

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar

### Saturday, April 15

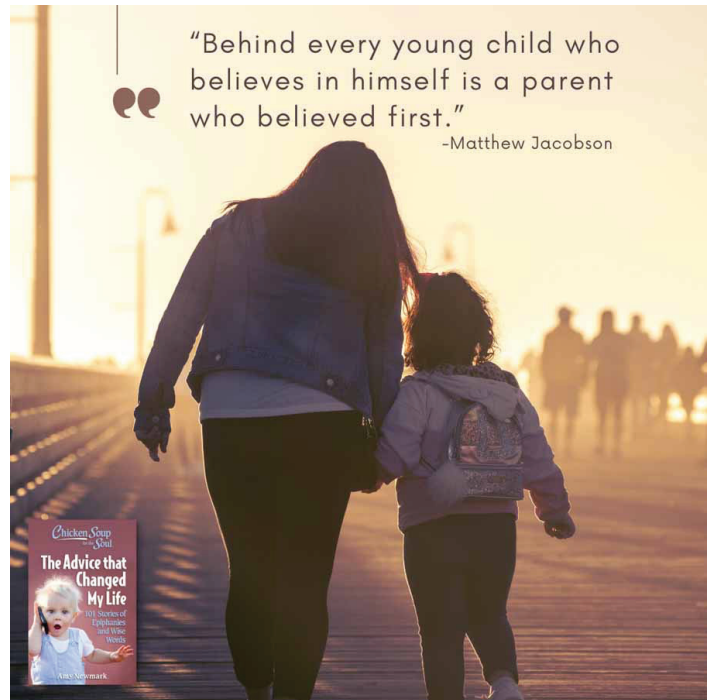
- Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.
- Emmanuel Lutheran worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.
- All School Play, 4 p.m.

### Sunday, April 16

- Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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

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



Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday school, 9:45 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Sunday school after children's sermon in worship, 10:30 a.m.

State FFA Convention at SDSU, Brookings

### Monday, April 17

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Waffles

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, tater tots.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

State FFA Convention at SDSU, Brookings

## **OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

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## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

FDA pursues legal challenges.

- Former President Donald Trump will speak Saturday night at a Republican National Committee donor retreat in Nashville, Tennessee. Trump addressed the National Rifle Association's annual convention in Indianapolis Friday, marking his first public event since he was arraigned in Manhattan on charges in a hush-money case involving adult film actress Stormy Daniels.

- Jack Teixeira is facing two charges under the Espionage Act for allegedly leaking top secret military documents. The 21-year-old National Guardsman was ordered to remain in custody until a detention hearing, which has been scheduled for April 19.

- A three-day exchange of nearly 900 prisoners is underway between Yemen's Houthi rebels and the Saudi-backed coalition battling them for control of the country, in the same week that both sides kick-started tentative truce talks.

- Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador will shut down national news agency Notimex. Workers have been on strike for years since the president appointed Sanjuana Martínez to lead the agency, citing a hostile work environment.

- France's Constitutional Council approved French President Emmanuel Macron's unpopular plan to raise the country's retirement age from 62 to 64. The legislation, which sparked weeks of protests after Macron bypassed parliament to push it through, can take effect within 15 days.

- U.S. retail sales dropped 1% in March, more than double the forecasted amount, as a result of high interest rates and a year of significant inflation. However, retail sales were 2.9% higher than March 2022.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian President Putin signed a bill allowing officials to issue electronic notices to draftees and reservists. Russia's military previously required notices to be delivered in-person.

- Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was evacuated safely after a man threw what appeared to be a smoke bomb at him on Saturday. The incident comes less than a year after Japan's former prime minister, Shinzo Abe, was fatally shot during election campaigning.

- The Supreme Court has temporarily blocked a federal judge's decision to revoke FDA approval of the abortion pill mifepristone. The decision is expected to remain in place through April 19, giving both sides more time to argue for or against the decision's immediate implementation as the

## 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**

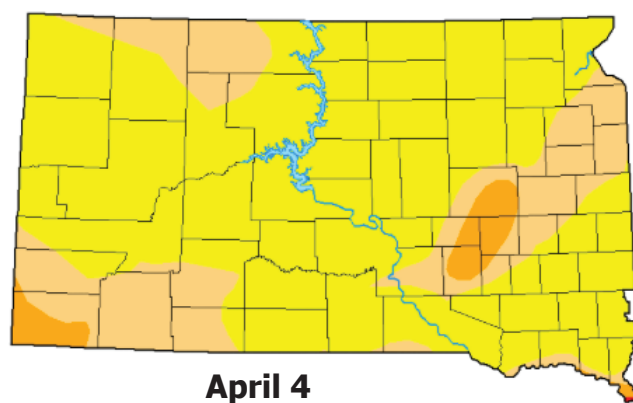
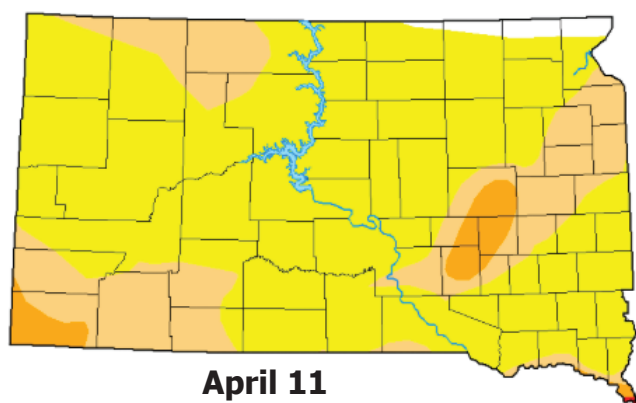
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## Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



On this week's map, deterioration occurred in the southern extent of the region in Kansas where both short and long-term precipitation deficits exist (ranging from 4 to 16 inches during the past 12-month period). Moreover, other drought-related indicators, such as surface and root zone soil moisture, are showing very low moisture levels (ranging from the 2nd to the 20th percentile) across Kansas as well as much of Nebraska, according to NASA Short-term Prediction Research and Transition Center (NASA SPoRT). In the Dakotas, deep snowpack conditions were observed this month as well as recent rapid melting which has boosted soil moisture levels significantly (leading to improvement on the map) as well as concerns over major flooding. Flood warnings have been issued for numerous rivers across the Dakotas as temperatures are expected to soar into the low 90s today (April 12) in southeastern South Dakota. According to NOAA NCEI, North Dakota logged its 32nd wettest March on record while Nebraska observed its 28th driest and Kansas its 14th driest. In terms of average temperatures, North Dakota observed its 5th coldest March and South Dakota its 16th coldest on record, For the 12-month period (April 2022-March 2023), Nebraska experienced its 11th driest on record while Kansas its 17th driest.

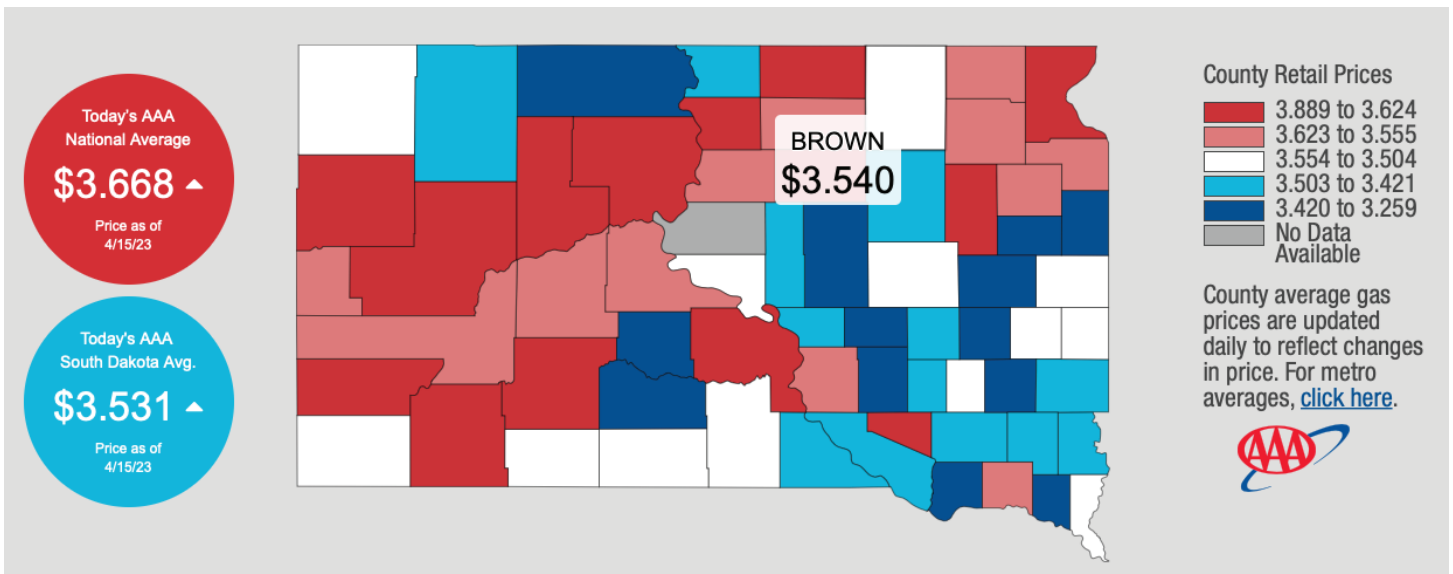
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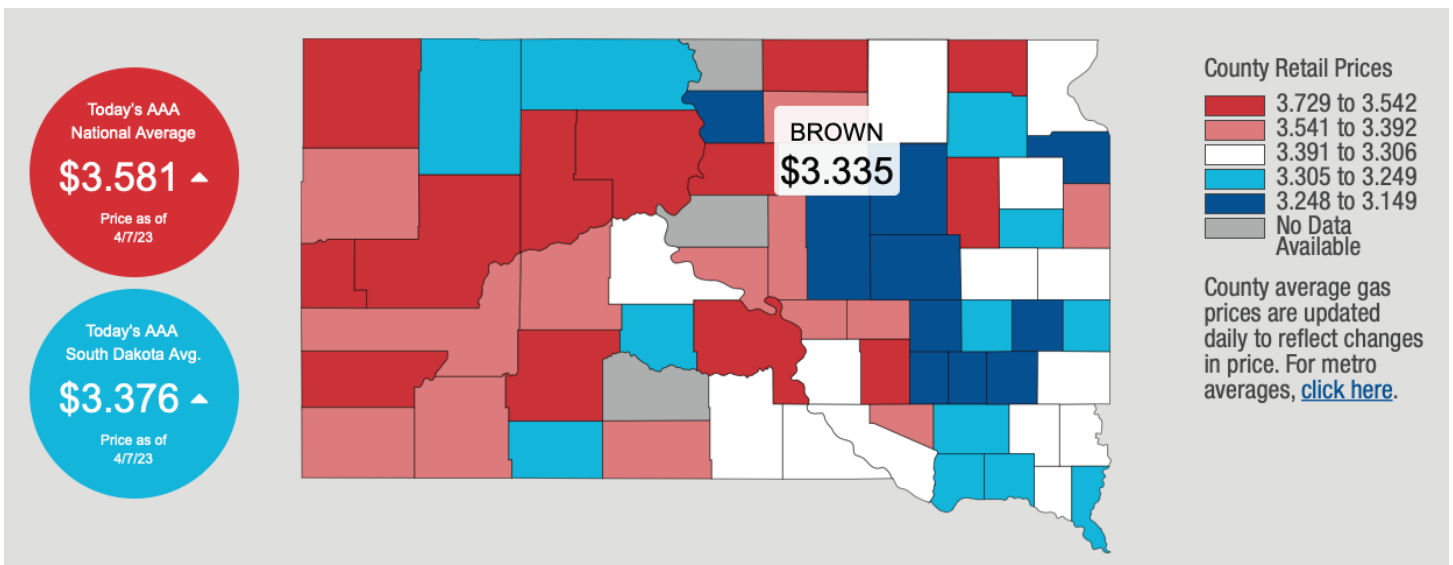
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.531	\$3.661	\$4.115	\$3.932
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.525	\$3.653	\$4.096	\$3.912
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.386	\$3.536	\$3.995	\$3.909
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.336	\$3.478	\$3.942	\$4.098
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.838	\$3.959	\$4.305	\$4.772

### This Week



### Two Weeks Ago



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## The Wizard of Oz presented



Play director Amanda Bisbee and the All School Play cast members presented the Wizard of Oz Friday night. A second performance is scheduled for today at 4 p.m.  
(Photos by Paul Kosel)



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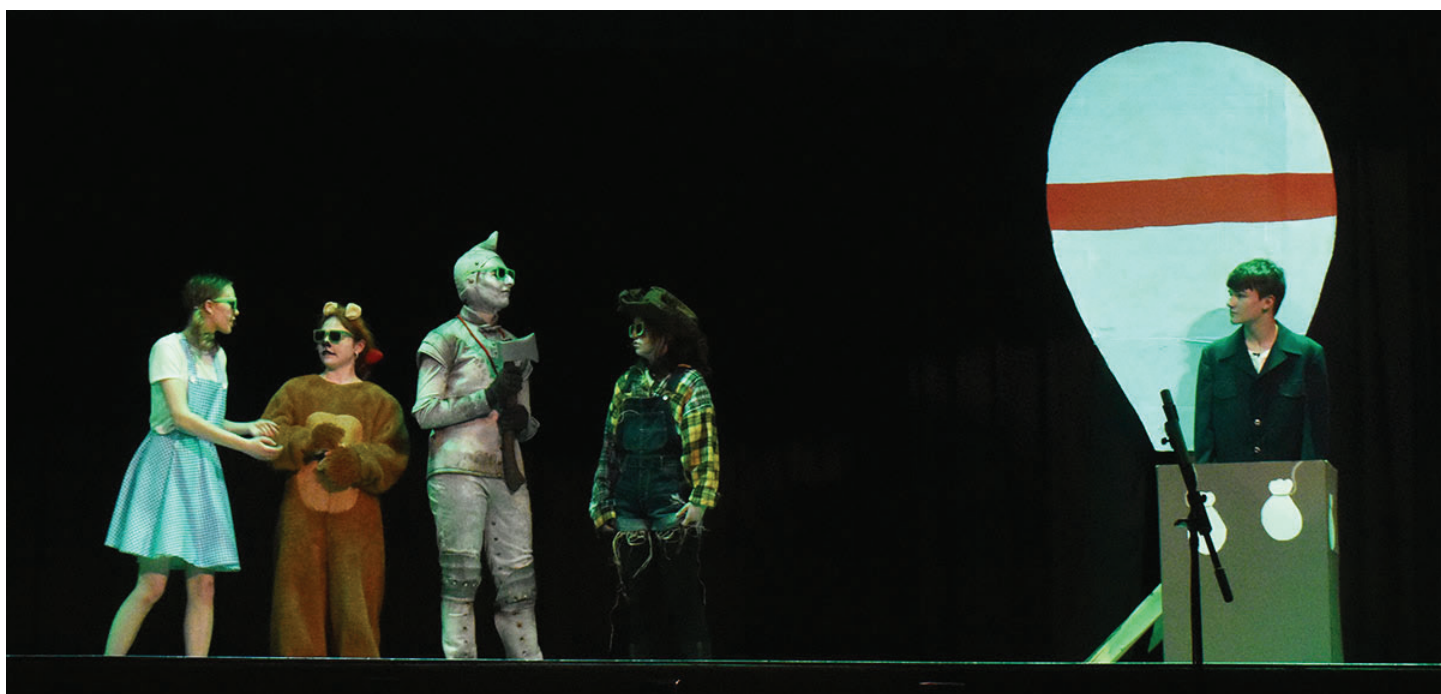
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The cast and characters of *The Wizard of Oz* are: Anna Bisbee, Dorothy; Ashtyn Bahr, scarecrow; Carter Barse, tin man; Camryn Kurtz, cowardly lion; Addison Hoelt, wicked witch, Gavin Kroll, Oz, farmer, gentleman of the court; Natalia Warrington, Glinda, lady of the court, munchkin; Kyleigh Kroll, Witch of the North, lady of the court; Maddie Herrick, guardian, kalidah; Ari Dinger, munchkin, flower, winkie, kalidah; Hannah DeCoteau Heminger, munchkin, lady of the court, winkie; Tinley Frost, munchkin, flower, winkie, gentleman of the court; Raquel Tracey, winkie, munchkin, lady of the court; Aurora Washenberger, soldier, farmer, winkie, monkey; Adeline Kotzer, crow, lady of the court, flower; Novalea Warrington, monkey king, crow, flower, lady of the court.

Tech crew: Ellie Weismantel, Cambria Bonn, Raelee Lilly, Jacob Tewksbury, Axel Warrington, Ethan Clark, Reanne Dennert, Emily Clark, Anthony Garcia.

Elementary Cast (munchkins, flying monkeys, gentleman of the court, flowers): Tori Schuster, Charlie Jacobsen, Libby Johnson, Kendyll Kroll, Callie Herrick, Jase Bahr, Aschar Warrington and Ayce Warrington.



## South Dakotans: Be Informed



Learn about the proposed extreme abortion amendment to the South Dakota State Constitution that would **legalize abortion to the point of birth.**

Pro-abortion groups are currently circulating petitions to put this amendment up for a vote and into our Constitution.

**Learn more and have your questions answered at this free event, which includes a soup supper and dessert.**



**Jon Hansen**

*Co-Chair, Life Defense Fund*

**Sunday, April 16th**

**4:30 p.m.**

**St. John's Lutheran Church**

**308 2nd St. - Groton, SD**

A free will offering will be taken.

**[www.lifedefensefund.com](http://www.lifedefensefund.com)**

## Gov. Noem Delivers Remarks and Signs Executive Order at NRA-ILA Leadership Forum

INDIANAPOLIS, IN – Governor Kristi Noem will deliver remarks at the National Rifle Association’s Institute for Legislative Action Leadership Forum. During her remarks, she signed Executive Order 2023-04, which will protect the 2nd Amendment rights of South Dakotans from infringement by financial institutions.

### Here are Governor Noem’s remarks as prepared for delivery:

Charlton Heston once said: “Those dead old white guys who invented this country, knew what they were talking about.” So often, all we need to inspire us for future fights is to look to the examples of the past. Our founding fathers and former leaders charted a visionary path for our country. They created an exceptional experiment of Freedom and personal responsibility that would withstand centuries of storms and challenges. To keep what they built, we must be people who act on values and character rather than personal benefit.

So much of who we are is determined by how we are raised. I didn’t grow up in politics. We didn’t talk about politics – we lived them. We had a gun cabinet in our living room, a shotgun in every pickup and tractor. Our family vacations were hunting trips. And long before I ever ran for office, I became a lifetime member of the NRA.

My dad taught us life lessons and common sense during our hunting trips. As soon as we were old enough to ride a horse, he would take us hunting and pack us by horseback 20 miles in the Big Horns to hunt elk.

I didn’t always know it then, but those hunting trips gave me the confidence to be a problem solver. For instance, I remember being around 10 years old and miles from camp in the high country when dad turned to me and said, “hunt your way back to camp” as he disappeared over the ridge.

Now, to a ten-year-old girl, this was terrifying. As strange noises and darkness fell, I had to rely on my instincts and horse to find my way back to our tent. Years later, mom shared with me that dad followed me at a distance to make sure I was safe.

Now, before you go and get all soft and tender hearted on me, I want you to know he was also the one making the bear noise which just about scared me to death. But it made me stronger. It made me realize I could conquer challenges. It made me who I am today, the first female Governor of the state of South Dakota.

Here today with me is my husband Bryon, who has been with me every step of the way. Thank you for our amazing family and all the support. Speaking of family... can you believe I’m a grandma? Not just once either, but twice. For those of you with grandchildren you know, they are why we get up each day and continue to fight for our values. Little Miss Addie and Branch have brought us so much joy. And Miss Addie, who is almost two years old, already has both a shotgun and a rifle! Welcome to South Dakota.

There is a very famous quote that says, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Some would look at what is happening here in America today and call the times “unprecedented” or “unforeseen.” I would say the exact opposite. It all sounds, looks, and feels tragically “familiar.” We have

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been here before.

A country arguing over policies, a public discouraged and dismayed at the lack of public discourse, violence in the streets and in our schools, families grieving their children and loved ones that were destroyed by a deranged maniac for no reason, and a White House so hell-bent on grabbing power and control of your life they will do anything and stop at nothing to take it. Even take away your last tool of defense.

The Second Amendment is about deterrence. It is about ensuring the Government respects the rights and liberty of citizens. "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed."

Those 27 words are freedom's last line of defense. The founders understood deeply that without an armed citizenry, authentic freedom could not and would not survive.

How did they know this? What were their circumstances? What did they know about human nature and the temptation to seize power? Did they know how fragile freedom could be? What were they drawing on? First, their own experience.

The founders knew the country would never have survived the revolutionary war if the colonists hadn't owned their own weapons.

The very first battles of the Revolutionary War, the Battles of Lexington & Concord, started when 800 expertly trained British soldiers came to seize weapons from the colonists. The Americans were untrained and had only their own personal muskets and pistols to fight back.

One American named Samuel Whittemore was 78 years old. Think about that – in the 1770s, average life expectancy was less than 40. As the British were retreating from the battle, Samuel hid behind a wall on his property. He ambushed the British by himself. He shot one with his personal musket, then shot two more with his personal dueling pistols. All three died of their wounds.

For his heroism, Samuel was shot in the cheek, bayoneted six times, and clubbed repeatedly. The British left him to die, but he refused to die. He got medical treatment, then he lived another 18 years. He lived to see American Independence secured; to see the ratification of the Constitution; to see George Washington elected as the first President of the United States. And when the Revolutionary War was over, Samuel Whittemore would go down in history as the oldest, perhaps the bravest, colonial militiaman.

That is how the American people won the Revolutionary War. The Continentals challenged the infantry of the British Empire with the same firearms they used to hunt squirrels and deer and feed their families. Men like Samuel Whittemore did not ask for permission from their government to own those firearms. They didn't need it. God gave them that right. Samuel defended his own personal property with his own personal firearms. He defended his own Freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen, we don't know what hard is. We don't have an oppressive foreign government marching across our land and threatening to take everything from us. But we all have our part to play to defend our Liberty.

God gave you those Liberties. God gave you the right to defend yourselves and your family. Our government recognizes that right. But we do not have to ask permission to defend it. Each of us must be as bold and as brave as Samuel Whittemore. It doesn't matter if we're 18 or 78.

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What else did the Founding generation understand? They knew human nature.

Writing in 1775, Thomas Paine laid it out clearly: "While avarice and ambition have a place in the heart of man, the weak will become prey to the strong. The history of every age and nation establishes these truths, and facts need but little arguments when they prove themselves."

Today, the future looks uncertain. I would say clarity can be found in studying the past and striving to do better. Let's be teachable. The National Rifle Association has leaders who stand in the vortex for us today, such as Wayne and Susan.

We see them and their family walk through fire for us, and we are grateful. But we should also look at headlines from 25 years ago and see what we can learn for today.

A Washington Post article dated June 9, 1998, summarizes where we stood then in this battle for freedom but also reflects much of today's reality.

The Post reported the following:

"The National Rifle Association installed Charlton Heston as its new President today and loudly applauded his pledge to steer the organization back to the political mainstream from what Heston described as the 'fringe' of American life.

The choice of Heston was seen in large part as a response to public relations problems for the NRA that have intensified recently because of several school shootings and rising calls for stricter guns laws opposed by the group."

Having the right messenger matters. Why am I here today? Why do I boldly support the NRA?

I probably don't look like the "traditional" NRA member. The media would lead us to believe the NRA is made up of Old White guys... Well, let me tell you something, I AM THE NRA!

Our daughters, our granddaughters, every American is the NRA. I didn't know I could be a hunter until I saw my grandma was a hunter. And she was good.

The Post went on to say that Heston rose to power in the NRA because of the need to soften the organization's public image.

Calling the school shootings "a child issue, not a gun issue" Heston reasserted the NRA's long-standing position that violence grows from unraveling family values and weak prosecutors and judges. But he also added a new twist: He called on the White House, which acknowledged many gun violations go unprosecuted for lack of resources, to commit the Justice Department to prosecuting every federal gun law violation in one major city. This he said would include attempts by felons to buy guns, which are rarely prosecuted except in combination with violent crimes.

Heston pulled no punches in his first day as President. Referring to the Second Amendment, he said "Those dead old white guys who invented this country, knew what they were talking about."

Again, this article is from 25 years ago, yet the conversation is so relevant for today. What if prosecutors actually did their jobs instead of going on the political attack? What if the laws we have today were actually enforced? What if when tragedies happen, families gathered together, bowed their heads, and prayed

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for wisdom and discernment on how to heal hearts and minds, rather than debate the methods used by those in society who do harm.

Our problems are not new, yet the threat is greater. Every time our country stands in the path of danger, it's always the patriots who first hear the call. Even the most common man deserves uncommon freedom. And we the patriots must be resolved to take action.

