting Wednesday, the South Dakota High School Activities Association board of directors met for over an hour with more than 10 people from White River who were upset by mistakes that were made during the third-place game at the Class B Basketball Tournament.

At the game with Aberdeen Christian, a point was mistakenly awarded for a free throw that an Aberdeen Christian player missed. The game ended regulation play in a tie. In the overtime, Aberdeen Christian won.

That was just one of many rule violations during the game, according to White River Superintendent Louie

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, April 13, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 279 ~ 70 of 70

Krogman, who led a group of administrators, coaches, players and fans to the board meeting. He said the White River contingent was at the board meeting to get the association to "acknowledge the mistakes and not sugarcoat the truth. We just want proper acceptance that the mistakes occurred."

Krogman said that when the point was mistakenly awarded to Aberdeen Christian, Peri Strain, the school's principal and regular scorekeeper at games, went to the scorekeeper's table to point out the mistake. Strain's attempt to correct the score was brushed off by the people at the scorer's table. Krogman suggested Strain was more easily dismissed because of her race. She is a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe.

The tournament was held in Aberdeen. SDHSAA Board Chairman Mark Murphy, who is from Aberdeen, said he knows the people who served at the scorer's table and disputed that there was any sort of cultural bias involved.

Aside from dismissing her attempt to correct the score, Strain said the work by the people at the scorer's table was unprofessional. "The bookkeepers at the State B Tournament this year were on their phones," Strain said. "That should not happen."

When he tried to address the board, White River basketball coach Eldon Marshall was visibly emotional. He said the basketball program's success has turned some people against White River.

"People probably do hate White River," Marshall said. "I feel like it's trickling down into the officials."

Board members who were at the meeting took turns offering their apologies for White River's experience at the state tournament and promised to make changes.

"I can't believe it happened," said board member Kelly Messmer of Harding County. "It can't happen again."

SDHSAA Executive Director Dan Swartos offered his apologies. "There may be reasons, but there are no excuses," Swartos said. "I'm sorry that it happened to you. It shouldn't have."

—30—

Three principals vie for SDHSAA board

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. Newspaper Association

PIERRE — Three principals from small high schools are in the running to join the board of directors of the South Dakota High School Activities Association. The nominations were made at Wednesday's SDHSAA annual meeting.

The nominees are Drew Bunkers of Dell Rapids, Adam Shaw of Madison and Jeff Sheehan of Hamlin. If no nominee gets a majority of the votes cast, there will be a runoff election between the two candidates who get the most votes. Leaving the board is Dani Walking Eagle of St. Francis Indian School.

Randy Hartmann, a member of the Pierre School Board, was the only nominee for the position on the board for a school board member from a large school. He will replace board chairman Mark Murphy of Aberdeen.

New members will join the board at its July meeting. Member schools must return their ballots by May 31.