Why do the liberals and Joe Biden want to take our guns? Because it will make it easier for them to then infringe on all other rights. As the late, great Justice Scalia wrote in the Heller decision, "History showed that the way tyrants had eliminated a militia consisting of all the able-bodied men was not by banning the militia, but simply by taking away the people's arms, enabling a select militia or standing army to suppress political opponents."

But Biden hasn't done that yet. Why is that? Why haven't they achieved their goal? Because of you. Because of each and every one of you — and because of the NRA. Together, we have successfully held off federal legislation that would infringe on our fundamental constitutional right to keep and bear arms. We have kept our rights from being infringed.

In the last few years, we've seen government overstep its authority more than ever before. I've said that China didn't just export COVID to the world. They exported communist lockdowns as seemingly the only way of stopping it. In fact, until South Dakota refused to issue any lockdowns, I don't know if political leaders even realized that there was another option.

I was shocked at how quickly people gave up their Freedoms. Politicians closed churches, so people willingly gave up their Freedom of Religion. Politicians said you couldn't gather in groups, so people willingly gave up their Freedom of Assembly. Politicians worked with social media companies to stifle dissent, so people willingly gave up their Freedom of Speech.

I think the American people could learn a thing or two from the NRA. This is not a group of people who gives up their God-given Constitutional rights willingly.

During the pandemic, I spent more time in the great outdoors. I needed a break from the fear and paranoia on television and in the newspapers. So my family would relax at a cabin or go fishing or pheasant hunting.

One day, I made a video of me shooting a pheasant. Then I turned to the camera and said "Less COVID, more hunting." And people loved it! I was a little embarrassed though, because it took me three shots to drop that bird. It wasn't my best day shooting.

I shouldn't have been surprised, but PETA and the liberal media came unglued. They could not believe that I would say "less COVID, more hunting." I was confused. Did they want more COVID or less hunting?

Since then, we have had less COVID, thank God. And we have had plenty more hunting. In fact, South Dakota has the best pheasant hunting in the world! If you haven't come to enjoy it with us, then you really should.

South Dakota's greatest asset is our people. Our state motto is "Under God, the People Rule." While enduring many challenges over the past several years, we have worked together to turn those challenges into opportunities. Our state is thriving as a result of embracing Liberty and personal responsibility.

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We are setting the standard as the most 2nd Amendment friendly state in the nation. The very first bill that I signed as governor guarantees Constitutional Carry for all law-abiding South Dakotans. I signed legislation to block state and local governments from using an emergency declaration as an excuse to infringe on 2nd Amendment rights. We strengthened our "Stand Your Ground" law. We updated the definition of "loaded firearm" to mean if a round is chambered, making it easier to respond in situations where seconds count. And we made South Dakota the first state in America to not charge a fee for a concealed carry permit – and we'll even pay for your federal background check.

While leadership in Washington, DC fails to deliver meaningful solutions for the nation, our state will take action. South Dakota enjoys the strongest economy in the nation, the lowest unemployment, and unprecedented economic growth. Make no mistake. Freedom generated these blessings.

Winston Churchill once said, "Never give in, never never never... except to convictions of honor and good sense." Here, my honor and good sense require me to continue to fight for Freedom, and that's what I will do.

As I look around this room, I see resolute faces prepared to stand up for honor and good sense. You are prepared to defend our right to keep and bear arms. I also see a media in the back of the room who thinks that we are crazy for doing so. They are prepared to shame us and demonize us. I know that they will attack me for giving this speech. But if they think that is going to stop me, then they weren't paying attention during the pandemic.

But it's not just the media and big government that are attacking our rights. Now, we have seen banking institutions go after industries they disagree with... threatening to withhold funding, cancel loans, or holding them to a different standard than how the left is treated. None have been more impacted than those who support the Second Amendment. Well, not on my watch. I won't stand for it, not in South Dakota.

Today, I will sign an Executive Order to protect the God-given right to keep and bear arms from being infringed upon by financial institutions. My Executive Order, effective immediately, blocks state agencies from contracting with large banks that discriminate against firearm-related industries.

In 1787 Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to James Madison. He talked about how committed he was to Freedom. He made this point in Latin, but it translates as "I prefer dangerous freedom over peaceful slavery."

May we all leave here today inspired by our history and the blessings you enjoy. As well as the burden of responsibility that rests on your shoulders.

Never give in... Never, never, never. Our Freedom is in your hands.

Thank you!



## El Niño Is Now Likely To Develop By Summer, NOAA Says

By Jonathan Erdman

In a regularly scheduled monthly update released Thursday, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center (CPC) issued an El Niño watch.

Somewhat analogous to severe thunderstorm or tornado watches but for much longer time periods, this means conditions are favorable for an El Niño to develop over the next six months.

The CPC outlook assigned an over 70% chance El Niño will be in place from June through August, and an over 80% chance by the peak months of the hurricane season, August through October.

An El Niño is a periodic warming of a strip of water straddling the equator in the Pacific Ocean.

Over much of the past three years, this strip of water has instead been cooler than average, known as a La Niña. But that ended by March, and water temperatures in this area are getting warmer.

In fact, the water has become particularly warm near the western coast of South America in recent weeks. The smaller-scale, so-called "coastal El Niño" that fueled flooding rain in typically drier parts of western Brazil, Ecuador and Peru can sometimes precede the development of a full-fledged El Niño.

NOAA declares an El Niño has developed when sea-surface temperatures in a certain region of the equatorial Pacific Ocean have reached at least 0.5 degrees Celsius above average for at least a month and is expected to persist for several more months.

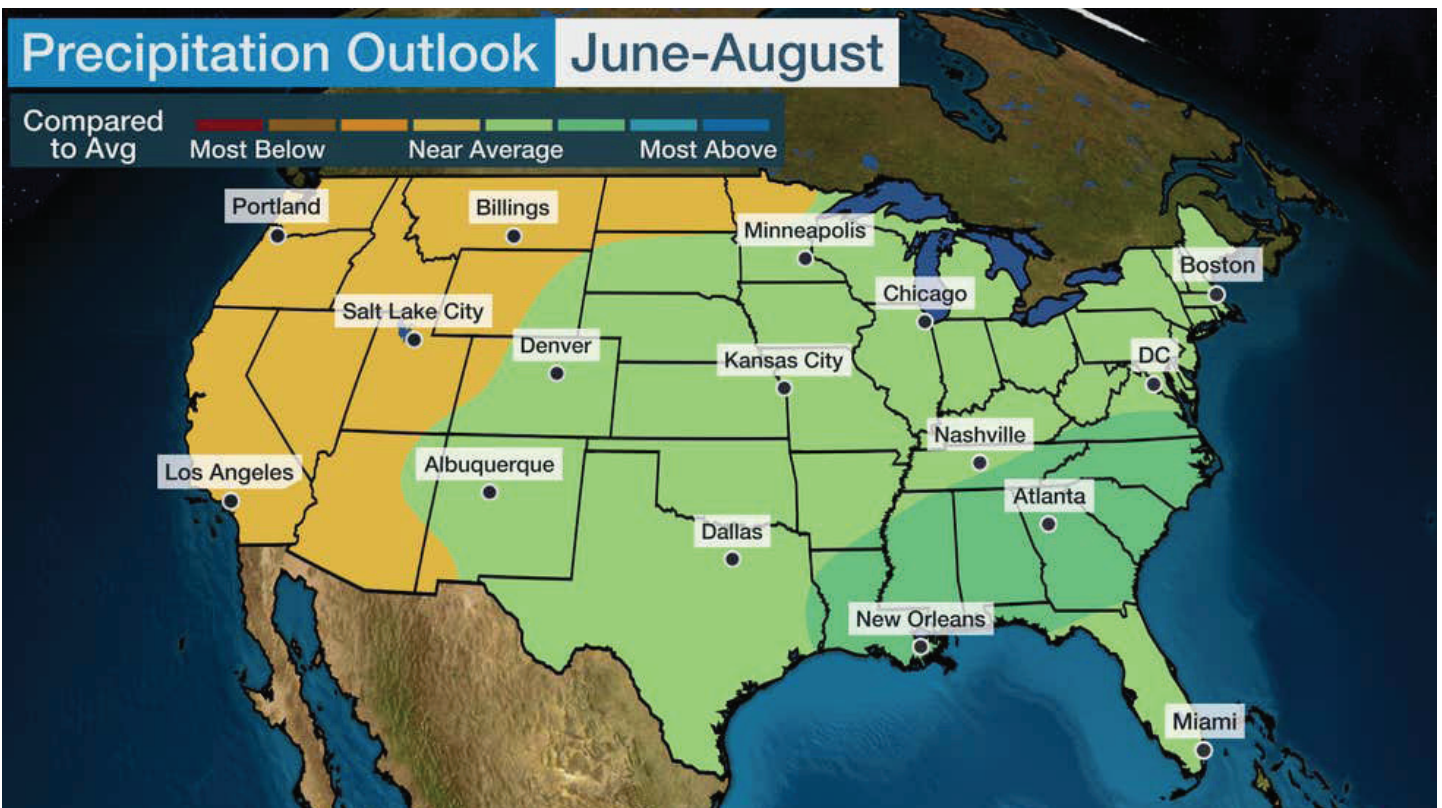
But it turns out when this strip of ocean water is either persistently cooler or warmer over several months, it affects the circulation of the atmosphere. So the final criterion needed to declare an El Niño is if the atmosphere is responding to the warmer water.

If the typical trade winds near the equator weaken – leading to less rain near Indonesia and more rain over the central or eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, along with the warm-enough ocean water – an El Niño has developed.

It would be the first El Niño since 2018-19.

### Potential Impacts

While not the only influence, an El Niño can eventually steer weather patterns in parts of the world,



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including the tropics and the U.S. Here are some possible impacts.

## Summer

Usually, both El Niño and La Niña have their biggest impacts on the weather in winter, when they've been in place for several months. But if El Niño can develop fast enough, it could at least subtly affect both temperatures and rainfall in the U.S. this summer.

According to an outlook also issued Thursday from The Weather Company, an IBM Business, and Atmospheric G2, this summer could be less hot in much of the East and wet in the Southeast due to the developing El Niño.

## Hurricane Season

El Niño can also be one of the strongest influences on hurricane season.

In El Niño hurricane seasons, stronger shearing winds often occur over at least the Caribbean Sea and some adjacent parts of the Atlantic Basin.

This tends to limit the number and intensity of storms and hurricanes, especially if the El Niño is stronger, as we investigated in a March article.

However, separate outlooks from The Weather Company and Colorado State University also released Thursday noted warmer Atlantic Ocean water may work against the influence of El Niño in 2023.

## Winter 2023-24

As alluded to above, most El Niños hit their peak in late fall or winter, and thus have their strongest influence on weather patterns in the colder months of the year.

The classic El Niño winter is rather warm from Alaska into western and central Canada, then into the northern tier of states from the Pacific Northwest to the western Great Lakes.

It tends to be colder and wetter than average through much of the southern U.S., particularly from Texas to the Carolinas. In a previous investigation, we found some cities in the Southwest, Southern Plains and mid-Atlantic have their snowiest winters during El Niño.

Other factors can and do influence winter weather patterns, including the polar vortex. But if this El Niño develops and especially if it becomes strong, this may be the general picture to expect next winter.

## Global Temperatures

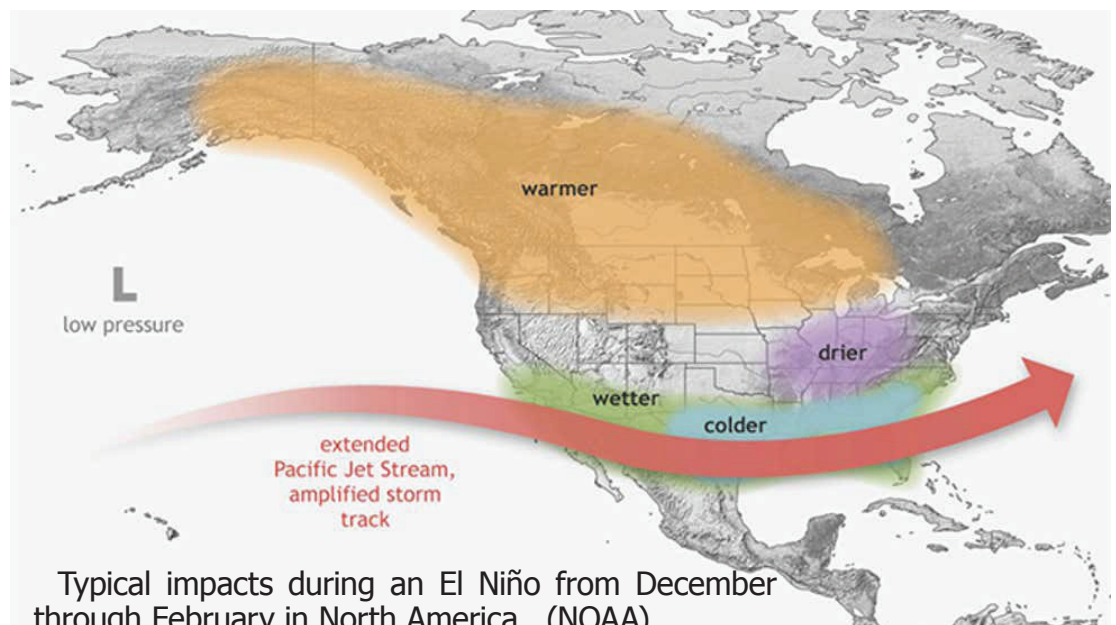
NOAA's ENSO blog noted the warmest year of any decade tends to occur during an El Niño.

But the planet's warming now means that even recent La Niña years have become warmer than El Niño years in past decades.

In fact, March 2023 was the planet's second-warmest March, according to analyses from NOAA, the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, Berkeley Earth and NASA.

And that happened just after a La Niña ended, but of course before this El Niño has officially developed.

So it's certainly possible 2023 could end up topping the record-warm year of 2016. NOAA's calculations as of their March report give about 50/50 odds of doing so.





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Noem signs order, gets standing ovation amid presidential speculation at NRA event

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 14, 2023 5:17 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem signed an executive order that she said will bolster gun rights as she spoke to a crowd Friday at the National Rifle Association Leadership Forum in Indianapolis, along with presidential candidates and potential candidates including former President Donald Trump, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and former Vice President Mike Pence.

Noem is viewed as a potential presidential candidate but has not committed to running. During her speech, she touted South Dakota's economic growth and gun-friendliness since she stepped into office in 2018. Her executive order bars state agencies under her control from contracting with financial institutions that discriminate against firearm-related entities.

The appearance furthers the governor's national brand and is a clear indication she has ambitions at the national level, said David Wiltse, political science professor at South Dakota State University.

In fact, she is "doing everything she needs to do" to run for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, he said.

"This is a national stage — deliberately a national stage," Wiltse said. "That's probably more or less an unequivocal good for the state and certainly good for her as she looks past her current office, as any ambitious politician would."

"That's probably more or less an unequivocal good for the state and certainly good for her as she looks past her current office, as any ambitious politician would."

#### **New executive order mirrors Texas, Montana laws**

Noem opened her speech with stories about how growing up hunting played a role in developing her confidence and problem-solving abilities. She further used the microphone to promote South Dakota, sharing her determination not to "lock down" during the COVID pandemic and touting the state's positive record with gun owners.

In 2019, she signed a bill into law eliminating the need for a permit to carry a concealed weapon in the state. South Dakota also has a strengthened "Stand Your Ground" law and doesn't charge a fee for concealed carry permits — even paying for individuals' federal background checks when they buy a gun from a licensed dealer, she said.

"We are setting the standards as the most Second Amendment friendly state in the nation," Noem said.

South Dakota is listed as the seventh best state for gun owners, according to Guns and Ammo, behind Wyoming, Montana, Indiana, Utah, Arizona and North Dakota.

After Noem signed her executive order on stage, she handed the pen to NRA CEO and Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre. Texas signed similar legislation into law in 2021, and a similar bill in Montana is



**South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem speaks to guests at the 2023 NRA-ILA Leadership Forum on April 13, 2023, in Indianapolis, Indiana. The forum is part of the National Rifle Association's Annual Meetings & Exhibits.** (Scott Olson/Getty Images)

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awaiting the governor's signature after passing through the Legislature earlier this month.

The executive order would require banks and other businesses seeking state contracts worth \$100,000 or more to certify they don't exclude firearm or ammunition industries and retailers.

"God gave you the right to defend yourself and your family. The government recognizes that right, but we don't have to ask permission to defend it," Noem said, after comparing the modern political situation to the Revolutionary War period.

## Noem is making 'all the right moves' for presidential bid

Noem used some of her time at the podium to re-introduce herself to a national audience. She spoke about her success as governor and her rural roots, she told stories of her family and her grandchildren, and touched on national political topics.

Noem was met with a standing ovation as she walked off the stage to the country song "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue" by Toby Keith. Trump and Pence received a similar standing ovation, but Hutchinson did not.

Republican Florida Gov. Ron Desantis spoke to the convention via video message. Like Noem, he has not officially announced a run, but he's a leader in some polls.

Noem and Desantis are favored among South Dakota Republicans, based on an SDSU poll by Wiltse and SDSU professor Filip Viskupič. The poll, which surveyed 747 registered voters about five presidential candidates or potential candidates, was released Thursday.

"You're seeing her make all these moves that just have to be done. Things like the NRA convention, those are important when it comes to funding but also when signaling support and taking cues from opinion leaders," Wiltse said. "She has a constant presence on conservative media too — that's everything you need to do to run for president at this point."

But, Wiltse said, those are also the things needed to do if she's angling for vice president or a cabinet position.

"You can't be sure of this other than we know she's building her name and her brand for something bigger than governor, which is perfectly normal and logical and something any other politician worth their salt is going to be doing."

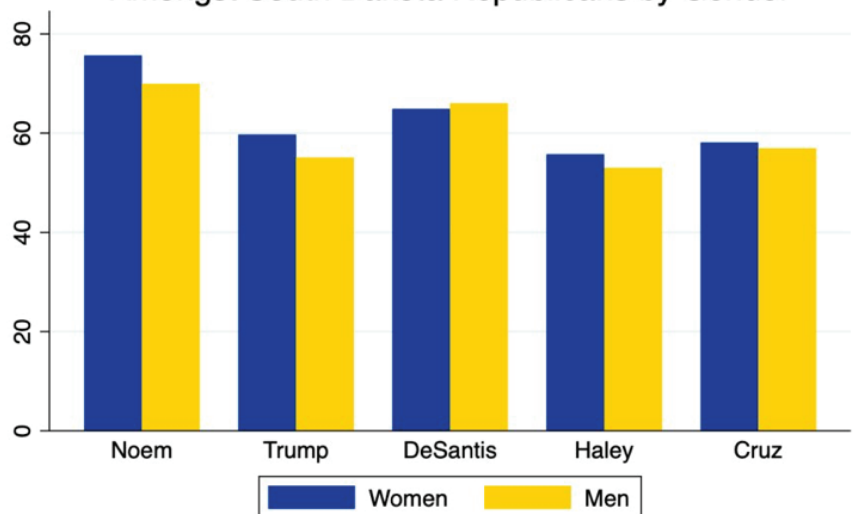
The next step, Wiltse said, is heading to Iowa or South Carolina, which are early Republican primary states.

"That's where you're really waving a flag of running or wanting to be involved in shaping who runs," Wiltse said.

Noem has been invited to the Iowa Faith and Freedom Coalition's speaking event later this month, according to the Argus Leader. The event is for those who've expressed an interest in running for president, and other invitees include DeSantis, Hutchinson, Trump and former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley.

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

Feelings Thermometers of Potential Candidates Amongst South Dakota Republicans by Gender



The SDSU Poll: Spring 2023

SDSU political science professors asked 747 South Dakota Republicans to rank how favorably they view Gov. Kristi Noem, former President Donald Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz. Noem had the most favorable ranking, followed closely by DeSantis. (Courtesy of SDSU)

## Teen murderer, now 41, denied parole in fourth appearance before board

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 14, 2023 2:44 PM

SIOUX FALLS – A 41-year-old inmate who put two bullets in the head of a man who was pleading for his life in 1996 will spend at least eight more months in prison.

Paul Jensen was 14 years old at the time. He was given a mandatory sentence of life without parole for first-degree murder in the 1996 death of cab driver Michael Hare in rural Fort Pierre.

Jensen and his co-conspirator had plotted to rob a cab driver for several days before placing the call that would end Hare's life and put \$30.48 in their pockets.

He was resentenced to 200 years in 2016 after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that mandatory life sentences for juveniles are unconstitutional.

On Thursday, about a dozen supporters crowded into the visit room at the Jameson Annex of the South Dakota State Penitentiary to urge the Board of Pardons and Paroles to offer a second chance to the rehabilitated man they say Jensen has become.

Among them were members of a church that backs Jensen's release, the psychiatrist who evaluated him in 1996 and a man who runs a metalworking works company and pledged to give Jensen a job if the three other contractors who'd promised him one backed out. Also present was Jensen's former cellmate, who drove from Denver to tell the board how remorseful his friend had been years before the Supreme Court made freedom an option.

"I've seen this man shed tears for how he feels about this," said Ward Mitchell, who met Jensen in prison in 1999. "Men don't cry in prison. We're not allowed."

Five other people, including two siblings of the victim, argued over video chat that the crime was too egregious to earn Jensen a second chance. They also said he's never fully accepted responsibility for the brutal slaying, about which a former justice of the South Dakota Supreme Court wrote "a more senseless act of violence by one human being against another is hard to imagine."

The 7-1 vote against parole for Jensen is his fourth straight failed attempt at freedom since he became parole eligible.

### Model inmate

Jensen told the board that co-defendant Shawn Springer, then 16, was like a surrogate father to him. Springer was dating Jensen's sister, who'd spent years looking after him as their single mother worked long hours to support the family.

Jensen had "an immature sense of loyalty," he said, and wanted to prove he could be tough and menacing enough to earn Springer's respect.

"I wanted to be respected by someone I looked up to," Jensen said.

Those backing his plea for freedom told the board that the aggressive "knucklehead" who'd signed on to a series of break-ins and thefts and mapped out a path to murder no longer exists.

Jensen hasn't had a write-up for violence for 15 years, they noted, and has instead filled his time with schooling, skills training and work behind the walls.

Along the way, he not only completed a hands-on course from the Alternatives to Violence Project, but became a facilitator who taught and mentored other inmates.

Angel Runnels, a Sioux Falls attorney who said she represents him at no cost because she's become a friend and supporter, reminded the board that Jensen handles purchase orders and turns in contraband at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield.

"Those are positions of trust," Runnels said.

Jensen has also made and has maintained close friendships from his prison cell.

Angie Roth said she, her husband and her three daughters have visited him multiple times over the years.

"My daughters think of him as an uncle," Roth said. "He taught them how to shuffle cards. They like to joke around with him."

Her church is among those ready to welcome him, she said, and her family is one of several that would be happy to take him in for a while if he were released.

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Pastor Dave Sinkgraven of Life Church in Sioux Falls said his congregation is praying for Jensen's release. "They are praying for him, and they are praying for Mr. Hare's family," Sinkgraven said.

Jordan Wixon owns a metalworking company in Sioux Falls that hires subcontractors, and he said at least three of them would be ready to give Jensen a job.

"If they don't take him, he has a job with me," Wixon said.

## 'The plan was to kill him'

Passionate calls for mercy gave way to passionate anger when Board Chair Myron Rau opened the floor for the opposition.

Former Stanley County State's Attorney Curt Mortenson's voice shook as he accused Jensen of falsifying the story of the killing. Jensen had talked of Springer's need for money as a motivating factor and told the board he was confused when Springer told him to shoot Hare. He also talked about smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol before the incident began.

That doesn't square with several days of preparation and a failed "dry run" of the robbery a week earlier with another cab driver, Mortenson said. That driver had refused to meet them behind the Days Inn in Pierre.

"This was not a robbery that ended in a homicide," said Mortenson, addressing Jensen directly as the inmate sat watching him on a laptop screen. "You and Shawn wanted to kill someone. You wanted to be gang bangers, and you wanted to know what it felt like ... the plan was to kill him."

Jensen's supporters told the board that they believed in redemption, but that didn't sit well with the victim's sister, Liz Hare.

"We believe in redemption; however, you have never, ever, not even today, accepted responsibility for what you've done," she said.

Liz Hare, Mortenson and current Stanley County State's Attorney Thomas Maher acknowledged that the re-sentencing judge in Jensen's case crafted a prison term designed to offer him parole, but each stated aloud or agreed with the idea that Jensen should not be considered for release until at least 2029. That's the year Jensen's co-conspirator, Springer, will first become eligible for release.

Asking for clemency so much earlier than Springer, Liz Hare said, amounts to a slap in the face for the family.

"You continue to traumatize us every time you put us through this," she said.

Maher told the board he believes in rehabilitation and self-improvement for inmates. He also argued that prison sentences are meant to accomplish more than rehabilitation.

Other juvenile murder cases stemmed from heated moments, or were more clearly fueled by drugs or unexpected circumstances. Jensen and Springer's crime was more methodical and brutal, Maher said, and the criminal justice system needs stiff penalties to deter such behavior.

"This sends a message that there are consequences," he said.

## Board vote: 7-1

In a brief rebuttal, Runnels said all the ugliness of the crime itself was scrutinized in exhaustive detail at Jensen's re-sentencing hearing in 2016. The judge, she said, still crafted a sentence designed to allow the teen killer's eventual freedom.

Board Vice Chair Kirsten Aasen was the lone board member swayed by the arguments. The attorney agreed that the case is among the more chilling she'd encountered, but said she planned to vote against a motion to deny parole because Jensen had done everything the system expected him to do and more.

"I wish I had the wisdom of Solomon to decide when your debt to society is paid, but I don't," Aasen said. "But we have a system for parole, and I believe in that system."

Peter Lieberman, a former judge, offered similar thoughts about the crime. He and the rest of the board members at Thursday's hearing, however, landed on a different decision.

Jensen's age at the time of the murder and his decades of personal growth are worthy of consideration, Lieberman said, but they weren't enough – at least they aren't yet.

"I am completely with the sentencing judge when he says there will be a time when he deserves parole,"

Lieberman said. "But that day is not today."

Jensen will be able to apply for parole again in eight months.

*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.*

## The Intervenor: Lone customer enters procedural fray over gas and electric rates

**Retired energy analyst says customers should get more involved**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 15, 2023 6:00 AM**



**Steve Wegman sips coffee and looks out the kitchen window of his home in Sioux Falls.** (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

As an unassuming and good-natured retiree, Steve Wegman might not seem like the type to make headlines. But he did recently, as the only "intervenor" participating in the state's two ongoing utility rate adjustment cases with MidAmerican Energy and Xcel Energy.

MidAmerican wanted to raise customers' natural gas bills by just over 6% but was awarded only 5.4% by state regulators, thanks in part to Wegman. Xcel is seeking about 18%.

Wegman is the first individual customer to intervene in an electric or gas rate case in years, and he said that's for a simple reason: "The public was never educated how to." He gained the knowledge as a former analyst for the Public Utilities Commission, often referred to as the PUC.

That's the state regulatory agency that considers a natural gas or electric rate adjustment case. The cases determine the rates a company can charge its customers.

Similar to a court case, the utility company presents

evidence to support its proposed rate increase, while other parties, such as consumers, can challenge the proposed rates. In this "courtroom," the final decision is made by three publicly elected commissioners that serve six-year terms.

Anybody who's a customer of the utility requesting the rate increase can email the commission and ask to be granted "intervenor" status, allowing them to participate in the process. Intervenors are entitled to receive official notices, appear at hearings, examine and cross-examine witnesses, present evidence, compel attendance of witnesses and production of evidence, submit briefs, and make and argue motions and objections.

Wegman said that by not participating, customers are assuming the Public Utilities Commission and its staff are representing them.

"The PUC's views and the company's views may not be the same as the customers' views," Wegman said. "And without the customer participation, it's a guessing game."

### **PUC's view**

The Public Utilities Commission does not agree with that assessment.

"The commission believes that utility customers understand that the PUC has expert staff who advocate for the public interest in rate cases, which is much more efficient than individual customers intervening in rate cases," said Leah Mohr, a PUC staff spokesperson. "It is important to note that the examination of any rate case filing is a long and difficult process even for experienced professionals."

The PUC noted that while individual intervenors are rare, organizations sometimes intervene in utility

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rate cases on behalf of individual customers.

When Black Hills Energy applied to increase its electric rates in 2014, Black Hills Industrial Intervenors and Dakota Rural Action were granted intervenor status.

Additionally, there have been at least two instances in which customers filed a petition requesting a public input meeting in the last two decades. When NorthWestern Energy looked to raise its electric rates in 2015, 27 customers filed a petition requesting a public hearing. Similarly, when the company looked to raise natural gas rates in 2011, 25 customers filed a petition requesting a public hearing. Public hearings were held in both cases.

And intervening is common in other types of regulatory proceedings before the PUC. More than 500 people and organizations have standing to participate in the regulatory review of two proposed carbon-capture pipelines that would go through South Dakota.

And regardless, "Customers are not left out of the process just because they do not intervene," Mohr said. "Many customers submit comments, and the commission considers those comments as the docket is processed."

Wegman said some other states have a body in the Attorney General's Office to represent customers in all rate adjustment cases.

"Something to consider," he said.



**Steve Wegman reminisces as he flips through old photos in the kitchen of his home in Sioux Falls.** (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

## A Pierre insider

Wegman started with energy policy under then-Governor Bill Janklow in the early 1980s as an energy policy analyst.

"I was working on energy efficiency," Wegman said. "Changing building codes. Changing building practices. Changing curriculum in the technical schools for building homes."

From there, Wegman began working on natural gas and geothermal projects around the state. And in the 1990s, he worked for the Public Utilities Commission as an analyst.

"What I basically worked on is energy efficiency and energy efficiency policies for utility companies," Wegman said.

After Janklow came back for a second stint as governor in 1995, Wegman was invited back to the Governor's Office as a special projects director.

Among other projects, Wegman worked to develop a mobile public health lab, a tattoo removal trailer for inmates, and an inmate production plant that made extremely bright lights to be used by fire departments around the state.

"That's probably my favorite," he said. "The firefighters still use those lights today."

Wegman then headed back to the PUC as an analyst in the early 2000s. He has since retired but still does consulting work in renewable energy. He said his time in Pierre taught him an important lesson about elected officials.

"The only thing that matters to an elected official is that the public marks the box on the ballot," Wegman said. "The unfortunate part is that no one follows up with those officials' performance."

But companies with skin in the game do.

Wegman said the public should be aware that utility companies work hard to build relationships with elected regulators – for example, by sponsoring the Governor's Hunt to get themselves invited, or hosting a dinner for the commission and lawmakers during the legislative session.

"Rule number one in business is that in order to have a relationship with the other party, you have to



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have a personal relationship," Wegman said. "And that's what those are. It is the company building a personal relationship with a commissioner. Whether they want to admit it or not, that's what is happening."

PUC spokesperson Leah Mohr said it's inaccurate to characterize those relationships as anything more than business.

"The commission is not going to raise rates in return for a free lunch," Mohr said.

"Each commissioner understands and honors their responsibility as fair and impartial decision-makers. Naturally, commissioners have business relationships with representatives of each utility. The more a commissioner learns about a utility's business, whether through formal avenues or informal ones, it fosters communication and understanding, which helps the commission do a better job of evaluating any request from that utility."

And she said commissioners work to build relationships with customers, too. Commissioners attend public events throughout the year across South Dakota, including home shows in Sioux Falls and Rapid City, the South Dakota State Fair, and community gatherings.

"In contrast," Mohr said, "meetings with utilities are relatively rare."

## How to intervene

Wegman said customers can have more influence by becoming intervenors, and he said the PUC should welcome that.

"It's really just a lack of education upon the consumers," Wegman said. "Should the commission spend time and resources to help the customers get educated? I always believed they should."

The state requires utility companies to provide written notice of any proposed rate increase to all affected customers at least 30 days prior to the effective date of the increase with a statement in customers' bills. Wegman said the low number of individual intervenors in electric and gas rate cases is a sign that the PUC isn't doing enough to educate consumers.

"Obviously people don't know what they can do," Wegman said. "If people are lining up for free food, having hard a time eating, I have a hard time believing they are not struggling to pay their utility bills."

Becoming an intervenor is simple, according to Wegman.

"All you need to do is be a customer of the company requesting the rate adjustment," Wegman said. "Within that sign-up period that's noted in your bill, you email the commission that you'd like to intervene. Include contact info, an address, and that's it."

By becoming an intervenor, Wegman was able to request information from state regulators and utility companies, participate in the case's proceedings, and present his views to regulators on the proposed rate changes.

"We had a few phone calls. We had a few Zoom meetings," Wegman said. "The company sent me the data that I wanted. I also asked PUC staff what questions they are asking, just to make sure the bases were being covered."

And Wegman said he extracted some concessions.

Wegman said MidAmerican was proposing to raise a standard fee tacked on to every bill, in addition to the natural gas, from \$5 to \$10. "And I talked them down to \$6 and some odd cents," he said.

Wegman said the commission staff was not planning to do that. At other times he and the PUC staff shared concerns.

"MidAmerican tried to include some costs accrued in other states. Staff caught that too," Wegman said. "We pushed back on that."

Wegman said he is still reviewing Xcel Energy's rate increase.

"I'm looking at their energy efficiency programs to make sure they are fair for South Dakotans," Wegman said.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## Mexican cartel targeted by Biden administration in multiple fentanyl indictments

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - APRIL 14, 2023 6:02 PM

WASHINGTON — As illicit fentanyl seizures reach record numbers, the Biden administration on Friday announced “government-wide efforts” to counter narcotics trafficking, including criminally charging members of the Sinaloa Cartel operating out of Mexico, and sanctioning Chinese producers of the chemicals used to make the synthetic drug.

The Department of Justice unsealed indictments alleging fentanyl trafficking, weapons offenses, and money laundering against 28 defendants, including those at the highest levels of the notorious and violent cartel.

The indictments allege that its members reaped hundreds of millions of dollars in profits “by flooding the United States with fentanyl.”

Seven of the defendants are in custody pending extradition proceedings. U.S. law enforcement will work with counterparts in Mexico to “expeditiously extradite” the other defendants, a senior administration official said on background Friday.

The Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control concurrently issued sanctions against two China-based entities — Wuhan Shuokang Biological Technology Co., Ltd, owned by Yao Huatao, and Suzhou Xiaoli Pharmatech Co., Ltd — for the sale of precursor chemicals to cartel members in Mexico for the production of illicit fentanyl “intended for U.S. markets,” according to the department.

Huatao was indicted by the Justice Department earlier this month on conspiracy charges, including money laundering and fentanyl trafficking.

Treasury’s OFAC also sanctioned five individuals from China and Central America, including a Guatemala-based precursor chemical broker working on behalf of cartel members in Mexico.

“These efforts demonstrate the U.S. government’s commitment to dismantling this deadly criminal enterprise, and every level, from those who willingly ship illicit precursor chemicals from overseas to those who traffic pills right into our homeland killing tens of thousands of Americans every year,” a White House senior administration official told reporters on background Friday.

In addition, the Department of State added several individuals, including those who were indicted and sanctioned Friday, to its Narcotics Rewards Program that offers up to \$25 million in exchange for information leading to arrests and convictions of drug traffickers.

### Politics of fentanyl

The issue of illicit fentanyl crossing the southwest border into the United States is a talking point for both Republicans and Democrats whose constituents have been affected by staggering overdose deaths.

The GOP-led U.S. House has so far this year led numerous roundtables and hearings around combating the deadly drug, often conflating the drug overdose crisis with immigration concerns.

Illicit fentanyl seizures by U.S. law enforcement are up 400% in 2023 over 2019 numbers, according to Customs and Border Patrol.

To date this year, more illegal fentanyl has been seized by agents than all of the synthetic drug seized last year, according to a senior administration official Friday — though those numbers are not yet reflected on the CPB’s drug seizure dashboard.

GOP lawmakers are pushing for the HALT Fentanyl Act, a measure reintroduced this Congress by Republican Reps. Morgan Griffith of Virginia, and Bob Latta of Ohio.

The bill aims to permanently classify fentanyl-related analogs as Class I substances under the Controlled Substances Act.

Earlier this year, a bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers, including Democratic Reps. Joe Neguse of Colorado and Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania, launched the Fentanyl Prevention Caucus.

In his 2023 State of the Union address, President Joe Biden called for the purchase of advanced detection machines to inspect cargo and packages, including those arriving through private couriers like FedEx.

While illicit fentanyl arrives to the U.S. over land borders, it also comes via the coasts and U.S. mail. Biden has requested \$46 billion for next year's drug control programs, roughly \$2 billion over the current amount, according to the White House.

## Staggering overdose deaths

Drug overdose deaths have skyrocketed in the U.S., increasing fivefold in the last two decades, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study published in late 2022.

Of the record-setting 107,622 overdose deaths tracked by the CDC in 2021, 71,238 of them were attributed to manmade, illegal fentanyl substances.

The synthetic opioid is 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine.

Because of its potency and cost-effectiveness for illegal drug producers, the synthetic opioid — that can be both liquid and powder form — is often found in other types of drugs, including heroin, cocaine and fake prescription pills.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency — through its "One Pill Can Kill" campaign — warns that six out of every 10 fentanyl-laced fake prescription pills contain a lethal dose of the synthetic opioid.

Though they are both synthetic opioids, pharmaceutical fentanyl differs from illicit fentanyl in that it is prescribed by medical practitioners for pain management — for example, following surgery or for advanced-stage cancers.

Fentanyl that is made at facilities and distributed through illegal drug markets is considered illicit.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

## U.S. Supreme Court temporarily blocks limits to abortion pill access

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 14, 2023 3:20 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito has temporarily halted any changes in access to the abortion medication mifepristone from taking effect until Wednesday at midnight.

The one-page order from Alito, issued late Friday afternoon, will block for now the April 7 ruling from the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas that suspended the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's 2000 approval of mifepristone.

That was set to take effect Friday at midnight. However, in 17 states and the District of Columbia, the Texas ruling was in conflict with a separate ruling from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington, where a judge ruled that the FDA couldn't change access to mifepristone.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans had moved to partially block the Texas district court's nationwide ruling from taking effect following an appeal from the federal government and manufacturer of the brand-name abortion pill, Danco Laboratories.

That ruling, from the three-judge panel, would have allowed mifepristone to stay on the market, though it would have required doctors to prescribe and administer the medication under guidelines that were in place before 2016.

The federal government and Danco Laboratories rejected that decision from the appeals court and appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court on Friday morning.

Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar wrote in the federal government's appeal to the Supreme Court that the 5th Circuit's partial stay would immediately "render all extant doses of mifepristone misbranded because their labeling would be inconsistent with the operative conditions of approval."

"The generic version of the drug would cease to be approved altogether," she added.

GenBioPro, Inc., the maker of the generic abortion pill, wrote in a brief to the Supreme Court the 5th Circuit's partial stay "illustrates the essential folly and manifest danger of allowing federal drug approvals to be decided through nationwide injunctions rendered by individual district courts based on the claims

of particular private litigants.”

GenBioPro also noted that about two-thirds of all medication abortions in the country use their generic version of the abortion pill.

The pre-2016 prescribing instructions for medication abortion, a two-dose regimen that includes mifepristone, would have reduced the ceiling for use from 10 weeks gestation to seven weeks.

It would have required only doctors to prescribe and administer it as opposed to other health care providers with licenses to prescribe pharmaceuticals. It would have required patients attend three in-person visits, banned telehealth and ended dispensation of the medication by mail.

Alito wrote in the order that “any response to the application be filed on or before Tuesday, April 18, 2023, by 12 p.m.”

NARAL Pro-Choice America President Mini Timmaraju said in a statement in reaction to Alito’s order that “while medication abortion remains legal for now, this case should never have been heard in the first place.”

“Nothing about the rulings from the lower courts’ Trump-appointed judges had any basis in medical science — both are steeped in reckless disinformation and total disregard for the law,” Timmaraju said. “As this case continues, safe and effective medication abortion in all 50 states is at severe risk.”

Alliance Defending Freedom Senior Counsel Erin Hawley said in a statement that Alito’s “brief administrative stay is standard operating procedure whenever the Supreme Court is asked to consider an emergency request like this one.”

“It gives the court sufficient time to consider the parties’ arguments before ruling,” Hawley said. “We look forward to explaining why the FDA has not met its heavy burden to pause the parts of the district court’s decision that restore the critical safeguards for women and girls that were unlawfully removed by the FDA.”

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

## U.S. elections official takes part in secretive GOP conference, sparking backlash

BY: ZACHARY ROTH - APRIL 14, 2023 2:34 PM

A commissioner of a federal elections agency recently spoke at a secretive conference of conservative voting activists and Republican secretaries of state and congressional staff — a step that election experts call highly improper for an official charged with helping states administer fair and unbiased elections.

U.S. Election Assistance Commissioner Donald Palmer, the former chief election official in Virginia, was a panelist at a February conference organized by conservative groups working to impose new voting restrictions, including the Heritage Foundation.

Ten chief state election officials, as well as elections staff from three additional Republican-led states, attended the confab, which was described by one prominent organizer as a “private, confidential meeting.”

The existence of the conference, including its agenda and list of attendees, was first reported by The Guardian U.S. and the investigative journalism site Documented.

In a statement to States Newsroom, Palmer defended his appearance, calling it “an important opportunity to engage.” Palmer, who was appointed by former President Donald Trump, is one of two Republican members of the four-member commission, which by law is divided evenly between the two main political parties.

Though the EAC has no ethics code to guide commissioners or staff, it’s one of several agencies subject to heightened restrictions on political activity via the Hatch Act — the U.S. law that restricts federal government employees from involvement in partisan politics.

Amber McReynolds, the former elections director for the city of Denver and a prominent election administration expert, said commissioners should be barred from partisan events.

“With elections, the standard has to be higher. The professionalism has to be higher. The transparency

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has to be higher," said McReynolds, who sits on the Board of Governors for the U.S. Postal Service. "[EAC commissioners] should not be participating in partisan activities."

"I do think it's important for them to engage," added McReynolds, who is politically unaffiliated. "But do so with equal access in mind and high ethics in mind, and certainly not in private meetings."

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, a Democrat, went further, suggesting Palmer should step down.

"Election professionals across the spectrum are deeply disappointed that (a commissioner) of this federal agency abused the trust we placed in his ability to be professional and unbiased in supporting election administration," Benson said in a statement. "His inappropriate and poor judgment calls into question his ability to continue in his role in the future."

"It's the perception of appearing at a highly partisan group that isn't transparent," said Thom Reilly, the co-director of the Center for an Independent and Sustainable Democracy at Arizona State University. "In a time when there is so much that's problematic about how people are viewing elections, I think this is going to add to that. I think it's problematic."

In a statement sent via an EAC spokesperson, Palmer responded:

"The Heritage Secretary of State Meeting was an important opportunity to engage with chief election officials and key staff. It was a forum to discuss the national security implications of voting system standards and testing, federal legislation and funding, and interstate voter registration data sharing, and I appreciated hearing from states and answering their questions."

Trey Grayson, a Republican former secretary of state of Kentucky who served on the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration created by President Barack Obama, said he doesn't have a problem with Palmer's appearance at the event.

"I don't think the rules of the EAC require him to step back from being an active Republican," said Grayson. "Don has extensive election administration experience which he brings to the job as commissioner. He also maintains strong relationships with Republicans across the country. That can help him do his job better. It is possible to still be a partisan and do your job well."

## Panel appearances

According to the event's agenda, Palmer appeared on a panel entitled "Realistic ERIC Fixes and Reforms," alongside Missouri Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft and Logan Churchwell of the Public Interest Legal Foundation, whose founder and president, Christian Adams, served as moderator.

Palmer also appeared on an "Updates from the Hill" panel, alongside two Republican congressional staffers. Ashcroft has been a key supporter of his state's strict new voting law. He was one of several Republican chief election officials who recently pulled his state out of the Electronic Registration Information Center, an interstate compact that helps states maintain clean voter rolls and reach out to unregistered voters.

PILF has filed lawsuits aimed at forcing election officials to pare the rolls, and has sought to raise fears about illegal voting by non-citizens, which experts say is extremely rare. Cleta Mitchell, a lawyer for Trump who worked with him to overturn the 2020 election, sits on PILF's board of directors.

The conference was organized in part by the Heritage Foundation's Hans von Spakovsky, who for decades has been prominent in the conservative push to raise fear about illegal voting in order to impose new voting restrictions.

Also appearing at the event were Ken Cuccinelli of the Election Transparency Initiative, Jason Snead of the Honest Elections Project, and — giving the keynote speech — Ken Blackwell of the America First Policy Institute, another PILF board member. All three are leaders of the Trump-backed effort to tighten voting rules.

In an email to the staff of a Texas Republican state legislator who was set to appear at the event, von Spakovsky wrote: "There is no livestream. This is not a public event. It is a private, confidential meeting of the secretaries. I would rather you not send out a press release about it." The email was obtained by Documented.

Chief elections officials from Indiana, Florida, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Tennes-

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see, Virginia and West Virginia attended the conference.

## Former DOJ lawyer

Palmer joined the EAC in 2019. A former lawyer in the voting section of the Justice Department's civil rights division, he has served in senior election administration posts under Republican administrations in Florida and Virginia.

Palmer has tweeted about efforts to add antifa to the FBI's list of terror groups, and in opposition to gun control policies. Antifa is shorthand for anti-fascists, far-left-leaning militant groups that violently resist neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

And this isn't the first time Palmer has appeared with activists working to restrict voting. In 2020, Palmer and EAC Commissioner Christy McCormick, a fellow Republican and currently the agency's chair, went on a podcast hosted by Catherine Engelbrecht of True the Vote, another leader of the effort to raise fears about illegal voting.

On the podcast, Palmer questioned the security of mail-in voting, which many states expanded during the pandemic, and which has not been associated with significant fraud in the states that use it widely.

"There have been studies that say that vote-by-mail and absentee is just simply more vulnerable to fraud because an election official is not confirming the identity of the voter," Palmer said. "It's obvious when you look at reports of fraud that take place occasionally. Election officials and election offices need to be vigilant to make sure that increased probability of fraud doesn't take place on a scale that swings an election."

Palmer also appeared on Mitchell's podcast in 2021 — though in that appearance, he sought to knock down fears among right-wing voting activists about the vulnerability of voting systems.

At his confirmation hearing in 2018, Palmer stressed his commitment to fairness and impartiality.

"The principles of democracy and justice are greater than the singular success of any political party or candidate who may win or lose an individual race," he declared.

## What the EAC does

The EAC, which was created as part of the Help America Vote Act of 2002, sets standards for voting systems and supports states with other aspects of election administration, including distributing federal funds.

It also publishes widely used voting data, and maintains the national mail voter registration form. Its four commissioner are appointed by the president based on recommendations by congressional leaders, and confirmed by the Senate.

Though it often flies under the radar, the commission can play an important role in setting voting policy. In 2016, its executive director worked to make it easier for several Republican secretaries of state to require proof of citizenship from people registering to vote, before being blocked by a court.

McReynolds said part of the problem is the structure of the EAC, whose commissioners must be either Republicans or Democrats.

"Literally, Congress crafted a law that you have to be a D or an R, which leaves out 45 percent of the country and also a boatload of experience due to the lack of a party label," she said, adding that the U.S. should learn from other advanced democracies and ensure nonpartisanship in the conduct of election administration.

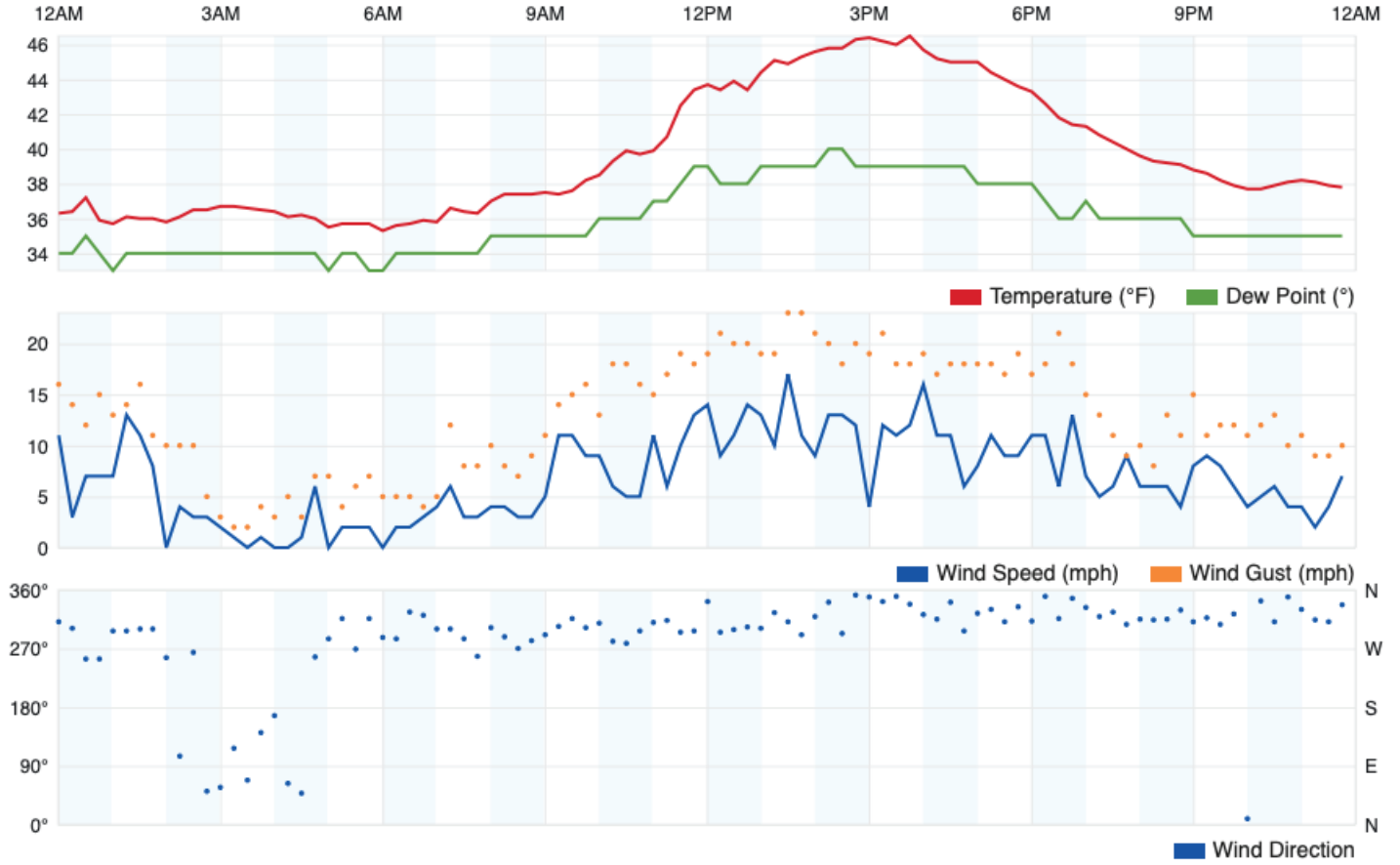
"There is independence when you look around the world, with the election authorities," McReynolds said. "We have to decouple partisan political party activity from election administration, and ensure nonpartisan guardrails are in place with high ethical standards for those who oversee elections."

*Zachary Roth is the National Democracy Reporter for States Newsroom.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

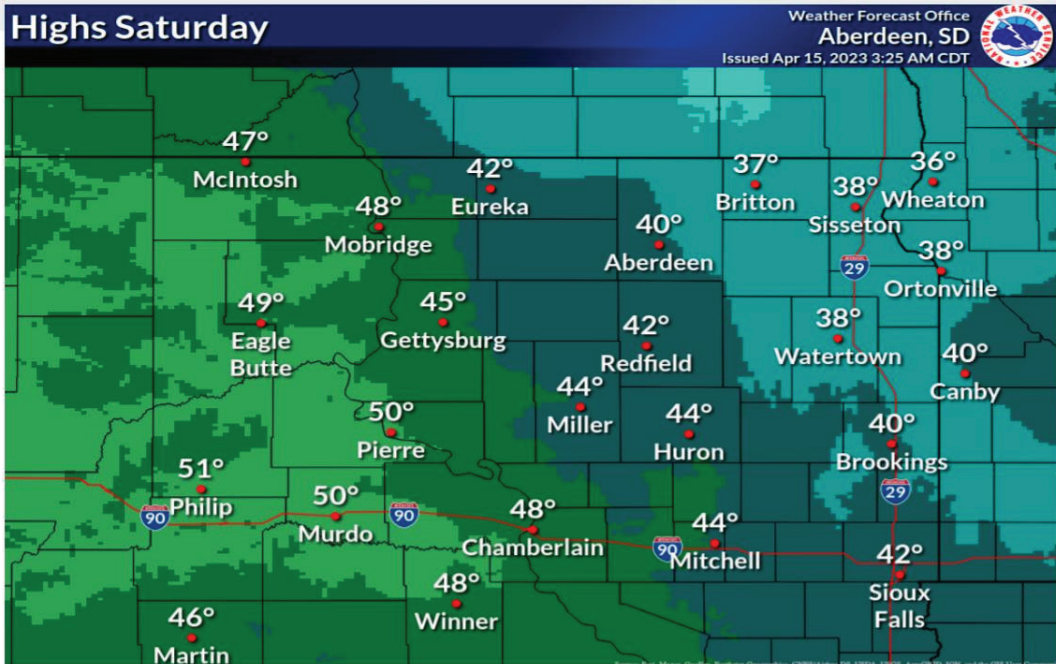


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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Mostly Cloudy then Mostly Cloudy and Breezy	Mostly Cloudy then Mostly Cloudy and Blustery	Becoming Sunny and Breezy	Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Partly Sunny then Partly Sunny and Breezy
High: 39 °F	Low: 27 °F	High: 47 °F	Low: 21 °F	High: 47 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 56 °F

**Mostly Cloudy - Breezy to Windy** April 15, 2023  
3:43 AM



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Mostly cloudy and cool today, with maybe a stray sprinkle. Winds will be out of the north northwest gusting between 25 and 35 mph.



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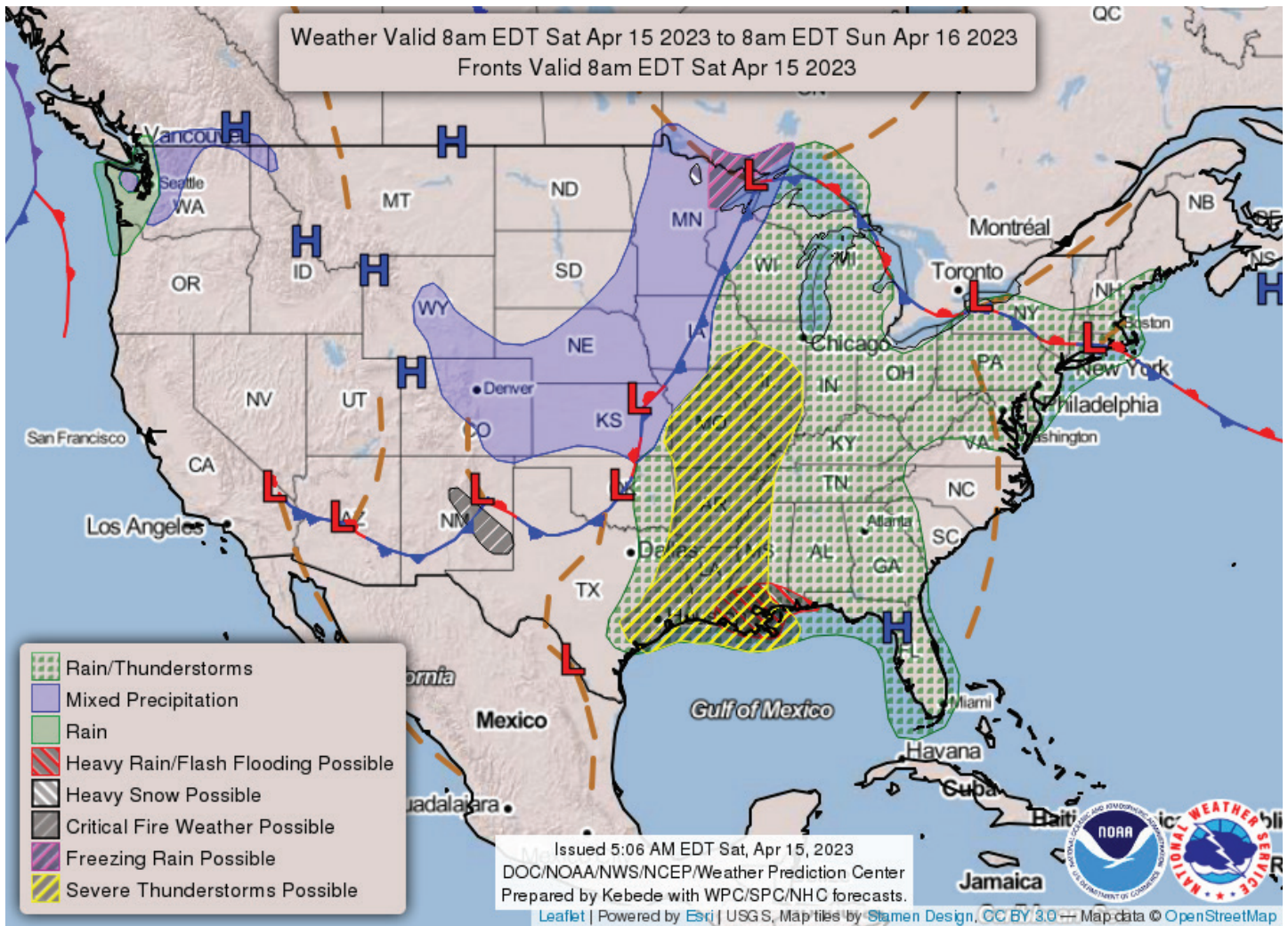
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 47 °F at 3:45 PM**  
**Low Temp: 35 °F at 5:55 AM**  
**Wind: 23 mph at 1:20 AM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 13 hours, 34 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1926  
Record Low: 8 in 2014  
Average High: 58  
Average Low: 31  
Average Precip in April.: 0.73  
Precip to date in April.: 0.76  
Average Precip to date: 2.79  
Precip Year to Date: 4.69  
Sunset Tonight: 8:19:38 PM  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:43:27 AM



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## Today in Weather History

April 15, 1896: A tornado, possibly an F3, moved northeast from Burkmere, which is 10 miles west of Faulkton. About half dozen farms were torn apart. Two children were killed, and the rest of the family critically injured as a home was leveled. 6 miles northwest of Faulkton, near Millard.

April 15, 2011: A strong upper-level low-pressure area brought widespread heavy snowfall to central and parts of northeast South Dakota. This early spring storm brought 6 to 14 inches of heavy snow to the area. The heavy wet snow caused a lot of travel problems along with a few accidents. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included 12 inches 12 SSW Harrold, 23 N Highmore, and Orient; 13 inches 14 NNE Isabel and Eureka with 14 inches at Eagle Butte.

1921 - Two mile high Silver Lake, CO, received 76 inches of snow in 24 hours, the heaviest 24 hour total of record for North America. The storm left a total of 87 inches in twenty-seven and a half hours. (David Ludlum)

1927: The Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927 continued to rage. Tremendous rains all over the Mississippi River Valley during the preceding autumn and winter sent floodwaters raging southward over a wide area. On this date, the government levee at Dorena, MO collapsed. The surge of floodwater continued pushing downriver toward the Mississippi Delta, bursting more dams as it went. Also on this day, New Orleans saw 15 inches of rain in 18 hours. More than 4 feet of water covered parts of the city.

1949 - A hailstone five inches by five and a half inches in size, and weighing four pounds, was measured at Troy NY. (The Weather Channel)

1958 - A tornado 300 yards in width skipped along a five mile path near Frostproof FL. A 2500 gallon water tank was found one mile from its original position (it is not known how much water was in the tank at the time). (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region. A tornado killed one person and injured seven others near Mount Dora FL. Drifts of hail up to two feet deep were reported in Davidson and Rowan counties in North Carolina. Myrtle Beach SC was deluged with seven inches of rain in three hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Death Valley, CA, was soaked with 1.53 inches of rain in 24 hours. Snow fell in the mountains of southern California. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Showers and thunderstorms soaked the eastern U.S. with heavy rain, pushing the rainfall total for the month at Cape Hatteras NC past their previous April record of 7.10 inches. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a stationary front produced severe weather from west central Texas to west central Arkansas during the late afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms spawned a tornado which caused more than half a million dollars damage at Fort Stockton TX, produced wind gusts to 65 mph at Dennison TX, produced baseball size hail at Silo OK and near Capps Corner TX, and drenched southeastern Oklahoma with up to 4 inches of rain in two hours. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: An F3 tornado hits downtown Nashville causing extensive damage but no loss of life. An additional 62 tornadoes touched down in Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee. These tornadoes caused 12 fatalities and approximately 120 injuries.

2000: What a difference a day made (with the help of a strong cold front). Yesterday's 86 degrees in Goodland, Kansas, tied the record high for the date. Today's high of 29 degrees was also a date record high, but a record low high. It was a new record by 3 degrees.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Bill Bowerman was the track coach for the University of Oregon. Every time he watched his athletes run, he would ask himself one question: "What can I do to help him run faster?"

Often he would think of their shoes and wondered if a different design would enable them to increase their speed. One morning while thinking about this concern, his wife served him a waffle for breakfast. As he looked at the waffle, he thought of a slab of rubber with the imprint of a waffle pressed deep inside of it.

From that concern came the beginning of the now-famous waffle-pattern running sole that became the birth of the Nike shoe line.

"If any of you is deficient in wisdom" is the way one translator begins James 1:5. James was a Christian teacher with a Jewish background and saw wisdom as something that was entirely practical - something that was concerned with the business of living life well!

We must always remember that our God is a giving God and gives us the wisdom we need to make the right choices, solve difficult problems and find directions for right living. As willing as God is to give, the responsibility for asking lies with the Christian. When we ask for anything in faith believing, God will grant the request as long as it is in His and our best interest.

Prayer: We pray, Father, that we will rely on You for the wisdom we need to meet and solve our problems. May we constantly seek Your goodness and guidance. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. James 1:5



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

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## 2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.14.23

23 27 41 48 51 22

MegaPlier: 2x

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

NEXT DRAW:

[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 DRAW: 12 Hrs 54 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.14.23

3 15 38 40 44 3

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

NEXT DRAW: 12 Hrs 24 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.12.23

5 10 22 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$25,000**

NEXT DRAW: 12 Hrs 54 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
04.12.23

16 19 32 33 41 19

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

NEXT DRAW: 12 Hrs 53 Mins 17 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 DRAW: 12 Hrs 53 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

## Noem signs order on bank discrimination against gun industry

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem signed an executive order Friday that blocks state agencies from signing contracts with financial institutions that she says have discriminated against the firearms industry.

The Republican governor signed the order while speaking before the National Rifle Association convention in Indianapolis.

The governor said the order, which takes effect immediately, was in response to moves by some large banking institutions whose policies toward the firearms industry she said have included threatening to withhold funding, canceling loans, or "holding them to a different standard than how the left is treated."

"I won't stand for it, not in South Dakota," Noem said.

Pro-gun lawmakers in the South Dakota Legislature tried to pass a similar NRA-backed measure during the 2022 session, but lobbyists for several banking associations and business groups persuaded the Senate Commerce and Energy Committee to defeat the legislation, KELO-TV reported.

## NOT REAL NEWS: A look at what didn't happen this week

By The Associated Press undefined

A roundup of some of the most popular but completely untrue stories and visuals of the week. None of these are legit, even though they were shared widely on social media. The Associated Press checked them out. Here are the facts:

Federal Reserve's payment service FedNow would not replace cash

CLAIM: The Federal Reserve is launching a digital currency app, FedNow, that will eliminate physical cash.

THE FACTS: FedNow is a service that allows banks and credit unions to transfer funds more quickly. It's not a form of currency, nor is it a move toward eliminating cash, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System stated. FedNow has been in the works since 2019 and will launch in July 2023. In recent days, social media users have misrepresented the service, claiming it is a step toward "getting rid of physical money and having digital currency." In response to the misinformation and confusion, the Federal Reserve reiterated on Twitter that FedNow is not a form of currency. Instead, it is a payments service that will be available to banks and credit unions, enabling them to speed up the processing of checks and electronic payments. This will mean people can access their paychecks and transfer money to other accounts instantly, any time of the day or week. Currently, these processes can take up to three days to clear and are often delayed on holidays and weekends. "FedNow has nothing to do with replacing cash. It is an upgrade to the decades old payment system," said Aaron Klein, senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution, in an email to the AP. Klein noted that if banks use the service, it will make payments faster, resulting in fewer overdraft fees, late fees and visits to check cashers. Many countries already have real-time payment systems similar to FedNow, including England. The U.S. already has a real time payment network, but it's run by private banks. The Fed is separately researching the potential to issue a digital currency, commonly referred to as a "central bank digital currency," or CBDC. Yet that research is in its early phases and there isn't uniform support among Fed officials for issuing such a currency. A central bank digital currency would potentially allow Americans to make electronic transactions without relying on a third party, such as a bank. "The Federal Reserve has made no decision on issuing a central bank digital currency and would not do so without clear support from Congress and the executive branch, ideally in the form of a specific authorizing law," the Federal Reserve's website states. "A CBDC would not replace cash or other payment options."

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Posts distort proposed LGBTQ 'safety zone' bill in Canada

CLAIM: A proposed bill in Canada would subject anyone who misgenders others or engages in anti-LGBTQ protests to prosecution and a \$25,000 fine.

THE FACTS: The bill would not institute a blanket ban on misgendering and anti-LGBTQ protests. The legislation, introduced by members of the opposition party in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, would allow the province's attorney general to temporarily prohibit people from engaging in acts of intimidation, such as threats or homophobic protests, within 100 meters (328 feet) of certain properties. Proponents say that the bill is intended to protect drag performers and LGBTQ communities from intimidation. Erroneous claims about the bill have spread widely across social media platforms. "New bill in Canada would prosecute anyone that misgendered, criticised or protested against Transgenderism," one Twitter user wrote in a post shared more than 6,000 times. "Anyone deemed 'transphobic, homophobic or offensive' would face prosecution and a \$25,000 fine." The legislation, which was introduced on April 4, would permit the Ontario attorney general to temporarily designate a property as a "2SLGBTQI+ community safety zone" and prohibit an "act of intimidation" — such as threats, transphobic or homophobic demonstrations, and distributing "hate propaganda" — within 100 meters of that property, according to the bill text. Violators could face a fine of up to \$25,000. The New Democratic Party of Ontario, whose members sponsored the bill, said it is a response to a rise in hate crimes and intimidation of drag artists and the LGBTQ community. The online claims are "inaccurate and distorting," Brenda Cossman, a law professor at the University of Toronto, wrote in an email to the AP, noting that the bill does not include a broad provision concerning misgendering, and the restrictions only apply to the designated zones. "The bill would not prosecute anyone deemed homophobic etc," Cossman wrote. "It would only apply to individuals who seek to intimidate within the designated safety zones." The New Democratic Party of Ontario said in a statement that some have "twisted the facts" about the legislation. "This legislation would not stop anyone from enjoying freedom of expression or assembly," the statement reads. To become law, the bill would still need to win a majority vote of the Assembly's members, and The Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario has a large majority in the provincial legislative body.

— Associated Press writer Josh Kelety in Phoenix contributed this report.

No, farmers aren't required to vaccinate livestock with mRNA vaccines

CLAIM: Farmers and ranchers are required to inject livestock with mRNA vaccines.

THE FACTS: There is no mandate in the U.S. that livestock receive certain vaccines and there are no COVID-19 mRNA vaccines licensed for animals, as some online have suggested. Both messenger RNA, or mRNA, and RNA are natural, essential components of all living cells. The COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna use mRNA to instruct cells to create a spike protein to fight the disease. Social media posts in recent days have falsely asserted that farmers are required to vaccinate livestock with such vaccines and baselessly suggested that unsuspecting humans will therefore consume the immunizations. "I just recently read that farmers and ranchers are being told that they must inject their livestock with the mRNA vaccine," a man in an Instagram video claims. "What temperature do I need to cook my cow in order to get rid of the mRNA death jab vaccine thing?" Experts, industry groups and officials say there are no such requirements. "There is no requirement or mandate that producers vaccinate their livestock for any disease," U.S. Department of Agriculture spokesperson Marissa Perry said in an email. "It is a personal and business decision left up to the producer and will remain that way." Jason Menke, a National Pork Board spokesperson, said in a statement that the "decision to use vaccines and other medical treatments to protect animal health and well-being are made by the farmer under the direction of the herd veterinarian." In terms of COVID-19 specifically, there are no licensed mRNA vaccines against that disease for animals, Perry said. Some animals, particularly those in zoos considered susceptible, have received vaccines against COVID-19. But those immunizations do not rely on mRNA technology, said Suresh Kuchipudi, a veterinary scientist and chair of emerging infectious diseases at Penn State University. Experts also say there are no animal vaccines currently licensed in the U.S. against any disease that use the same mRNA approach as humans' COVID-19 vaccines, which entails delivering the mRNA by using a fatty coating called lipid



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nanoparticles — though some are being researched. There are some animal vaccines that use other RNA platforms. The pharmaceutical company Merck has for several years offered a customizable vaccine using what it calls “RNA particle technology”; the company creates vaccines against the flu and other viruses in pigs to protect a specific herd as needed. That approach predates the advent of the COVID-19 mRNA vaccines. The notion that mRNA vaccines would be transmissible through animal consumption — much less cause harm to the consumer — is not rooted in scientific evidence, experts told the AP. “The messenger RNA is extremely fragile,” Kuchipudi said, and is typically gone within days of receipt. “The chance of the mRNA being transferred, even hypothetically, is extremely unlikely.” Moreover, regulators licensing vaccines for food animals require something called a “withdrawal time,” said Alan Young, a professor of veterinary and biomedical science at South Dakota State University who also founded veterinary vaccine company Medgene. “Any licensed vaccine comes with a minimum time before you’re allowed to actually have that animal to enter the food chain.” Menke, of the National Pork Board, added: “Vaccines are critical to preserving animal health and well-being, keeping the food supply safe, and protect U.S. livestock from emerging and foreign diseases.”

— Associated Press writer Angelo Fichera in Philadelphia contributed this report.

Video of roller destroying beer cans unrelated to Bud Light backlash

CLAIM: A video shows Bud Light drinkers using a “steamroller” to destroy beer cans in response to the brand partnering with Dylan Mulvaney, a transgender social media influencer.

THE FACTS: The video is from February 2023, prior to the controversy, and shows a road roller in Mexicali, Mexico, being used to destroy thousands of beer cases that had been confiscated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The municipality announced that the cases were destroyed due to health risks. But some online posts misrepresented the video as showing cans being destroyed in response to the brand’s partnership with Mulvaney, which has been met with transphobic commentary from conservative social media personalities. “Bud Light drinkers use steamroller to destroy beer in protest against partnership with trans influencer,” one blog featuring the video falsely stated. The false claim also circulated widely on TikTok and Reddit. The footage matches multiple similar videos that were posted on Feb. 28, 2023. That day, the Mexicali municipal government’s Twitter account posted photos of the same event, explaining that it showed the destruction of more than 85,000 beer containers that had been seized in 2020 by the City Council of Mexicali. According to local reports, the cans were confiscated during the pandemic as people tried to bring cases of beer across the U.S.-Mexico border. In April 2020, the AP reported that Mexico had ordered the closure of most “non-essential” industries, which included the country’s major breweries. Norma Bustamante, municipal president of Mexicali, tweeted on Feb. 27 that the authorization to destroy the cases of beer was approved “in order to avoid infections or other health risks.”

Find AP Fact Checks here: <https://apnews.com/APFactCheck>

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## Sudan’s army and rival force clash, wider conflict feared

By JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Fierce fighting erupted Saturday in Sudan’s capital between the military and the country’s powerful paramilitary force, raising fears of a wider conflict in the chaos-stricken country. A doctors’ group said at least three people were killed and dozens injured.

The clashes between the military and the Rapid Support Forces group capped months of heightened tensions between both sides that forced the delay of a deal with political parties to restore the country’s short-lived transition to democracy.

The sound of heavy firing could be heard across the capital, Khartoum, and its sister city of Omdurman, where both the military and the RSF have amassed tens of thousands of troops since an October 2021

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military coup that derailed Sudan's fragile path to democracy.

Residents described chaotic scenes in Khartoum and Omdurman as firing and explosions rang out in densely populated neighborhoods. "Fire and explosions are everywhere," said Amal Mohamed, a doctor in a public hospital in Omdurman. "All are running and seeking shelter."

Another Khartoum resident, Abdel-Hamid Mustafa, said soldiers from both sides on armored trucks were seen firing at each other in the streets and residential areas. "We haven't seen such battles in Khartoum before," she said.

One of the flashpoints was Khartoum International Airport, where clashes grounded commercial Sudan-bound flights from Saudi Arabia turned back after nearly landing at the airport, flight tracking data showed Saturday.

Saudi Arabia's national airline said one of its Airbus A330 aircraft was involved in "an accident." Video showed the plane on fire on the tarmac. Another plane also appeared to have caught fire in the attack. Flight-tracking website FlightRadar24 identified it as a SkyUp Airlines Boeing 737. SkyUp is a Kyiv, Ukraine-based airline. It did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Sudan Doctors' Committee said two civilians were killed at the airport, without specifying the circumstances. The committee said in a statement that another man was shot to death in the state of North Kordofan.

Meanwhile, the BBC reported that a correspondent for BBC News Arabic in Khartoum, Mohamed Osman, was beaten by a Sudanese soldier. The broadcaster said the army had stopped Osman's car while he was en route to his work and that he was taken to army headquarters in Omdurman. While explaining his movements to officers, he was hit in the head from behind by a soldier, the BBC said.

The fighting comes after months of escalating tensions between the generals and years of political unrest after an October 2021 military coup.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other top diplomats expressed extreme concern over the outbreak of violence. "We urge all actors to stop the violence immediately and avoid further escalations or troop mobilizations and continue talks to resolve outstanding issues," Blinken wrote on Twitter.

The European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell; the head of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat; and the Arab League chief, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, called for a cease-fire and for both parties to return to negotiations to settle their dispute.

The military and the RSF traded blame for triggering the clashes, which centered in Khartoum but also took place in other areas across the country including the Northern province and the strategic coastal city of Port Sudan on the Red Sea, a military official said.

Current tensions between the military and the paramilitary stem from a disagreement over how the RSF, headed by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, should be integrated into the military and what authority should oversee the process. The merger is a key condition of Sudan's unsigned transition agreement with political groups.

The fighting began at a military base south of Khartoum, with both sides trading accusations of initiating an attack. Clashes then spread in many areas across the capital, including around the military's headquarters, the airport and the Republican Palace, the seat of the country's presidency.

The RSF alleged in a statement that its forces controlled many strategic places in Khartoum and the northern city of Merowe some 350 kilometers (215 miles) northwest of Khartoum. The military dismissed the claims as "lies."

In a series of statements, the military also declared the RSF as a rebel force and unleashed the powerful air force against RSF positions in and around Khartoum.

Volker Perthes, the U.N. envoy for Sudan, urged both parties for "an immediate cessation of fighting to ensure the safety of the Sudanese people and to spare the country from further violence."

Perthes and Saudi Ambassador in Sudan, Ali Bin Hassan Jaffar, were leading communications with Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the country's top military official, and Dagalo to embark on a dialogue to settle their dispute, said a U.N. official who asked for anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

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Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates called on those fighting in Sudan to exercise restraint and work toward a political solution in the country.

The U.S. Ambassador to Sudan, John Godfrey, wrote online that he was "currently sheltering in place with the Embassy team, as Sudanese throughout Khartoum and elsewhere are doing." He urged both sides to cease fire.

"Escalation of tensions within the military component to direct fighting is extremely dangerous," Godfrey wrote. "I urgently call on senior military leaders to stop the fighting."

Magdy reported from Cairo.

Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell in Dubai, United Arab Emirates contributed to this report.

## Ukraine awaits US missile system after latest Russian strike

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The death toll from Russian missile strikes on eastern Ukraine's city of Sloviansk rose to 11 Saturday as rescue crews tried to reach people trapped in the rubble of an apartment building, Ukrainian authorities said.

Ukraine's air force said the country would soon have weapons with which to try to prevent attacks like the one on Friday. The delivery of the Patriot air defense system promised by the U.S. was expected in Ukraine sometime after Easter, Ukrainian air force spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat said.

The primarily Orthodox Christian country is preparing to observe Easter on Sunday. Speaking Saturday on Ukrainian state TV, Ihnat declined to give a precise timeline for the arrival of the defensive missile system but said the public would know "as soon as the first Russian aircraft is shot down."

A group of 65 Ukrainian soldiers completed their training last month at Fort Sill, a U.S. Army post in Oklahoma, and returned to Europe to learn more about using the defensive missile system to track and shoot down enemy aircraft.

Officials said at the time that the Ukrainians would then go back to their country with a Patriot missile battery, which typically includes six mobile launchers, a mobile radar, a power generator and an engagement control center.

Germany and the Netherlands also have pledged to provide a Patriot system each to Ukraine. In addition, a SAMP/T anti-missile system pledged by France and Italy "should enter Ukraine in the near future," Ihnat said this week.

The Ukrainian military is looking to beef up its ability to intercept missiles as it prepares for an expected spring counter-offensive to retake Russian-occupied areas of the country. Although more than a year of fighting has depleted weapons supplies on both sides, Russian forces have intensified their 8 1/2-month campaign to seize the city of Bakhmut, the focus of the war's longest battle so far.

Bakhmut and Sloviansk are located about 45 kilometers (28 miles) apart in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province.

Rescue teams in Sloviansk recovered the bodies of two people from under the rubble of a house hit in Friday's missile strikes, according to the State Emergency Service. They also searched Saturday for five people who remained in the wreckage of the apartment building, as well as the residents of three units who were reported missing, Vadym Liakh, the head of the local government, said.

Separately, a 48-year-old woman and her 28-year-old daughter died Saturday after Russian forces shelled a neighborhood of the city of Kherson, the regional administration said on Telegram. The southern port city was occupied by Russian forces in the early months of the war, but Ukrainian forces regained control of it in November, one of the most notable battlefield defeats for Moscow.

A new law signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday that allows military offices to send draft notices electronically instead of delivering them in person is part of Russia's preparation for a protracted war in Ukraine, the U.K. Defense Ministry said in a Saturday morning assessment.

According to British intelligence, a "unified registry of individuals eligible for military service" will be

digitally linked to other government services, allowing Russian authorities to “punish draft-dodgers by automatically limiting employment rights and restricting foreign travel.”

Since the law does not come into force until later in the year, the U.K. Defense Ministry said the e-notices do not automatically point to a “major new wave of enforced mobilization” but rather form part of a “longer-term approach to provide personnel as Russia anticipates a lengthy conflict in Ukraine.”

Meanwhile, 52,000 young Russian men already have received draft orders as part of the country’s regular spring call-up, and 21,000 of them qualified for military service, Col. Andrey Biryukov, who is in charge of mobilization, said Saturday.

Biryukov addressed concerns that the new electronic conscription law presaged a broader mobilization of reservists, like one Putin ordered in September.

“I’d like to stress that all army deferrals for citizens will still be valid. And e-draft orders will not be mailed in bulk,” Biryukov said.

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

This version corrects the name of the U.S. Army post in Oklahoma to Fort Sill, not Fort Still.

## **Bostonians remember deadly marathon bombing 10 years later**

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — With a bagpiper playing “The Bells of Dunblane” and a few runners looking on, families of those killed in the Boston Marathon bombing marked the 10th anniversary of the tragedy early Saturday by slowly walking together to the memorial sites near the finish line and laying wreaths.

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, who was making her first run for City Council when the bombing happened, joined the somber procession along with Gov. Maura Healey. At each memorial site — marked with three stone pillars for the three victims — they stood with the families in silence. A brief ceremony will be held later in the day at the finish line of marathon, where bells will ring followed by a moment of silence.

The 127th running of the Boston Marathon takes place Monday.

“The day never leaves me,” said Jennifer Black, 71, a realtor from Loveland, Ohio, who was watching the procession and recounted how her race in 2013 was cut short due to the bombing and talked about those who died in the attack. She is back in Boston to run this year.

“So much loss, so much pain all because of hate,” she continued, tears streaming down her face. “We have to stand up for people. We have to look out for each other, and we have to pray for these families every day.”

Standing next to Black, Karen Russell, of Boston, said she felt it was important to witness the procession especially on the 10th anniversary.

“The families are still suffering even though we’ve gone on,” Russel said. “There are a lot of people that got hurt that day and that pain will never go away. ... I feel it’s important to be here to let them know we still care.”

Three people were killed and more than 260 were injured when two pressure-cooker bombs went off at the marathon finish line. Among the dead were Lu Lingzi, a 23-year-old Boston University graduate student from China; Krystle Campbell, a 29-year-old restaurant manager from Medford, Massachusetts; and 8-year-old Martin Richard, who had gone to watch the marathon with his family.

During a tense, four-day manhunt that paralyzed the city, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police Officer Sean Collier was shot dead in his car. Boston Police Officer Dennis Simmonds also died a year after he was wounded in a confrontation with the bombers.

Police captured a bloodied and wounded Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the Boston suburb of Watertown, where he was hiding in a boat parked in a backyard, hours after his brother died. Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, had been in a gunfight with police and was run over by his brother as he fled.

“I think we’re all still living with those tragic days 10 years ago,” Bill Evans, the former Boston Police

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Commissioner, said recently.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev was sentenced to death and much of the attention, in recent years, has been around his bid to avoid being executed.

A federal appeals court is considering Tsarnaev's latest bid to avoid execution. A three-judge panel of the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Boston heard arguments in January in the 29-year-old's case, but has yet to issue a ruling.

The appeals court initially threw out Tsarnaev's death sentence in 2020, saying the trial judge did not adequately screen jurors for potential biases. But the U.S. Supreme Court revived it last year.

The 1st Circuit is now weighing whether other issues that weren't considered by the Supreme Court require the death sentence to be tossed a second time. Among other things, Tsarnaev says the trial judge wrongly denied his challenge of two jurors who defense attorneys say lied during jury selection questioning.

The bombing not only unified Boston — "Boston Strong" became the city's rallying cry — but inspired many in the running community and prompted scores of those impacted by the terror attack to run the marathon. At the memorial sites Saturday several flower pots with the words "Boston Strong" held what have become known as Marathon daffodils.

"It really galvanized and showed our sport's and our city's resiliency, our desire together to continue even better and to enhance the Boston Marathon," Boston Athletic Association President and CEO Jack Fleming said. "The bombing in 2013 resulted in a new appreciation or a different appreciation for what Boston, what the Boston Marathon, has always stood for, which is that expression of freedom that you receive and get while running."

On Saturday, the focus will mostly be on remembering victims and survivors of the bombing but also, as Wu said, "really making sure this was a moment to focus on where the city and our communities, our families are headed in the future."

That sentiment will be reflected in what has become known as "One Boston Day," where acts of kindness and service take place to honor victims, survivors and first responders. This year, nearly two dozen community service projects are happening including a shoe drive and several food drives, blood drives and neighborhood cleanups.

"This time of year evokes a strong emotion for so many of us across the City and the people touched by the tragedy ten years ago. But the most prevailing one is that Boston is indeed strong, and that our communities show up for each other in times of need," Jacob Robinson, the executive director of West Roxbury Main Streets, one of the groups hosting the shoe drive, said in a statement.

AP Sports Writer Jimmy Golen contributed to this report.

## US dollar scarcity threatens Bolivia's 'economic miracle'

By CARLOS VALDEZ Associated Press

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — Sofia Andrade, a lawyer, chose over the past month to withdraw all her dollar savings from the bank as the US currency became scarce on the streets of Bolivia.

"I prefer to have them at home," she said. "I fear they won't let me withdraw them later."

Like her, many Bolivians are withdrawing their dollar deposits or rushing to buy the US currency amid increased concern about Bolivia's economic fragility, a marked change for a country that for more than a decade experienced what many called an "economic miracle" amid strong growth, record exports, low inflation, a fixed exchange rate and subsidized gasoline.

The scarcity of the greenback, which opposition politicians attribute to the Central Bank running out of hard currency reserves and the government blames on speculation, means that for the first time since 2011, a parallel market for the U.S. dollar has emerged that charges slightly more than the official price.

When the shortage began earlier this year, hundreds spent the night outside the Central Bank to buy dollars at the official exchange rate. A new system has now been established to buy the currency online. The physical lines have disappeared, but the problem remains and is reminding Bolivians of past economic

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woes.

Alicia Meneses, 40, said she had converted her savings into dollars earlier this year, "because I was afraid of getting stuck with the bolivianos like what happened to my dad in the '80s."

She needed some local currency this week and so she changed a bit of her savings back to bolivianos on the black market in downtown La Paz, where she received 7 bolivianos per dollar, slightly more than the official rate of 6.96.

"I've come to change a few dollars because of an emergency," Meneses said.

Leftist President Luis Arce, who was economy minister from 2006 to 2017 during Bolivia's period of bonanza, has tried to calm the waters, insisting there will be no change to the country's managed exchange rate system in which the Central Bank has intervened to keep the local currency's value stable to the U.S. dollar over the past 12 years.

"There will be no devaluation," Arce said this week in what was his first interview with a private television station since taking office in late 2020. "There is no need for it when we have a solid economy that is growing."

The president dismissed speculation he would do away with expensive fuel subsidies that mean Bolivians pay around half of international prices for gasoline — at the cost of draining the country's international reserves. And Arce painted an optimistic picture: "We're growing and have the lowest inflation in the region."

Bolivia's annual inflation of 2.5% in March marks a decline from late last year when it crossed the 3% mark and is far lower than its neighbors. The government insists Bolivia will grow 4.8% this year, a sharp contrast to the International Monetary Fund's prediction of 1.8%.

"I'll disappoint international projections again," Arce quipped.

Bolivia, an exporter of natural gas for the region, enjoyed a huge economic bonanza over the last decade on the back of high commodity prices, a trend that followed the arrival in power in 2006 of Evo Morales, the country's first Indigenous president. The landlocked South American country also exports minerals and agricultural products, including soybeans, and has recently seen a surge in gold sales abroad.

Morales used the huge flow of money to reduce poverty, expand the middle class, and build roads. Buildings multiplied in cities, and cars ceased to be a luxury. But that came accompanied with lots of waste and corruption, according to his detractors.

The country's revenues tripled with the nationalization of hydrocarbon resources in 2006, but the sector stagnated due to a lack of investment, and the country went from being an exporter to an importer of hydrocarbons in 2022, according to the National Statistics Institute.

"They have squandered the money. Now there's a lack of liquidity," said Rodrigo Paz, a senator with the center-right Comunidad Ciudadana party. "People are buying dollars due to uncertainty, but those dollars don't return to the market, they stay under the mattress."

The commodity price boom ended in 2014, and Bolivia managed to stretch its savings for several years but now, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country is almost out of reserves.

The government is optimistic it will be able to make up some of the shortfall with the growth in gold mining, but tax revenue from that sector is scant. Of the \$3 billion in gold exports last year, public coffers received only \$75 million in taxes, according to official data.

"We're scraping the barrel," said analyst Gonzalo Chávez, who is an economics professor at Catholic University of Bolivia.

Bolivia can no longer rely on commodities to carry the economy, La Paz-based economic consultant Jaime Dunn said.

"It's an exhausted economic model that based its success on capturing the surplus generated by natural resources, not on generating wealth. It worked when raw materials fetched high prices," Dunn said. "The only way to keep it alive is by burning more currency and increasing debt, which already stands at around 70% of GDP."

Dunn says the government should do more to promote the agricultural sector that has been silently growing its exports. But he says the government is not eager to promote an industry that is concentrated in the eastern region of Santa Cruz, led by an administration that is in opposition to the central government.

Economy Minister Marcelo Montengro has pushed back against criticism, saying the current economic model of subsidies and a fixed exchange rate have contributed to “a robust productive apparatus with price stability and low inflation.”

Social protests, though, are on the rise. Public school teachers, for example, have been taking to the streets for six weeks, demanding more funding. The government has said it can’t meet the demands at a time when it’s facing lots of friendly fire amid public criticisms of Arce’s management by his political mentor, former President Morales, who is also the head of the ruling Movement for Socialism.

“We were coming out of the pandemic that plunged us into crisis, and I feel like we’re sinking again just as the economy was recovering,” said Sofia Godínez, a 54-year-old homemaker.

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Associated Press journalist Daniel Politi contributed from Buenos Aires, Argentina.

## Abortion bans raise fears inside GOP about backlash in 2024

By STEVE PEOPLES and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — As a new election season begins, the Republican Party is struggling to navigate the politics of abortion.

Allies for leading presidential candidates concede that their hardline anti-abortion policies may be popular with the conservatives who decide primary elections, but they could ultimately alienate the broader set of voters they need to win the presidency.

The conflict is unfolding across America this week, but nowhere more than Florida, where Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law one of the nation’s toughest abortion bans late Thursday. If the courts ultimately allow the new measure to take effect, it will soon be illegal for Florida women to obtain an abortion after six weeks of pregnancy, which is before most realize they’re pregnant.

Even before he signed the law, DeSantis’ team was eager to highlight his willingness to fight for, and enact, aggressive abortion restrictions. The Florida governor’s position stands in sharp contrast, they say, with some Republican White House hopefuls — most notably former President Donald Trump — who are downplaying their support for anti-abortion policies for fear they may ultimately alienate women or other swing voters in the 2024 general election.

“Unlike Trump, Gov. DeSantis doesn’t back down from defending the lives of innocent unborn babies,” said Erin Perrine, a spokesperson for DeSantis’ super PAC, when asked about Florida’s six-week ban.

DeSantis’ latest policy victory in the nation’s third most populous state offers a new window into the Republican Party’s sustained political challenges on the explosive social issue. In recent days alone, Republican leaders across Iowa, New Hampshire and Washington have struggled to answer nagging questions about their opposition to the controversial medical procedure as GOP-controlled state legislatures rush to enact a wave of new abortion restrictions.

Recent electoral results suggest that voters aren’t pleased.

Republicans have suffered painful losses in recent weeks and months across Michigan, New Hampshire, Nevada and even deep-red Kansas in elections that focused, at least in part, on abortion. Last week in Wisconsin, an anti-abortion candidate for the state Supreme Court was trounced by 11 points in a state President Joe Biden carried by less than 1 point.

“Any conversation about banning abortion or limiting it nationwide is an electoral disaster for the Republicans,” said New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, a Republican who describes himself as “pro-choice” but also signed a law banning abortions in the state after 24 weeks.

“The Republican Party has an inability to move off this issue in a way that doesn’t scare the heck out of the average voter, the independent voter, the younger generation of voters,” Sununu continued. “These guys keep pushing themselves deeper and deeper into an ultra-right base that really does not define the bulk of the Republican Party.”

Privately, at least, strategists involved with Republican presidential campaigns concede that the GOP

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is on the wrong side of the debate as it currently stands. While popular with Republican primary voters, public polling consistently shows that the broader collection of voters who decide general elections believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

There are no easy answers as leading Republicans like DeSantis and even Trump, who appointed the Supreme Court justices responsible for overturning *Roe v. Wade* last June, face tremendous political pressure from the left and the right.

Anti-abortion activists have been particularly vocal in warning Republican presidential candidates that the party's base will not tolerate any weakness on abortion given that GOP leaders have been vowing for decades to ban abortion rights if given the chance.

Before this week, Kristan Hawkins, the president of the anti-abortion group, Students for Life of America, was unwilling to describe DeSantis as a leader in the abortion fight.

"This is his opportunity to show himself as a leader on this issue. That's what's exciting about this moment," Hawkins said of DeSantis' six-week ban. "He has done a lot, but we really needed to see action at the legislative level. I think this 'heartbeat law' fully cements his pro-life street cred."

Katie Daniel, of the anti-abortion Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, described Florida's new law as "a huge step forward." But she said it was only the beginning of what anti-abortion activists expect from leading 2024 candidates, including their ultimate support for a national abortion ban.

"The issue of abortion is not going away," Daniel said. "It's not about saying you passed the law, check the box, you're done."

Such pressure ensures that the issue will remain central to the 2024 campaign as Republican presidential prospects begin to fan out across America to court primary voters. At the very same time, an escalating court battle over access to an FDA-approved abortion pill is forcing GOP leaders to answer more questions.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, long a vocal abortion opponent, condemned the abortion pill during an interview this week with Newsmax while vowing to "champion the right to life."

"We're going to continue to champion the interests of women born and unborn and pushing back against the abortion pill," Pence declared.

Former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley told Iowa voters this week that abortion is "a personal issue" that should be left to the states, although she left open the possibility of a federal ban without getting into specifics.

And in New Hampshire, just a day after launching a presidential exploratory committee, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott outlined his support for a federal law that would ban abortions nationwide after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

"We should certainly always side with a culture that preserves and appreciates and respects life," Scott told reporters. "How do we do that? I certainly think that the 20-week threshold is not a question in my mind at all."

He tried repeatedly to refocus the conversation on Democrats "radical position" on the issue because they generally oppose any abortion restrictions whatsoever.

Sununu, the New Hampshire governor, said he counts Scott as a friend, but was surprised that he would openly discuss his support for a federal abortion ban in New Hampshire, a state long known for supporting abortion rights.

"Of all places to talk about a federal ban of abortion, New Hampshire ain't it," Sununu said in an interview. "He's a good candidate and does a great job in the Senate. But know your audience here, man."

Republican officials in Washington are still looking for answers as well.

Republican National Committee Chair Ronna McDaniel declined to comment for this article. Her team pointed to a 7-month-old memo from her office suggesting that Republicans should highlight Democratic officials' opposition to abortion restrictions of any kind, which the memo described as "an extreme stance."

After the GOP's midterm disappointment last fall, however, Republicans are increasingly concerned that such messaging isn't enough to help blunt the Democrats' advantage — especially as Republicans in key states continue to enact strict abortion restrictions.

Republican strategist Alice Stewart said Republicans must find a way to keep the focus on the failings of



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the Biden administration, the economy, crime and education in the 2024 campaign.

"Abortion poses a challenge for Republicans. There's no denying it," said Stewart, who initially cheered the Supreme Court's Roe reversal. "Politically, it has become problematic."

Campaigning in Iowa this week, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, tried to sidestep questions about his support for aggressive abortion restrictions. Before leaving office earlier in the year, he signed into law a measure banning abortion after six weeks of pregnancy; the law had an exception for the life of the mother, but not for rape or incest.

Hutchinson said that voters are more concerned with national defense, curbing domestic federal spending and accelerating U.S. energy production than abortion.

"I don't see that as an issue that's going to hurt us long-term," Hutchinson said, referring to strict abortion bans. He stopped short of saying whether he would sign a federal six- or 15-week ban were it to come to his desk as president. "I've always signed pro-life bills that have come to me, but obviously I would want to look at the bill."

And even in DeSantis' Florida, there are signs that the ambitious Republican governor is approaching the issue with some level of caution.

Almost exactly a year ago, a smiling DeSantis signed a new 15-week abortion ban into law during a raucous public ceremony flanked by Republican lawmakers with dozens of cheering supporters in the audience.

This week, he signed the 6-week ban into law in private. His office issued a press release shortly before midnight to mark the achievement.

And he ignored the landmark achievement altogether on Friday when delivering a speech to the religious conservative Liberty University. He did the same Friday night in New Hampshire as he cast himself and Florida as leading the nation on a slew of "major issues," but did not mention abortion or the law he had signed the night before.

Christian Ziegler, chairman of the Florida GOP, dismissed any political concerns by pointing to DeSantis' overwhelming reelection last fall.

"I think it's very difficult for anyone to say the governor executing a conservative agenda is going to hurt him," Ziegler said.

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Associated Press writers Thomas Beaumont in Des Moines, Iowa and Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire, contributed to this report.

## Speaker McCarthy: 100 days in power and a tough road ahead

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Rep. Kevin McCarthy emerged from a messy 15-ballot election and ascended to House speaker, he was emboldened rather than chastened by the fight, declaring that his father taught him early on in life: "It's not how you start; it's how you finish."

But as the embattled Republican leader from California rounds the first 100 days at the helm of a slim House Republican majority, it is proving hard to shake off the spectacle of the unsteady launch that has become a defining backbeat to McCarthy's speakership.

So far, McCarthy has logged surprise successes in the new Congress: The Republican House has passed dozens of bills, many of them bipartisan, including politically potent efforts targeting crime and the COVID-19 pandemic that left President Joe Biden almost no choice but to sign the bills into law.

McCarthy has opened the Capitol more fully to visitors, relishing the onlookers who stop to snap selfies during his impromptu hallway news conferences. He hosted his first foreign leader, President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan, with a diplomatic flourish, leading a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers standing up to China.

On Monday, McCarthy will deliver a speech at the New York Stock Exchange, another sign of his rising influence.

And yet.

It's 100 days into the new Congress, and McCarthy's speakership is what one senior congressional

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Democratic aide compared to the spotlight on the theater stage, with the audience waiting for the play to begin and then suddenly, the realization there is no script.

McCarthy is performing the role as speaker — second in line to the presidency — but the Republican leader allied with Donald Trump remains stubbornly limited in action because of his uneasy grip on the gavel. Any single lawmaker is able to call for a vote to oust the speaker from office.

As such, McCarthy has been unable to steer House Republicans to start delivering on broader pursuits — the GOP promises for border security or budget cuts to prevent a debt ceiling crisis, for starters. How he handles them will be the defining challenge that makes or breaks his next 100 days.

"This is where McCarthy finds himself," said Jeffery A. Jenkins, a professor of public policy at the University of Southern California who has written about House speakers.

"The power of any single speakership is endogenous," he said. "This Congress, McCarthy will always have little wiggle room. He will have to walk a tightrope."

In many ways, it was inevitable that whoever followed the last House Speaker, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., would operate differently because of the oversize role she played as one of the most powerful congressional leaders in modern times. She often quips it has become a shrinking speakership under the Republican.

But McCarthy is remaking the speaker's office in his image, including reclaiming a private room just steps from the House floor for meetings. The silver-haired father shuns many of the formal trappings of Congress — he may never return to the televised briefing room at the Capitol for formal news conferences — as he begins to tap into the enormous powers at his disposal.

He often suggests he's being underestimated. House Republicans stunned Washington with some unexpected early victories when they took control in January for the first time in four years.

Republicans all but forced Biden into signing early bills into law, including one to roll back the District of Columbia's criminal code. Democrats were furious when the White House abandoned efforts to veto the measure and played into the GOP's tough-on-crime rhetoric.

On other measures, McCarthy found Democrats willing to cross party lines — to create a select committee focused on U.S. competition with China, to require the administration to declassify as much intelligence as possible about the origins of COVID-19 and to require an abrupt end to the national pandemic emergency.

Hard-right critics who withheld their support of McCarthy during the excruciating 15 ballots it took to become speaker until he agreed to their demands seem relatively satisfied at the outcome.

"He's performed better than I thought he would," said Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., the past chairman of the Freedom Caucus, in an interview. "I can't complain."

To establishment conservative observers, the House under McCarthy is a welcome contrast to the past two years of Democratic party rule in Washington.

"Now there's actually a check and balance," said Eric Cantor, a former GOP leader. "He is delivering that every day and very effectively, obviously, at holding his troops together."

But the struggle to become speaker is never far behind, thanks to a Trump-aligned power center in Congress that propped McCarthy up and could just as easily tear him back down.

Trump's support ensured McCarthy won his race to become speaker, both men have said, but the former president's backing can easily be lost.

As McCarthy balances his own Reagan-styled optimism against the more extremist Trump-aligned populists in his conference, he has kept close to Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a top Trump ally. She has been leading efforts to ease detention conditions for defendants facing some of the most severe charges stemming from the Capitol insurrection.

In another gesture toward his right flank, McCarthy released thousands of hours of the riot video footage about the riot to Fox News' Tucker Carlson, who has fanned false conspiracy theories of the attack. McCarthy was among those members of Congress who voted on Jan. 6, 2021, against certifying Biden's 2020 election victory over Trump.

The House Democrats' campaign arm issued a memo last week saying the new House GOP majority is "too extreme to lead."

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Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., and a longtime leader of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, said in an interview that the drawn-out election to make McCarthy speaker "was the most embarrassing week of all in the history of Congress — and I don't think things have gotten much better."

Even the House investigations into Biden and his family that were supposed to be a capstone of the new Republican majority have spun into a free-for-all with several committees examining all aspects of the federal government.

"Tough job," said GOP Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, chairman of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee, told The Associated Press about the speaker. "But he's doing great."

Rep. Andrew Clyde, R-Ga., a Freedom Caucus member who was among the holdouts during the weeklong speaker's election, said it all may make McCarthy "the best speaker" in his lifetime.

"We are proud of him," said Clyde, whose crime bill was the first Biden signed into law.

"I mean, he's proven he can fight. He's proven that he'll stick it out. Well, that should terrify the White House and terrify the Senate. The House is in control."

## US, Vietnam pledge to boost ties as Blinken visits Hanoi

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

HANOI (AP) — Fifty years after the last U.S. combat troops left South Vietnam, Secretary of State Antony Blinken looked Saturday to strengthen America's ties with its old foes in Hanoi as it seeks to counter China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

Blinken and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh pledged to boost relations to new levels as they met just two weeks after the 50th anniversary of the U.S. troop withdrawal that marked the end of America's direct military involvement in Vietnam.

And it came as Blinken broke ground on a sprawling new \$1.2 billion U.S. embassy compound in the Vietnamese capital, a project the Biden administration hopes will demonstrate its commitment to further improving ties less than 30 years after diplomatic relations were restored in 1995.

Despite concerns over Vietnam's human rights record, Washington sees Hanoi as a key component of its strategy for the region and has sought to leverage Vietnam's traditional rivalry with its much larger neighbor China to expand U.S. influence in the region.

"We think this is an auspicious time to elevate our existing partnership," Blinken told reporters after meetings with Chinh, Vietnam's foreign minister and Communist Party chief.

"This has been a very comprehensive and effective relationship and going forward we will continue to deepen relations," Chinh said. "We highly appreciate the role and responsibility of the U.S. towards the Asia Pacific, or, in a larger scheme, the Indo-Pacific."

He added that Vietnam's communist government is keen to "further elevate our bilateral ties to a new height."

Along with a number of China's smaller neighbors, Vietnam has maritime and territorial disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea. The U.S. has responded by offering diplomatic support and bolstering military cooperation with the Philippines and the self-ruled island of Taiwan, which China claims as a renegade province.

Blinken noted that the U.S. is currently finalizing the transfer to Vietnam of a third Coast Guard cutter, which will complement existing maritime security cooperation that has seen Washington give Hanoi 24 patrol boats since 2016 along with other equipment and training.

"All of these elements bolster Vietnamese capacity to contribute to maritime peace and stability in the South China Sea," he said.

Just last month, China threatened "serious consequences" after the U.S. Navy sailed a destroyer around the disputed Paracel Islands in the South China Sea for the second day in a row, in a move Beijing claimed was a violation of its sovereignty and security. The Paracels are occupied by China but also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam.

U.S. officials are reluctant to describe any visit to Asia in terms of China, preferring instead to discuss

the importance of improving bilateral ties. But they frequently speak to broader concerns in the region that are clearly directed at China.

"We focused on how our countries can advance a free and open Indo-Pacific; one that is at peace and grounded in respect the rules-based international order," Blinken said.

And five decades after the Nixon administration pulled U.S. combat forces out of Vietnam on March 29, 1973, Blinken said the U.S. is seeking a more strategic orientation with the country.

Blinken's visit comes as the administration grapples with its own record of troop withdrawals and is facing congressional criticism and demands to explain the chaotic U.S. departure from Afghanistan two years ago.

Some have likened that to the Vietnam experience, especially as it relates to the fate of Afghans who supported the 20-year military mission but were left behind when the Biden administration pulled out of Afghanistan in 2021.

## **Explosive thrown at Japan PM at campaign event; no one hurt**

By MARI YAMAGUCHI and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

WAKAYAMA, Japan (AP) — Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was evacuated unharmed Saturday after someone threw an explosive device in his direction while he was campaigning at a fishing port in western Japan, officials said. Police wrestled a suspect to the ground as screaming bystanders scrambled to get away and smoke filled the air.

Although no one was hurt, and Kishida continued campaigning Saturday, the chaotic scene was reminiscent of the assassination nine months ago of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which also came on a campaign tour and continues to reverberate in Japanese politics. Kishida was visiting Saikazaki port in Wakayama prefecture to support his ruling party's candidate in a local election, and the explosion occurred just before he was to begin his speech.

A young man believed to be a suspect was arrested Saturday at the scene after he allegedly threw "the suspicious object," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters. Matsuno refused to comment on the suspect's motive and background, saying police are still investigating.

TV footage shows Kishida standing with his back to the crowd. His security detail suddenly points to the ground near him, and the prime minister whips around, looking alarmed. The camera quickly turns to the crowd just as several people, including uniformed and plainclothes police officers, converge on a young man wearing a white surgical mask and holding what appears to be another device, a long silver tube.

As they collapse on top of the man, working to remove the tube from his hands, a large explosion is heard near where Kishida had been standing. The crowd scatters in panic as police roughly drag the man away.

It wasn't immediately clear what the explosive device was or how many the suspect had, but some reports said it was a smoke or pipe bomb, possibly with a delayed fuse.

No injuries were reported in the incident, which came on the eve of a major international forum in Japan. Kishida was not hurt and continued his campaign speeches later Saturday, Matsuno said.

Kishida did not mention the explosion and returned to the Tokyo region in the evening after campaigning in Chiba for another candidate.

"Elections are the core of democracy, and we should never tolerate threats or obstruction by violence," Matsuno said.

He said he instructed national police to ensure their utmost effort for the protection of dignitaries who are visiting Japan in the period leading up to the Group of Seven summit in May.

Abe's assassination, which shocked a nation that prides itself on public safety and extremely tight gun controls, came as he delivered a campaign speech in the western city of Nara. Amid a national outcry, police have tightened their protective measures following a subsequent investigation that found holes in Abe's security.

Security has been also ramped up in Japan as senior diplomats from some of the world's most powerful democracies arrive for Sunday's G-7 foreign minister meetings. Kishida will host a May 19-21 G-7 leaders' summit in his hometown of Hiroshima.

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One witness Saturday told NHK television that she was standing in the crowd when she saw something come flying from behind. After a sudden loud noise, she fled with her children. Another witness said people were screaming and that he saw someone being apprehended right before the explosion occurred.

Saturday's attack comes ahead of nationwide local elections, including several by-elections for vacated parliamentary seats, with voting scheduled for April 23.

In Abe's assassination, the former prime minister was shot with a homemade gun during a campaign speech. The suspect, Tetsuya Yamagami, has been charged with murder and several other crimes, including violating the gun control law.

He told investigators that he killed Abe, one of Japan's most influential and divisive politicians, because of the former prime minister's apparent links to a religious group that he hated. In statements and in social media postings attributed to him, Yamagami said he developed a grudge because his mother had made massive donations to the Unification Church that bankrupted his family and ruined his life.

Abe's assassination led to the resignation of top local and national police chiefs and a tightening of security guidelines for political leaders and other prominent people.

Kishida's government was hoping to focus world attention this weekend on the hot spring resort town of Karuizawa, where senior diplomats will gather Sunday for the so-called Group of Seven foreign ministers' meeting.

The foreign ministers from Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Italy and the European Union are expected to focus on worries over Russia's war in Ukraine, China's increasingly belligerent rise and North Korea's provocative string of weapons' tests.

Klug reported from Karuizawa, Japan.

## Christian faithful flock to 'Holy Fire' under restrictions

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Christian worshippers thronged the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem on Saturday to celebrate the ceremony of the "Holy Fire," an ancient, mysterious ritual that has sparked tensions this year with the Israeli police.

In the annual ceremony that has persisted for over a millennium, a flame — kindled in some miraculous way in the heart of Jesus' tomb — is used to light the candles of fervent believers in Greek Orthodox communities near and far. Little by little, the darkened church is irradiated by tiny patches of light, which eventually illuminate the whole building as the resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed. Chartered planes then ferry the flickering lanterns to Russia, Greece and beyond with great fanfare.

Many trying to get to the church — built on the site where Christian tradition holds that Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected — were thrilled to mark the pre-Easter rite in the city where it all started. But for the second consecutive year, Israel's limits on event capacity dimmed some of the exuberance.

"It is sad for me that I cannot get to the church, where my heart, my faith, wants me to be," said 44-year-old Jelena Novakovic from Montenegro.

Israel has capped the ritual — normally an experience of being squeezed among multilingual, suffocating crowds — to just 1,800 people. The Israeli police say they must be strict because they're responsible for maintaining public safety. In 1834, a stampede at the event claimed hundreds of lives. Two years ago, a crush at a packed Jewish holy site in the country's north killed 45 people. Authorities say they're determined to prevent a repeat of the tragedy.

But Jerusalem's Christian minority — mired in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and caught between Jews and Muslims — fear Israel is using the extra security measures to alter their status in the Old City, providing access to Jews while limiting the number of Christian worshippers.

Israeli authorities and church officials have publicly quarreled over the crowd constraints for the past week. The Greek Orthodox patriarchate has lambasted the restrictions as a hindrance of religious freedom and called on all worshippers to flood the church despite Israeli warnings.

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As early as 8 a.m., Israeli police were already turning back most worshippers from the gates of the Old City — including foreign tourists who flew from Europe and Palestinian Christians who traveled from across the West Bank — directing them to an overflow area with a livestream.

Angry pilgrims and clergy jostled to get through while police struggled to hold them back, allowing only a trickle of ticketed visitors and local residents near the church. Metal barricades sealed off alleys leading to the Christian Quarter. Over 2,000 police officers swarmed the stone ramparts.

A few Palestinian teenagers from the neighborhood saw a chance to make a buck, promising tourists they'd get them into the church for some 200 shekels (\$54) but leading them only to a nearby courtyard before asking for more money.

Ana Dumitreț, a Romanian pilgrim surrounded by police outside the Old City, said she came to pay tribute to her late mother, whose experience witnessing the holy fire in 1987 long inspired her.

"I wanted to tell my family, my children, that I was here as my mom was," she said, straining to assess whether she had a chance.

The dispute comes as Christians in the Holy Land — including the head of the Roman Catholic church in the region as well as local Palestinians and Armenians — say that Israel's most right-wing government in history has empowered Jewish extremists who have escalated their vandalism of religious property and harassment of clergy. Israel says it's committed to ensuring freedom of worship for Jews, Christians and Muslims and portrays itself as an island of tolerance in the Middle East.

The friction over Saturday's Orthodox Easter ritual has been fueled in part by a rare convergence of holidays in Jerusalem's bustling Old City. A few hundred meters away from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Muslims fasting for the 24th day of the holy month of Ramadan were gathering for midday prayers at the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam. Earlier this week, tens of thousands of Jews flocked to the Western Wall for a mass prayer during the Passover holiday.

Tensions surged last week, when an Israeli police raid on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound, Jerusalem's most sensitive site, set off unrest in the contested capital and ignited Muslim outrage around the world. The mosque stands on a hilltop that is the holiest site for Jews, who revere it as the Temple Mount.

Israel captured the Old City, along with the rest of the city's eastern half, in the 1967 Mideast war and later annexed it in a move not internationally recognized. Palestinians claim east Jerusalem as the capital of their hoped-for state.

In the limestone passageways on Saturday, Christians pushed back by police were trying to cope with their disappointment. Cristina Maria, a 35-year-old who traveled from Romania to see the light kindled from the holy fire, said there was some consolation in the thought that the flame was symbolic, anyway.

"It's the light of Christ," she said, standing between an ice cream parlor and a dumpster in the Old City. "We can see it from here, there, anywhere."

## G7 energy, environment leaders haggle over climate strategy

By ELAINE KURTENBACH and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SAPPORO, Japan (AP) — Energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations met Saturday in northern Japan, seeking to reconcile the world's heavy reliance on fossil fuels with the urgency of ending carbon emissions to stave off the worst consequences of climate change.

The meetings in the northern Japanese city of Sapporo are aimed at forging a consensus on the best way forward, ahead of the G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May.

"We are facing the challenge of promoting reforms to resolve climate change ... and achieving energy security at the same time," economy minister Yasutoshi Nishimura told the ministers as the meetings began.

Speaking on the sidelines of the meetings, U.S. Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said the G-7 was "powerfully positioned to be able to lead" in the effort to stem global warming. "We appreciate Japan's leadership and its stewardship of G-7 this year."

But differences persist over how, and how quickly, to end carbon emissions, especially at a time when the war in Ukraine has deepened concerns over energy security, complicating that effort.

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The talks in Sapporo will also focus on biodiversity loss and other global challenges. But climate change tops the agenda of the closed door meetings. At the G-7 summit last year in Germany, the countries set a common goal of achieving a fully or predominantly decarbonized electricity supply by 2035.

U.S. officials voiced support for Japan's strategy centering on so-called clean coal, hydrogen and nuclear energy to bridge the transition to renewable energy. Others are pushing for a faster transition to renewable energy.

The head of the United Nations recently called for an end to new fossil fuel exploration and for rich countries to quit coal, oil and gas by 2040. While emissions among the G-7 nations, especially in Europe, have begun falling, they are still rising globally, especially in big, increasingly affluent economies like India and China.

The G-7 nations hope to lead by example, U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said in an interview Friday with The Associated Press.

"We expect that those countries see that this can be done and the nations that have the wherewithal to make these investments to be first out give hope to others to be able to do it as the technology lowers the cost," she said.

The U.S. government's approval of fossil fuel initiatives such as the Willow project on Alaska's petroleum-rich North Slope have drawn criticism for their environmental impact and for running counter to President Joe Biden's pledges to cut carbon emissions and move to clean energy.

There's a strong business case for climate-friendly policies, Granholm said, given the estimated \$23 trillion global market in clean energy by 2030.

"People see people getting jobs in this area. People who start to drive electric vehicles who don't need to pay gasoline prices know that it's much cheaper to drive EVs. It's all becoming obvious to people," she said while touring the Suiso Frontier, the world's first and only liquid hydrogen carrier, a showcase of the latest technology for what Japan's leaders call a "hydrogen society."

While Japanese farm fields increasingly are sown with solar panels rather than crops and its gusty coastlines are studded with wind turbines, the country still expects for about 60% of its energy to come from fossil fuels in 2030, with renewables accounting for up to 38%. New fuels and nuclear power would account for the rest.

Meanwhile, Japan is scrambling to protect communities from extreme weather and other impacts from global warming. Sweltering summers, torrential downpours that trigger flooding and landslides, and violent storms have become the norm.

In Sapporo, Japan is seeking an endorsement of its so-called "GX transformation" plan, which its leaders say is designed to foster energy sufficiency and phase out carbon emissions that contribute to global warming.

Legislation yet to be enacted would entail issuing 20 trillion yen (\$150 billion) in bonds to help attract 150 trillion yen (\$1.1 trillion) in combined public-private investment in decarbonization. The law also calls for a carbon-pricing system to make businesses pay for their carbon emissions.

Environmental activists say the plan will keep the country's dwindling nuclear industry on life support while undermining the transition to renewable energy sources.

"As the world tries to overcome two crises of climate and energy, especially in Japan, we need to drastically increase renewables," said Takejiro Sueyoshi, co-representative of the Japan Climate Initiative, a non-government organization of 768 member companies and organizations.

"Discussions in Japan have gone backward as if we were in the 20th century. We must smash a wedge into the debate to push it forward rather than backwards," he said.

The JCI urged the officials meeting in Sapporo to push for more ambitious targets, noting that Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy already get more of their electricity from renewable sources than Japan's 2030 target and that despite its own faltering progress toward phasing out fossil fuels, the United States will get most of its electricity from renewable energy by 2035.

"There's no time left. The window for change is closing, but there is still hope. We need to use the sense of crisis as a turning point," Sueyoshi said.

The G-7 includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom. \_\_\_\_  
AP writer Yamaguchi contributed from Tokyo.

## Zimbabwe's aspiring female artists still 'frowned upon'

By FARAI MUTSAKA Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — A self-portrait shows Nothando Chiwanga covering her face with a yellow miner's helmet while money spills over the edge of a traditional African reed basket she holds in her lap.

The artwork, a collage called "Immortal," challenges age-old gender roles in a strongly patriarchal country like Zimbabwe by juxtaposing a helmet from an overtly male-dominated job with a delicately woven basket commonly used by women at markets.

To art curator Fadzai Muchemwa, the piece speaks directly of a woman's struggle to break free of those traditional roles.

"To survive as a woman in Zimbabwe ... one needs a hard hat," Muchemwa said as she gazed at the collage, which combines photography and paintwork in an intentionally blurred yet striking image.

Chiwanga's "Immortal" is one of 21 works by female artists that have been on show at the southern African country's national gallery since International Women's Day on March 8. The exhibition titled "We Should All Be Human" is a homage to women's ambitions and their victories, Muchemwa said.

There are paintings, photographs, textiles, sculptures and ceiling installations. They broach issues like migration, the economy and health, but also far more contentious subjects in Zimbabwe, such as a woman's reproductive rights. Some of the art seeks to provoke discussions around pregnancy and maternity leave.

"Immortal" calls for change and is an invitation for women to reinvent themselves, visual artist Chiwanga said.

"It's not often to find women doing such kind of work as mining," she said. "In Africa, women are mostly looked down upon. People just see the face or body but the work that you do can also represent your identity."

In her collage, the reed basket, the money, Chiwanga's satin skirt and her neatly manicured nails are manipulated with blurs of red, yellow, brown and black to showcase the complexities of women's lives in Zimbabwe, Chiwanga said.

She points out that women make up more than half of the country's population of 15 million but are still vastly underrepresented in higher education and formal employment.

More girls than boys complete elementary school in Zimbabwe but one in three women were married before they reached 18, according to the United Nations children's agency. UNICEF cited teenage pregnancy and early marriage as key factors preventing girls completing high school and pursuing careers.

Previously, girls could marry at age 16 in Zimbabwe while boys had to be 18. A Constitutional Court ruling led to law changes last year setting the legal age for marriage and sexual consent for both boys and girls at 18.

The 26-year-old Chiwanga is one of few young women to graduate from Zimbabwe's National School of Visual Arts and Design. She was one of 30 artists from 25 countries to have works included in the "Notes for Tomorrow" exhibition on the COVID-19 pandemic, which was shown in the United States, Canada, China and Turkey in 2021 and 2022. She also had a show last year in Nigeria.

The "We Should All Be Human" exhibit in Zimbabwe was designed to raise the profile of young female artists and to encourage them to keep making art amid persistent societal pressures to get married, have children and change their focus to a life of domestic chores.

"You see a promising student, two or three years down the line they are married and they are done with art," Muchemwa said. "In our society, married women are not expected to be artists. They are frowned upon, yet their male counterparts are celebrated."

"We are featured more as subjects and not as creators of art. It is a narrative that we need to change," she said.

Phineas Magwati, who teaches music and art at Zimbabwe's Midlands State University, goes further. A



woman's decision to pursue a career in art often causes "conflict" in her family, he said.

That is reflected in Chiwanga's life: her mother is supportive of her art, but other family members badger her about getting married and finding a "proper job," she said.

Much of her art is conceived in a rusty brown caravan in the expansive yard of her family home in the suburbs of the capital, Harare.

Sitting on a rugged old wooden bed, Chiwanga works on her latest piece, covering her face with a transparent white veil and moving a camera back and forth to catch the right angles of herself. The photographs are then set on matte paper and worked with color.

"I have faced a lot of challenges because as a woman you have to be married when you turn into your 20s," she said. "Even growing up you will be told a woman must aspire for marriage, you must not aspire to be great."

"But as an artist I have told myself that I really want to achieve, I need to be big. You mustn't force a woman to be in marriage before she can perfect herself," she said.

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## Here's why downpour in Florida just wouldn't stop

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

In some ways, it was the Florida Man of storms – not quite knowing when to say when.

Usually, thunderstorms fizzle out after they run out of rain or get cold air sucked in. But not Wednesday, when the storm that hit Fort Lauderdale had the warm and moisture-rich Gulf Stream nearby.

The end result was more than 25 inches (63.5 centimeters) of rain drenching and flooding Fort Lauderdale in six to eight hours. That ranked among the top three in major U.S. cities over a 24-hour period, behind Hilo, Hawaii's, 27 inches (68.58 centimeters) in 2000 and Port Arthur, Texas's 26.5 inches (67.31 centimeters) in 2017, according to weather historian Chris Burt.

While it could happen in other places in coastal America, Florida has the right topography, plenty of warm water nearby and other favorable conditions, said Greg Carbin, forecast branch chief at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Prediction Center.

Just two days before the downpour, Weather Prediction Center forecaster David Roth told colleagues that conditions were lining up similar to April 25, 1979, when 16 inches of rain (40.64 centimeters) fell on Fort Lauderdale, Carbin said.

What parked over Fort Lauderdale on Wednesday was a supercell — the type of strong thunderstorm that can spawn killer tornadoes and hail and plows across the Great Plains and Mid-South in a fierce, fast-moving but short path of destruction, several meteorologists said.

Normally a cell like that would "snuff itself out" in maybe 20 minutes or at least keep moving, Carbin said. But in Fort Lauderdale the supercell was in a lull between opposing weather systems, Carbin said. It lasted six to eight hours.

"You had this extreme warmth and moisture that was just feeding into the cell and because it had a bit of a spin to it, it was essentially acting like a vacuum and sucking all that moisture back up into the main core of the system," said Steve Bowen, a meteorologist and chief science officer for GallagherRe, a global reinsurance broker. "It just kept reigniting itself, essentially."

What was key, said former NOAA chief scientist Ryan Maue, was "the availability of warm ocean air from the Gulf Stream was essentially infinite."

Other factors included a strong low pressure system, with counterclockwise winds, churning away in the toasty Gulf of Mexico, Maue and Carbin said. There was a temperature difference between the slightly cooler land in Florida and the 80-degree-plus Gulf Stream waters. Add to that wind shear, which is when winds are flowing in opposite directions at high and low altitude, helping to add some spin.

Many of those conditions by themselves are not unusual, including the location of the Gulf Stream. But when they combined in a precise way, it acted like a continuous feeding loop that poured rain in amounts

that the National Weather Service in Miami called a 1-in-1,000 chance.

"We continue to see more and more of these thousand-year" weather extremes in major cities, Bowen said. "The whole definition of normal is changing."

Physics states that a warmer climate holds more moisture in the air, about 4% more for every degree Fahrenheit (7% for every degree Celsius). But warming also increases the intensity of storms amplifying that moisture level, said University of Pennsylvania climate scientist Michael Mann.

And that moisture then falls as rain.

One-day downpours have "increased in frequency and magnitude over the last several decades and will continue to increase in both in the coming decades," University of Oklahoma meteorology professor Jason Furtado said in an email. "These heavy rainfall events coupled with sea level rise on the Florida coast need to serve as significant 'wake up calls' for the residents of South Florida about the severe risks that climate change poses to them."

This story has corrected Michael Mann's university affiliation to University of Pennsylvania, not Pennsylvania State University.

Follow AP's climate and environment coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-and-environment>

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter at @borenbears

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## Spanish industry kicks off EU green hydrogen race

By JENNIFER O'MAHONY Associated Press

PUERTOLLANO, Spain (AP) — In Spain, the dream of an emissions-free future for heavy industry starts with a rugged Castilian hillside covered in solar panels, and ends with an ice-cold beer. When the beer will be available, and how much it will cost, depends on an intervening rollout of green hydrogen.

This Mediterranean nation wants to become the European leader in hydrogen produced exclusively from renewable energy. With plenty of sunshine and wind and wide-open countryside to host those power sources, Spain's ambition is to export the gas to the rest of the continent.

Green hydrogen is created when renewable energy sources power an electrical current that runs through water, separating its hydrogen and oxygen molecules through electrolysis. The result does not produce planet-warming carbon dioxide, but less than 0.1% of global hydrogen production is currently created this way.

As the global price of solar power continues to fall, Spain is betting that it can rapidly build a new supply chain for sectors of the economy that require hydrogen for industrial processes, and which have been harder to wean off fossil fuels.

Critics of Spain's ambitions have warned there isn't enough renewable energy capacity to produce green hydrogen that can replace natural gas and coal in the making of petrochemicals, steel and agricultural products.

But supporters are relying on the country's plans for a head start to implant themselves in the nascent green hydrogen economy. The International Energy Agency estimated in December that Spain would account for half of Europe's growth in dedicated renewable capacity for hydrogen production

"The sense of urgency is that everyone seems to be racing to be the first to export green hydrogen," said Alejandro Núñez-Jiménez, an expert in green hydrogen policy at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. "Once you build energy infrastructure, it's going to be there for decades. So it's really a game where the first one might lock in the situation for many years,"

A glimpse of the potential for green hydrogen can be seen in Puertollano, a former mining town now

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home to a large industrial park where Spanish energy company Iberdrola and fertilizer manufacturer Fertiberia have partnered to create the first zero-carbon plant nutrients in the world. The fertilizer will one day be scattered onto malt barley, which will then be used to make Heineken's first "green malt" beverage.

Etienne Strijp, president of Heineken Spain, emphasized the difficulty of stripping carbon out of agricultural processing "Being carbon neutral throughout our value chain represents an enormous challenge," he said at the announcement of the company's plan to produce green malt.

The green hydrogen plant in Puertollano, Europe's largest functioning facility, is currently in a pilot phase. Iberdrola owns the 100 megawatts' worth of solar panels that power electrolyzers to separate water from hydrogen. Huge hydrogen storage tanks then feed pipes that take the gas direct to Fertiberia, where it is used to make ammonia, the foundational chemical in nitrogen fertilizers.

Synthetic fertilizers are a highly polluting product. A recent study found that fertilizers emit the equivalent of 2.6 gigatons of carbon per year, or more than global aviation and shipping combined. One-third of those emissions come from the production of fertilizers in plants like Fertiberia's.

"We have green hydrogen for these difficult-to-abate sectors, so that we can achieve the goal of a totally decarbonized economy," Javier Plaza de Agustín, who manages Iberdrola's green hydrogen arm, said.

The plant has the capacity to reduce Fertiberia's emissions by 10%, but most of the fertilizer firm's hydrogen is still drawn from natural gas, creating so-called "gray" hydrogen. The company plans to be 100% carbon neutral by 2035.

In these early days, the challenges for Spain's green hydrogen players are several.

The first is cost. Javier Goñi, Fertiberia's CEO, said green hydrogen technology is not yet delivering a cost-effective final product.

Spanish firms are pushing for EU subsidies to match the recent announcement of \$750 million for research and development of hydrogen projects in the United States. They argue the subsidies are essential to grow the market so economies of scale make zero-carbon products cost-competitive.

"Right now, we are at such an early stage that we need that help from the public authorities to cover the funding gap," Plaza de Agustín said. "Without a framework (it) is difficult to invest in a plant and facility for 20, 25 years without knowing what's going to happen."

The European Union's executive commission has proposed that the 27-nation EU produce 10 million metric tons of renewable hydrogen by 2030 and to import 10 million metric tons more. Last month, the European Commission announced measures to create an intra-EU hydrogen market and to assess infrastructure needs.

But the second problem is the EU's promise of ramped-up supply with little consideration for where the demand really lies, argued Núñez-Jiménez, the hydrogen expert.

"Spain and Portugal could produce a lot of green hydrogen, and demand in Central Europe may materialize, but the connection between supply and demand does not exist yet," he said. "Developing the infrastructure to transport that gas from the Iberian peninsula to central Europe must be a priority."

Hydrogen, the lightest element in the periodic table, is difficult to store and transport and is highly flammable. For this reason, Iberdrola built its hydrogen plant right next to Fertiberia's factory, to minimize leakage. Once Iberdrola and its competitors have met Spain's limited hydrogen needs for things like making beer, they will need to look outside its borders to keep growing.

"Everyone wants to be in hydrogen production," said Goñi of Fertiberia. "But today, there are basically few companies and few sectors of activity that can absorb large amounts of hydrogen."

Partnerships are key. Ammonia created at the Fertiberia plant with Iberdrola's green hydrogen could be used to transport hydrogen in liquid form before it is reconverted into a gas.

Decarbonizing hydrogen for industry has taken on greater importance in Europe since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russia is the world's second-largest producer of natural gas, which powers most global hydrogen production.

Spain, France, Germany and Portugal have agreed to build a hydrogen pipeline by 2030 to transport some 2 million metric tons of hydrogen to France annually — 10% of the EU's estimated hydrogen needs.

But not everyone in Spain wants a hydrogen plant on their doorstep. The use of land for renewable

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energy installations, and the 9:1 ratio of water to kilo of green hydrogen produced can be a tough sell for regions suffering from long-term drought.

Pere Virgili, the mayor of the northeastern seaside town of Roda de Bera, rejected an initial proposal from a Danish green hydrogen developer last year that would have covered 42 hectares (103 acres) of territory with a mix of solar panels and wind turbines to power its electrolyzers.

"It's not that we are against renewable energy, but we can discuss at length if using that much water and land to create it is actually environmentally friendly or not," he said, adding that the project would create just 100 jobs.

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## Rays lose first game after 13-0 start, fall 6-3 to Blue Jays

By IAN HARRISON Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Waiting two weeks to experience their first loss of the season didn't make defeat any easier for the Tampa Bay Rays.

The Rays lost their first game following a record-tying 13-0 start as Colin Poche forced in two runs with bases-loaded walks and second baseman Brandon Lowe made a key error in a four-run fifth inning that lifted the Toronto Blue Jays to a 6-3 win on Friday night.

"Losing always sucks," Lowe said. "There's no loss that feels any worse or any better than any other ones. You kind of put them all in the same kind of category, you know? Every win is great. Every loss is terrible."

George Springer hit a leadoff home run and Bo Bichette had five hits and an RBI as the Blue Jays denied Tampa Bay's bid to establish Major League Baseball's post-1900 record for consecutive wins at a season's start.

"Not much went our way tonight," Rays manager Kevin Cash said.

Tampa Bay's 13-0 record matched the 1982 Atlanta Braves and 1987 Milwaukee Brewers, trailing only the 20-0 start by the 1884 St. Louis Maroons of the Union Association.

The Rays went unbeaten in 13 games against Detroit, Washington, Oakland, and Boston. Those four teams are currently in last place in their divisions.

Toronto, the first Rays opponent this season with a winning record, has won eight of 10.

"Guys are excited to play big series," Toronto manager John Schneider said. "They're a good team. But we're solely focussed on winning the series."

Tampa Bay trailed at the end of an inning just six times entering Friday. Against the Blue Jays they trailed after all nine.

Springer homered on the night's second pitch from Drew Rasmussen (2-1), who pitched 13 innings in his first two starts. Springer's 53rd leadoff homer tied Craig Biggio for third, behind Rickey Henderson's 81 and Alfonso Soriano hit 54.

Bichette had an RBI double in the second for a 2-0 lead and his 500th hit. He reached the mark in his 407th game, 25 games quicker than the previous Blue Jays mark shared by Vernon Wells and Shannon Stewart.

Luke Raley cut the lead in half with an RBI single in the fourth but Poche relieved with the bases loaded in the fifth and walked pinch-hitter Alejandro Kirk on four pitches and Santiago Espinal on five.

"One strike in your nine pitches, it's just not competitive," Poche said.

Danny Jansen hit a grounder to Wander Franco for a potential inning-ending double play, but second baseman Brandon Lowe allowed the relay to bounce off his glove and into the outfield as two runs scored.

"It kind of got out of hand on us there," Lowe said

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Rasmussen allowed five runs and eight hits in 4 1/3 innings. José Berríos (1-2) gave up one run and four hits in five innings, leaving because of a bruised left knee that got struck twice in his final inning. Manuel Margot's leadoff liner caromed off Berríos' left foot and into foul territory. Three batters later, a Yandy Díaz comebacker struck Berríos' knee.

Schneider said he expects Berríos to make his next start.

Trevor Richards got two outs in the sixth and Zach Pop came on to strike out Isaac Paredes, stranding runners at first and second.

After Yimi García gave up back-to-back homers to Josh Lowe and Christian Bethancourt in the seventh, Erik Swanson worked a scoreless eighth and Jordan Romano finished for his ML-leading fifth save in six chances.

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Rays: Cash said LHP Jeffrey Springs will likely land on the injured list after leaving Thursday's game against Boston two pitches into the fourth inning with what the team said was inflammation of the ulnar nerve.

Blue Jays: 3B Matt Chapman returned after being scratched Thursday because of an illness.

## FAMILIAR FACE

Blue Jays center fielder Kevin Kiermaier faced his former team for the first time and went 2 for 4. The three-time Gold Glove award winner spent the first nine seasons of his career with the Rays.

"It's weird to see him in a different color blue," Tampa Bay's Brandon Lowe said, "but everybody in this clubhouse wishes nothing but the best for him."

## GREAT GRAB

Blue Jays left fielder Daulton Varsho made a leaping catch at the wall on Díaz's deep drive for the final out of the third

## PEDAL POWER

Kiermaier said he rode his bicycle to the ballpark for the first time Friday, a 4 1/2 mile journey from his Toronto home.

"I had an absolute blast," Kiermaier said.

## UP NEXT

RHP Calvin Faucher (0-0, 4.50) will open for the Rays Saturday. LHP Yusei Kikuchi (1-0, 6.75) goes for the Blue Jays.

AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/mlb> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Mexico's president vows to eliminate national news agency

By MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico's president said Friday he will shut down Notimex, a national news agency that has been locked in a years-long strike against the woman he appointed to run it.

Founded in 1968, Notimex was generally a service that mainly sent news reports from Mexico's 32 states, many of which weren't covered much by Mexico's national newspapers, which are almost all based in Mexico City.

Analysts said it is the latest chapter in an effort by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to control public government media, scientific or cultural bodies.

López Obrador said Friday that there is no longer a need for Notimex, saying his carefully orchestrated morning news briefings are enough to keep the country informed.

"We do not need a government news agency anymore. That was from the era of press statements," López Obrador said. "It is not something that we need as a government. We have the mañanera" — his daily news briefing.

The unionized workers at Notimex went on strike in 2020, arguing some members had been unfairly fired or harassed by Sanjuana Martínez, who was appointed by López Obrador to run the agency in 2019, soon after he took office. The two sides have made no progress in resolving the strike.

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López Obrador said the agency will be closed after an agreement is reached to pay the striking workers severance payments.

Martínez said she completely agreed with the decision to shut down the 55-year-old news agency, which she claimed was ridden with corruption when she took over.

"I am totally in agreement" with the decision, Martínez said.

She added she agreed that the president's morning news briefings — where pre-selected bloggers and reporters usually ask soft-ball questions, and sometimes openly state their loyalty to López Obrador — is enough to keep Mexicans informed.

"It is a successful phenomenon with high audience share that has allowed (the government) to respond to the press, which in general has opted for campaigns of slander and lies," Martínez said.

López Obrador routinely lashes out at mainstream reporters, calling them corrupt lackeys of conservatives.

The Mexican Association for the Right to Information said there has been a disturbing trend by López Obrador's government of turning publicly funded media outlets into a mouthpiece for his administration.

The coverage of a march by López Obrador's supporters in November in Mexico City was one example the group cited.

Public television and radio stations — most of which had previously broadcast mainly cultural, scientific or education programs — quickly became politicized, giving promotional space to draw people to López Obrador's march and broadcasting fawning coverage of it.

"The government is making a clearly partisan use of supposedly public media outlets that constitutes a flagrant violation of the Constitution," the association said in a statement. "These are publicly funded electronic media that are meant to provide information without a slant in favor of the government."

Jorge Bravo, the association's president, noted that Notimex, like some other public media, had long had a reputation for being pro-government. Underfunded public media could have used more independence and professional standards, or better funding, Bravo said, but they have gotten none of that under López Obrador.

"But if before they were pro-government, now they are also propaganda outlets," Bravo said.

It's not just news media and regulatory agencies the president has dissolved, starved of funding or refused to approve appointments for in his effort to concentrate media coverage and decision-making in his own hands.

In 2021, his administration sought to lock up 31 academics, professors and scientists in the country's harshest maximum security prison for receiving money from a government science fund. The researchers involved have denied the funds were illegal or misused.

As in the case of Martínez, López Obrador appointed a new director for the government science council, María Álvarez-Buylla, to shake up the body.

Álvarez-Buylla quickly drew dissent after she criticized researchers for presenting reports in English, despite the fact that is the common language in some technical fields.

She also has criticized "Western science" and "techno-science that makes knowledge merchandise," while calling for "collective processes of generating knowledge" more closely tied to social concerns.

"Western science has produced the most splashy, and perhaps most useless advances, like reaching the Moon," Álvarez-Buylla said in 2020.

## Food or medicine? Inflation squeezing retirees in Argentina

By DEBORÁ REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — With trembling hands, the bingo players at a Buenos Aires retirement center put the buttons they use as markers on their cards. Small containers hold their betting money, coins and crumpled low-denomination bills that every day seem able to buy less.

The twice-weekly game brings some enthusiasm to the eyes of the retirees playing it in the recreational center serving Caballito and Villa Crespo, middle-class neighborhoods of Argentina's capital. The men and women participating are all over 80 years old and find themselves in a situation they would have considered unthinkable before they retired.

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"This center has middle-class people in it. We are deprived of many of the things we used to do," said Betty Santucci, 85, who runs the place. She added quietly: "I did something I'd never done in my life: I asked for free medicine ... nothing else can be done."

Monthly inflation was 7.7% in March, up from 6.5% in the same month in 2022, Argentina's National Institute of Statistics and Censuses announced Friday. Analysts project annual inflation — the measure used commonly internationally — will come in at 110% in 2023, one of the highest rates in the world.

"The numbers we see today represent the worst moment of the impact of the war (in Ukraine) on international prices and the worst drought in history in the country," tweeted government spokesperson, Gabriela Cerrutti. "We know, it hurts us, it occupies us, how it affects daily life and each family."

The impact has been particularly devastating on Argentina's retirees, 85% of whom receive a state pension averaging 58,500 pesos a month, the equivalent of \$265. That barely covers a third of their expenses for food, medicine and rent.

"I can't even pay the rent, my daily expenses, services, and I have to eat. I have two children who bring me a 'little package' (of money)," Paulina Najnudel, 85, said as she played bingo. "But it makes me, not ashamed, but sad because we have worked so many years."

Argentina had one of the most advanced pension systems in South America, with retirement pensions increasing according to a mobility formula calculated by wages and taxes collected. Between January 2022 and March 2023, pensions rose 72.5%. But in the same period prices rose more than 100%.

Now, after years of high inflation, Argentina's minimum pension measured in U.S. dollars is one of the lowest in the region, just above Venezuela, according to a study by the Argentine consulting firm Focus Market.

"The minimum pension is not even enough for the basics," said Ana Falcone at the retirement center.

Mercedes Villafañe, 80, described the crisis during a game. "When we retirees go shopping, we don't buy food by the kilo. We buy it by the item: one onion, one potato. We never have enough to make it to a kilogram."

"At the moment, there is no hope," she said.

To make up for some of the loss of purchasing power caused by inflation, the government of President Alberto Fernández ordered a monthly addition of 15,000 pesos (\$67) to retirees who had low salaries as workers. But experts say it is not enough.

The Ombudsman for Senior Citizens reported at the beginning of April that the basic needs of rent, medicine and food for one person was 202,064 pesos a month, or \$914 dollars, a 33% increase from six months ago.

"We are in a humanitarian crisis in the sector," said Eugenio Semino, head of the ombudsman agency, which is responsible for defending the rights of senior citizens.

"The retiree must choose between taking medication or not taking medication, eating or not eating," he said.

Semino said the consequences of the crisis are real though not always socially visible.

"I have been doing gerontology for 40 years and I have never seen, for example, that medication is no longer taken according to the prescription, but by what the retiree can buy. This means that treatments are neutral, they do not have any type of positive result," he said.

Night falls and the bingo comes to an end.

Najnudel and the rest of the retirees begin filing out of the center, heading home to deal with the harsh reality of their final years — a reality they never foresaw.

"I come here, I have a good time and I am with good people. I spend a few hours fine, but I go back to my house and it's still the same," Najnudel said.

"I hope all this changes. It has to change. I would like to have hope, but I will no longer be around when it happens."

## In China, Lula seeks help to build back Brazilian industry

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — The trip by Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to Beijing has made clear he is counting on China to help reinvigorate the South American nation's ailing industrial sector — particularly by picking up the slack of exiting U.S. companies.

After Lula met Friday with China's President Xi Jinping, Brazilian finance minister Fernando Haddad told reporters the nations are planning a "leap forward" in their relationship.

"President Lula wants a policy of reindustrialization. This visit starts a new challenge for Brazil: bringing direct investments from China," Haddad said. He added that Brazil wants strong bonds with the U.S. as well, but noted with regret that recently "some American companies made the decision to leave Brazil."

Industrial policy is near and dear to Lula, a former steelworker who became a union leader. Decades later, he launched his bid for a third presidential term on the gritty outskirts of Sao Paulo outside a car factory. That area — and the country — is churning out ever-fewer manufactured goods.

Brazil's national statistics institute said in July 2022 that Brazil had lost 1 million industrial jobs over the prior decade, a decline of 11.6%. The institute said in 2021 that the country's industrial sector represented 18.9% of Brazil's GDP, down from 38% three decades earlier.

Speaking to journalists before leaving China, Lula said Saturday morning that Brazil's relationship with the Asian giant "is going beyond that phase of commodity" exports. He added he visited the headquarters of Chinese telecommunications company Huawei because he needs to promote "a digital revolution" in his South American nation.

Over the years, Brazil became a big exporter of raw materials, and China has consumed them voraciously. China overtook the U.S. as Brazil's biggest export market in 2009, and each year buys tens of billions of dollars of soybeans, beef, iron ore, poultry, pulp, sugar cane, cotton and crude oil.

The Asian giant and the Latin American powerhouse had a somewhat frosty relationship over the last four years when far-right leader Jair Bolsonaro held the presidency in Brasilia. Even some of Bolsonaro's supporters in the agribusiness sector were critical of outbursts that antagonized China.

On Thursday, Lula meet with the CEO of Chinese manufacturer BYD, which produces electric busses and is in talks to start operations at a factory the Brazilian state of Bahia, Lula's office said. The previous owner, Ford Motor Co., announced in 2021 that it was shuttering the plant, along with two others in Brazil.

Brazil is already the biggest recipient of Chinese investment in Latin America, according to Chinese state media. And Lula doesn't just want more investment; he is also seeking partnerships that challenge the hegemony of Western-dominated economic institutions and geopolitics, including diplomacy over the war in Ukraine.

Lula's visit included the swearing in Thursday of former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff as head of the Chinese-backed New Development Bank, which is funding infrastructure projects in Brazil and elsewhere in the developing world.

The bank portrays itself as an alternative to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which often impose loan conditions that developing nations criticize as punitive.

At the swearing-in ceremony, Lula took swipes at both the IMF and the dominance of the U.S. dollar in international trade, hailing an agreement between Brazil and China to use the Chinese yuan in their bilateral commerce

Lula and Xi oversaw the signing of agreements in 15 areas, ranging from agriculture to aeronautics, which underscored the improvement in relations since Lula took over in January.

"As comprehensive strategic partners, China and Brazil share extensive common interests," Xi said, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

"China ... sees the relationship as a high priority on its diplomatic agenda," he said.

Charles Tang, who chairs the Brazil-China Chamber of Commerce, told The Associated Press that he expects several new deals for Chinese infrastructure investments after the trip.

"China tends to put money into that, as it did in Africa. China is filled with reserves for investment and



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it can take the current risks in Brazil," Tang said by phone.

The trip was Lula's third visit to China, but the first with Xi sitting as president. On Friday, the two leaders met for three hours — far longer than had been scheduled.

"The duration of the meeting speaks for itself," Brazil's Ambassador Marcos Galvão said afterward at a late-night press conference.

Xi had greeted Lula with full military honors, including a 21-gun salute, at the Great Hall of the People adjacent to Tiananmen Square in the heart of the Chinese capital. The two leaders walked to the sound of Brazilian song "Novo Tempo" — or "New Time" in English.

The Brazilian leader is seeking to rebuild ties with China following a turbulent relationship under Bolsonaro, who showed little interest in foreign travel.

On Friday, a son of the former president, Sen. Flávio Bolsonaro, criticized Lula for cozying up to China.

"The only thing missing is to wage a direct war on the United States ... Lula is walking a dangerous path alongside dictatorships and enemies of democracy, like Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua," the younger Bolsonaro said on social media.

In February, Lula traveled to Washington, where he and U.S. President Joe Biden stressed the importance of defending democracy and preserving the Amazon rainforest. The trip didn't, however, produce the hoped-for financial pledge for Brazil's Amazon Fund.

The Lula-Xi talks touched on the conflict in Ukraine, with the leaders agreeing on the need for a negotiated settlement, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

A key piece of Lula's outreach abroad is his proposal that Brazil and other developing countries, including China, mediate peace. However, his suggestion that Ukraine cede Crimea has irked Kyiv and its closest backers, namely the U.S. and Europe.

Lula said Saturday morning that China and the U.S. have an important role in the discussion on Ukraine, but added, "It is necessary that the U.S. stops stimulating the war and talk about peace."

One of roughly 50 leaked classified documents on the platform Discord that have been viewed by the AP said that, as of late February, Russia's foreign affairs ministry supported Lula's plan to establish a club of supposedly impartial mediators, as it "would reject the West's 'aggressor-victim' paradigm." The item cited electronic surveillance as the source.

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.

Lula's trip to China marks a significant contrast with the "low-key visit to Washington" and provides leverage against Europe, said Oliver Stuenkel, a political scientist from the Getulio Vargas Foundation university and think tank.

"This approach with China might actually make Europeans keener to make an agreement with Brazil, so they don't lose even more market share to China in South America," Stuenkel said.

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Savarese reported from Sao Paulo. AP reporter Frank Bajak contributed from Boston, and senior producer Wayne Zhang contributed from Beijing.

## **Pence: Candidates must run 'as Republicans' to win in 2024**

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former Vice President Mike Pence ramped up his criticism of fellow Republicans at a GOP donor summit Friday night, trying to paint his would-be rivals as straying from party principles as he inches closer to an expected presidential run.

Speaking at a Republican National Committee donor summit in Nashville, Pence planned to criticize former President Donald Trump and others who have questioned the war in Ukraine and oppose entitlement reform and further curbs on abortion rights. He argued the party will be better served by candidates who espouse more traditional GOP views, according to excerpts shared by aides ahead of his remarks.

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"It's becoming clearer every day that the upcoming Republican primaries will not just be a contest of candidates but a conflict of visions," Pence was expected to tell donors. "One vision grounded in traditional Republican principles, and another vision driven by the promise of winning at the expense of our highest ideals."

He said the party's route to victory rests on a "well-worn path" it has "traveled for the better part of half a century," including support for strong national defense, limited government and "traditional" social values. "We will win if we run boldly as Republicans," he was expected to add. "We will lose if we run away from that proven American agenda."

Pence is widely expected to launch a campaign for the White House in the coming weeks that will put him in direct competition with his former boss, who is the frontrunner for the GOP nomination.

Pence, who was a loyal lieutenant to Trump in the White House, has spent the years since he left office distancing himself from the former president. That has included criticizing Trump's actions on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump's supporters violently stormed the Capitol building as Pence was presiding over the certification of President Joe Biden's win. Trump was furious with Pence for refusing to go along with his unconstitutional scheme to overturn the results, and the two have been at odds ever since.

In his speech at the retreat, Pence continued to tacitly criticize Trump as well as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, another likely candidate, saying the party must "resist the politics of personality and the lure of populism unmoored to timeless conservative values."

"If 2022 taught us anything, it's that candidates that were focused on the challenges facing American families did well. But candidates focused on the past, on litigating the last election, did not do well," he was expected to add. "Elections are always about the future. To win in 2024, the Republican Party must be the party of the future."

The comments came hours after both men spoke at the National Rifle Association's annual convention in Pence's home state of Indiana, where Pence was greeted with a smattering of boos from the crowd. It was a reflection of lingering animosity from Trump's loyal base, which continues to harbor resentments over Pence's handling of the 2020 election.

Trump, who will address the donor summit in Nashville Saturday, took a dig at Pence from the NRA stage, telling the crowd he hoped they'd given the former vice president a warm introduction. Still, he called Pence a "nice" and "good man."

Pence, in his remarks, was expected to continue to criticize those in his party who have questioned U.S. support for Ukraine after Russia's invasion. "Joe Biden wants to cut defense spending. But for some reason, so do some prominent Republicans," he was expected to say.

DeSantis last month walked back his characterization of the war as a "territorial dispute" following criticism from a number of fellow Republicans who expressed concern about the potential 2024 presidential candidate's dismissive description of the conflict.

Pence was also expected to call out Trump for opposing reforms to Social Security and Medicare, such as increasing the age of qualification — once a standard GOP talking point.

"Sadly, our former president has echoed Biden's pledge 'not to touch' Social Security. I think we owe my three granddaughters better," he was planning to say.

He was also expected to criticize those in his party who are shying away from further restrictions on abortion rights following a series of GOP losses.

"On the heels of the biggest pro-life victory in history, too many Republicans want to run away from the cause that has animated our party for half a century," he was going to say, according to the excerpts.

Trump has warned that the party risks fallout from tight abortion restrictions, while DeSantis late Thursday signed a 6-week ban into law.

## Gov. vetoes Kansas bill on live deliveries during abortion

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly vetoed a bill on Friday that could have penalized doctors accused of not providing enough care to infants delivered alive during certain kinds of abortion procedures.

In a statement on her website, Kelly, a Democrat, called the legislation “misleading and unnecessary.”

The legislation could have subjected doctors to lawsuits and criminal charges in certain kinds of abortions and in circumstances when doctors induce labor to deliver a fetus that is expected to die within minutes or even seconds outside the womb.

“Federal law already protects newborns, and the procedure being described in this bill does not exist in Kansas in the era of modern medicine,” Kelly said Friday. “The intent of this bill is to interfere in medical decisions that should remain between doctors and their patients.”

Kansas’ Republican-controlled Legislature gave final passage to the bill earlier this month, and in both chambers, the bill passed with a veto-proof majority. Still, the bill’s fate has been uncertain in a legal and political climate that’s made Kansas an outlier on abortion policy among states with GOP-led legislatures.

Kansas Senate President Ty Masterson vowed in a statement that the Senate will move quickly to override Kelly’s veto.

Even if they succeed, the measure could still be challenged in court and not enforced. Lawsuits have prevented Kansas from enforcing a 2015 ban on a common second-trimester abortion procedure and a 2011 law imposing extra health and safety rules for abortion providers.

Kansas abortion opponents haven’t pushed to ban abortion outright despite the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in June 2022 that the U.S. Constitution allows it. The Kansas Supreme Court ruled in 2019 that access to abortion is a “fundamental” right under the state constitution, and in August 2022, voters decisively rejected a proposed change to strip away protections for abortion rights.

Kansas For Life spokeswoman Danielle Underwood released a statement that said Kelly’s veto was “heartless” and she called on Kansas residents to urge lawmakers to override the governor’s decision.

“These babies deserve protection and the same medical care as any other newborn of the same gestational age. This once again proves how out of touch Gov. Kelly is with the values of the people of Kansas,” Underwood said.

Senate Democratic Leader Dinah Sykes said there is no circumstance in Kansas in which an infant can be delivered alive during an abortion.

“It simply does not happen,” Sykes said in a statement. “The reality is that this legislation would harm mothers and health care teams who will be forced by statute to attempt care that will not change a tragic outcome, rather than provide families the dignity to grieve in peace.”

In Kansas, no abortions after the 21st week have been reported since at least 2016, and, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, less than 1% of the more than 600,000 abortions a year occur after the 21st week of pregnancy. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says almost no fetuses are viable before the 23rd week of pregnancy.

The Kansas measure is similar to laws in several other states requiring infants delivered alive during labor and delivery abortions to go to a hospital and imposing criminal penalties for doctors who don’t provide the same care “a reasonably diligent and conscientious” provider would with other live births. It is also similar to a proposed law that Montana voters rejected in November.

Under the bill, failing to provide reasonable care for such a newborn would be a felony, punishable by a year’s probation for a first-time offender. Also, the newborn’s parents and the parents or guardians of minors seeking abortions could sue providers.

Critics have said the state would be intervening in difficult medical and ethical decisions between doctors and parents. They also said parents could be forced to accept futile and expensive care.

Supporters have said the measure was necessary, and they considered it a humanitarian issue.

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This story has been corrected to remove an erroneous reference to Kelly vetoing a similar bill in 2019.

## Trump reports little income from Truth Social, \$1M from NFTs

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump says he's not making much money from his social media network but estimates it is worth between \$5 million and \$25 million, according to his personal financial disclosure form filed Friday.

He owns about 90% of his social media company, Trump Media & Technology Group, but said he made less than \$201 from it.

He also reported he made between \$100,000 and \$1 million for a series of digital trading cards he released in December that portrayed a photoshopped Trump in a series of cartoon-like images, including an astronaut, a cowboy and a superhero.

The report filed with the Federal Election Commission is the first glimpse into Trump's finances since he left the White House and launched several new business ventures.

The real estate mogul and reality TV star launched the platform Truth Social in 2022, a year after he was banned from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube following the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Although Trump has since been allowed back on those social media networks, he has relied on Truth Social as a primary method of sharing messages with his supporters, especially as he has launched his 2024 presidential campaign.

The disclosure provides limited information because it only reports income in broad ranges. That makes it difficult to tell how many of Trump's biggest properties and businesses are faring since his departure from office because the disclosures he was required to file when he was president included specific income figures instead of ranges.

In the latest disclosure, for instance, Trump reports his Washington, D.C., golf club took in more than \$5 million. In 2020, he had put a finer point on it: \$14.2 million.

CIC Digital LLC, the company that owned the digital trading card NFTs, or non-fungible tokens, was valued at somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1 million, according to the report.

Trump also reported he made more than \$5 million in speaking fees.

All federal candidates are required to file the disclosures after announcing their candidacies. Trump, a Republican, had been granted an extension and risked a fine if he delayed further.

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Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Bernard Condon contributed to this report.

## Leak suspect yearned to join military but then regretted it

NOMAAN MERCHANT and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

DIGHTON, Mass. (AP) — The Massachusetts Air National Guardsman accused of leaking highly classified documents had set his sights on joining the military from an early age. But more recently he had expressed disillusionment about having enlisted.

Jack Teixeira, 21, was charged Friday in U.S. District Court in Boston with unauthorized removal and retention of classified and national defense information — a breach that has caused an international uproar and exposed explicit U.S. assessments on the war in Ukraine and other closely held secrets. A magistrate judge ordered Teixeira held until a detention hearing next week.

Teixeira grew up in Dighton, a rural community south of Boston that is dotted with single-family homes interspersed with small farms. His mother's home sits down a long driveway in heavy woods. A florist, she sometimes puts out a flower cart by the side of the road, selling bouquets on the honor system.

Two of his classmates told The Boston Globe that Teixeira revered the military and showed an early interest in joining. He was especially focused on the history of war and weapons.

"From a young age, I remember he would have a book on, I believe, U.S. military aircrafts, armaments, like a real big textbook," John Powell told the Globe.

Though Powell remembered Teixeira being bullied in middle school, he told the newspaper that the young man was an optimist and "sweetheart," with an especially close relationship with his stepdad, an

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Air Force veteran.

High school classmate Kailani Reis told the newspaper Teixeira was "super quiet" and gave off "loner vibes," while another classmate, Sarah Arnold, told AP she remembered him as being quiet and keeping to himself.

Teixeira enlisted in the Air National Guard in September 2019, according to military records. He graduated from Dighton-Rehoboth Regional High School the following year, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the school to close and go virtual.

It was during the pandemic that Teixeira developed a close relationship with other members of a chat room on the social media platform Discord, where members of the group have said the leaks showed up. The chat app is used by video gamers and others to connect online.

A member of the Discord chat group spoke to AP about the conversations, but declined to give his name, citing concerns for his personal safety. The group, called "Thug Shaker Central," drew people who talked about their favorite types of guns and shared memes and jokes, some of them racist and anti-Semitic, the person told the AP.

The group also included a running discussion about Russia's invasion of Ukraine. For months, a member nicknamed "the O.G." posted reams of classified material, said the Discord member who confirmed that O.G. was Teixeira.

Teixeira liked to chat about guns, was an observant Christian and would often pray with group members, the fellow member said. In recent months, Teixeira had become disillusioned about the U.S. military and had begun to express "regret (about) joining," the person said. "He even said he'd kick my ass if I thought about joining."

Teixeira also worried the federal government had become too powerful, according to the Discord user.

The chat group member said he wasn't sure why Teixeira enlisted, but believed he needed money for college. He added that O.G. was skilled at making memes.

"He was good at his craft. He was good with, you know, Photoshop," the group member told AP, adding that Teixeira "was never a very, super serious guy, usually was all like laughs and giggles."

Teixeira was recently promoted to Airman 1st Class and assigned to the 102nd Intelligence Wing at Otis Air National Guard Base, where his job was listed as a cyber transport systems journeyman.

Despite his relatively low rank, the technology position would have given Teixeira responsibility for maintaining computer networks with access to classified information. Teixeira began active duty in October 2021, serving full time at the base, which is located on Cape Cod in Massachusetts.

Members of the Discord group described Teixeira as someone looking to show off, rather than being motivated by a desire to inform the public about U.S. military operations or to influence American policy.

Without any evidence, some prominent people on the right have begun hailing Teixeira as someone who aimed to expose the Biden administration and prevent further U.S. involvement in the war in Ukraine.

On Twitter, U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, using the wrong first name, posted that Teixeira was "white, male, christian, and antiwar. That makes him an enemy to the Biden regime."

The Discord member told AP he did not believe Teixeira leaked documents to undermine the U.S. government or for an ideological reason.

"If I had to give a gauge on it, it would be more or less just some nerds wanting to glance over some stuff and compare and contrast and kind of have a little joke about it," he said, adding that, "At the end of the day, I mean we're just trying to have a fun time."

Merchant reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Jennifer McDermott in Dighton, Massachusetts, Ali Swenson in Seattle and Alan Suderman, Michael Bieseker and Richard Lardner in Washington contributed to this report.

## Transgender adults brace for treatment cutoffs in Missouri

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM and DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Ellie Bridgman spent her Thursday night shift at a local gas station in Union, Missouri, planning for the day she'll lose access to gender-affirming treatments the transgender and nonbinary 23-year-old credits with making "life worth living."

A first-of-its-kind emergency rule introduced this week by Missouri's Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey will impose numerous restrictions on both adults and children before they can receive puberty-blocking drugs, hormones or surgeries "for the purpose of transitioning gender."

Transgender rights advocates have vowed to challenge the rule in court before it takes effect April 27. But promises of swift legal action have done little to ease the worries of trans Missourians like Bridgman who say it may be time to flee the state.

Before gender-affirming medical treatments can be provided by physicians, the regulation requires people to have experienced an "intense pattern" of documented gender dysphoria for three years and to have received at least 15 hourly sessions with a therapist over at least 18 months. Patients also would first have to be screened for autism and "social media addiction," and any psychiatric symptoms from mental health issues would have to be treated and resolved.

Some individuals will be allowed to maintain their prescriptions while they promptly receive the required assessments.

Bridgman, who uses she/they pronouns, is autistic and has depression. She said she sees only two options: move across the country, away from all her friends and family, to a state that protects access to gender-affirming care, or accept the serious health risks that could come with illegally buying hormones online.

She headed to a pharmacy Friday afternoon to pay out of pocket for all her remaining refills.

"Placing restrictions on transitioning for people with depression is just a way for them to completely bar us from transitioning at all," Bridgman said. "For lots of trans people, dysphoria is the cause of depression. You can't treat the depression without treating the underlying dysphoria."

Before Bridgman started hormone replacement therapy last summer, she said "life felt meaningless" and suicidal thoughts crowded her head. Gender-affirming care was her "last chance at life," she said.

The regulation comes as Republican lawmakers across the country, including in Missouri, have advanced hundreds of measures aimed at nearly every facet of transgender existence, with a particular emphasis on health care.

At least 13 states have enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming care for minors. Bills await action from governors in Montana, North Dakota and neighboring Kansas, and nearly two dozen other states are considering legislation to restrict or ban care.

National groups advocating for LGBTQ+ rights contend the Missouri regulation — based on a state law against deceptive and unfair business practices — goes further than most restrictions enacted elsewhere.

Three states have imposed restrictions on gender-affirming care via regulation or administrative order, but Missouri's regulation is the only one that also limits treatments for adults.

Cathy Renna, a spokesperson for the National LGBTQ Task Force, said the rule demonstrates how Republicans are now successfully broadening the scope of gender-affirming care restrictions beyond minors, which advocates had been warning about for months.

"When they see one thing work in one state, they'll try to replicate it in another," Renna warned.

Bailey's restriction comes after a former employee at a transgender youth clinic in St. Louis alleged that physicians at the Washington University Transgender Center were rushing to provide treatment without appropriate patient assessment.

Bailey said he is investigating the clinic but has not yet issued a report. The claims of mistreatment have been disputed by others, including another former employee and patients. Neither Bailey nor the university responded to phone and email messages seeking comment.

Dr. Meredith McNamara, an assistant professor of pediatrics specializing in adolescent medicine at the Yale School of Medicine, said evidence widely supports maintaining access to hormone therapy and other

gender-affirming care.

As part of a consent process, Bailey's rule requires that patients be shown materials containing nearly two dozen specific statements raising concerns about gender-affirming treatments — a practice doctors like McNamara have denounced as a form of conversion therapy.

"There is no evidence that shows that psychotherapy as the only treatment is effective," she said.

Stacy Cay, an autistic trans woman in Kansas City, has been stockpiling vials of injectable estrogen in anticipation of restrictions. The 30-year-old comedian and model realized she only required a small dose and has saved up enough estrogen to last about a year. When that runs out, she will have to travel across state lines to fill prescriptions or consider moving elsewhere.

Cay said her persistent depression will cut off her access to hormones under the regulation and that her autism diagnosis could complicate her path to receiving future care. While the regulation does not specify whether autism disqualifies a person for gender-affirming care, it does mandate an assessment.

A 2020 study from natural sciences journal Nature Communications estimated that transgender and gender-diverse people, or those whose gender expressions do not conform to gender norms, are 3-6 times more likely to be autistic compared to cisgender people. They were also more likely to have other developmental and psychiatric conditions, including depression.

"They know a lot of us are autistic, and it's part of their strategy to paint us as unstable — that we can't be trusted to make our own medical decisions," Cay said.

Attorneys from Lambda Legal and the American Civil Liberties Union say they plan to challenge the new rule in court.

Missouri falls under the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals — the same court that upheld a preliminary injunction last year preventing Arkansas from enforcing a first-in-the-nation ban on trans children receiving gender-affirming treatments. Federal judges have also blocked enforcement of a similar law in Alabama.

Republican legislators leading Missouri's effort to ban gender-affirming treatments for minors said Friday that they have no plans to expand their legislation to include adults.

Separate bills passed by the Missouri House and Senate would ban treatments for children younger than 18 but would impose no restrictions for adults who are covered by private insurance or willing to pay for their own health care.

"I believe it is detrimental to a person's body, probably even their psyche, to go through treatments like that," said state Sen. Mike Moon, lead sponsor of the Senate legislation. "Adults have the opportunity to make decisions such as these."

Schoenbaum reported from Raleigh, North Carolina, and Lieb reported from Jefferson City. Associated Press editor Jeff McMillan contributed from Scranton, Pennsylvania.

## **TikTok ban gets final approval by Montana's GOP legislature**

By AMY BETH HANSON and HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana's House gave final passage Friday to a bill banning the social media app TikTok from operating in the state, a move that's bound to face legal challenges but also serve as a testing ground for the TikTok-free America many national lawmakers envision due to concerns over potential Chinese spying.

The House voted 54-43 in favor of the measure, which would make Montana the first state with a total ban on the app. It goes further than prohibitions already put in place by nearly half the states — including Montana — and the U.S. federal government that prohibit TikTok on government-owned devices.

The measure now goes to Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte, who declined to say Friday if he plans to sign it into law. A statement provided by spokesperson Brooke Metrione said the governor "will carefully consider" all bills the Legislature sends to his desk.

Gianforte banned TikTok on state government devices last year, saying at the time that the app posed a "significant risk" to sensitive state data.

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TikTok spokesperson Brooke Oberwetter promised a legal challenge over the measure's constitutionality, saying the bill's supporters "have admitted that they have no feasible plan" to enforce "this attempt to censor American voices."

The company "will continue to fight for TikTok users and creators in Montana whose livelihoods and First Amendment rights are threatened by this egregious government overreach," Oberwetter said.

TikTok, which is owned by the Chinese tech company ByteDance, has been under intense scrutiny over worries it could hand over user data to the Chinese government or push pro-Beijing propaganda and misinformation on the platform. Leaders at the FBI and the CIA and numerous lawmakers, both Democrats and Republicans, have raised such concerns but have not presented any evidence that it has happened.

Ban supporters point to two Chinese laws that compel companies in the country to cooperate with the government on state intelligence work. They also cite troubling episodes such as a disclosure by ByteDance in December that it fired four employees who accessed the IP addresses and other data of two journalists while attempting to uncover the source of a leaked report about the company.

Congress is considering legislation that does not single out TikTok specifically but gives the Commerce Department the ability more broadly to restrict foreign threats on tech platforms. That bill is being backed by the White House, but it has received pushback from privacy advocates, right-wing commentators and others who say the language is too expansive.

TikTok has said it has a plan to protect U.S. user data.

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen, whose office drafted the state's legislation, said in a social media post Friday that the bill "is a critical step to ensuring we are protecting Montanans' privacy," even as he acknowledged that a court battle looms.

The measure would prohibit downloads of TikTok in the state and would fine any "entity" — an app store or TikTok — \$10,000 per day for each time someone "is offered the ability" to access or download the app. There would not be penalties for users.

The ban would not take effect until January 2024 and would become void if Congress passes a national measure or if TikTok severs its connections with China.

The bill was introduced in February, just weeks after a Chinese spy balloon drifted over Montana, but had been drafted prior to that.

A representative from the tech trade group TechNet told state lawmakers that app stores do not have the ability to geofence apps on a state-by-state basis, so the Apple App Store and Google Play Store could not enforce the law.

Ashley Sutton, TechNet's executive director for Washington state and the northwest, said Thursday that the "responsibility should be on an app to determine where it can operate, not an app store."

Knudsen, the attorney general, has said that apps for online gambling can be disabled in states that do not allow it, so the same should be possible for TikTok.

Hadero reported from New York.

## At Irish shrine, Biden meets priest who gave Beau last rites

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE, COLLEEN LONG and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

KNOCK, Ireland (AP) — President Joe Biden was moved to tears on Friday during a stop at a Catholic shrine when he discovered that a chaplain there had performed last rites for his late son Beau Biden.

"It was incredible to see him," Biden said later during remarks at the foot of a cathedral in nearby Ballina. "It seemed like a sign."

Knock Shrine is a pilgrimage site where, according to Catholic lore, the saints Mary, Joseph and John the Evangelist appeared near a stone wall in 1879. Biden touched the remaining old wall, and toured the site with priest Father Richard Gibbons.

Gibbons said he discovered earlier in the day that the Father Frank O'Grady working at the site was the same one who'd performed last rites, a ceremony in the Catholic faith that spiritually prepares people for



death, for Beau.

It's common in the Catholic faith for priests to move around to different posts during their lives in the church. O'Grady is a former U.S. Army chaplain and was formerly assigned to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, where Beau died in 2015 from brain cancer at the age of 46.

Gibbons said he did not know about the Biden connection until Friday.

"I told the president that," Gibbons told BBC Ulster. "He wanted to meet him straightaway, so he dispatched a Secret Service agent to go and find him."

He said it was "a wonderful, spontaneous thing that happened."

"He was crying and it really affected him," Gibbons said of Biden. "Then we said a prayer, we said a decade of the rosary for his family, we lit a candle. Then he took a moment or two for private prayer."

O'Grady told Irish national broadcaster RTE that he was summoned to meet the president.

"He gave me a big hug, it was like a reunion. He told me he appreciated everything that was done," he said. "I hadn't seen him really in eight years since Beau died. His son Hunter was there too, so we had a real reunion."

O'Grady said of the president, "He has been grieving a lot, but I think the grief is kind of going down a bit. We talked a little bit about how grief can take several years."

The death of his elder son rocked the president, who was vice president at the time. He said he chose not to run for president in 2016 in part because of Beau's death. He talks of Beau often, including during a speech to the Irish parliament this week when he said it was his son who should have been standing there as president.

After the visit to the shrine on Friday, Biden toured a hospice center that displays a plaque commemorating his son.

Biden was in Ireland this week with his sister Valerie and son Hunter, touring his ancestral home and meeting with the nation's leaders.

## Online gaming chats have long been spy risk for US military

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Step into a U.S. military recreation hall at a base almost anywhere in the world and you're bound to see it: young troops immersed in the world of online games, using government-funded gaming machines or their own consoles.

The enthusiasm military personnel have for gaming — and the risk that carries — is in the spotlight after Jack Teixeira, a 21-year-old Massachusetts Air National Guardsman, was charged with illegally taking and posting highly classified material in a geopolitical chat room on Discord, a social media platform that started as a hangout for gamers.

State secrets can be illegally shared in countless different ways, from whispered conversations and dead drops to myriad social media platforms. But online gaming forums have long been a particular worry of the military because of their lure for young service members. And U.S. officials are limited in how closely they can monitor those forums to make sure nothing on them threatens national security.

"The social media world and gaming sites in particular have been identified as a counterintelligence concern for about a decade," said Dan Meyer, a partner at the Tully Rinckey law firm, which specializes in military and security clearance issues.

Foreign intelligence agents could use an avatar in a gaming room to connect with "18 to 23-year-old sailors gaming from the rec center at Norfolk Naval Base, win their confidence over for months, and then, through that process, start to connect with them on other social media platforms," Meyer said, noting that U.S. spy agencies have also created avatars to conduct surveillance in the online games World of Warcraft and Second Life.

The military doesn't have the authority to conduct surveillance of U.S. citizens on U.S. soil — that's the role of domestic law enforcement agencies like the FBI. Even when monitoring members of the armed forces, there are privacy issues, something the Defense Department ran into head-on as it tried to estab-

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lish social media policies to counter extremism in the ranks.

The military does, however, have a presence in the online game community. Both the Army and the Navy have service members whose full-time job is to compete in video game tournaments as part of military esports teams. The teams are seen as an effective way to reach and potentially recruit youth who have grown up with online gaming since early childhood. But none of the services said they had any sort of similar team playing online to monitor for potential threats or leaks.

Pentagon spokeswoman Sue Gough said its intelligence activities are primarily focused internationally. In collecting any information on Americans, the Defense Department does so "in accordance with law and policy and in a manner that protects privacy and civil liberties," she said in a statement to The Associated Press. She said the procedures must be approved by the attorney general.

Instead, the military has focused on training service members never to reveal classified information in the first place. In wake of the online leaks, the department is reviewing its processes to protect classified information, reducing the number of people who have access, and reminding the force that "the responsibility to safeguard classified information is a lifetime requirement for each individual granted a security clearance," Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said in a memo issued Thursday following Teixeira's arrest.

But that may not be enough.

"These various gaming channels are just another form of social networks," said Peter W. Singer, whose novel "Burn In" centered on attacks on the U.S. that are plotted in a private chamber of an online war game — and where all the plotters use avatars of historical figures to disguise themselves.

Singer, who has advised the Pentagon on future warfare, expects that future espionage and plotting will likely find haven in some of these private online worlds.

"There's a shift from it being viewed as niche, and for kids to adults using it for everything from marketing and entertainment to criminality," Singer said. "Is this the future? Most definitely."

But besides the legal limitations on monitoring these games, the vast number of sites and private chats would be virtually impossible for the Pentagon to manage, Singer said.

"Your answer to this can't be 'How do I find it on video game channels?'" Singer said. "Your answer has to be, 'How do I keep it from getting out in the first place?'"

## Putin signs bill allowing electronic conscription notices

MOSCOW (AP) — Russian President Putin on Friday signed a bill allowing authorities to issue electronic notices to draftees and reservists amid the fighting in Ukraine, sparking fears of a new wave of mobilization.

Russia's military service rules previously required the in-person delivery of notices to conscripts and reservists who are called up for duty. Under the new law, 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.

In the past, many Russians avoided the draft by staying away from their address of record. The new law closes that loophole in an apparent effort to create a tool for quickly beefing up the military ahead of a widely anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive in the coming weeks.

Recipients who fail to show up for service would be prohibited from leaving Russia, would have their drivers' licenses suspended and would be barred from selling their apartments and other assets.

The bill signed into law by Putin was published on the official register of government documents.

Kremlin critics and rights activists denounced the legislation as a step toward a "digital prison camp" that gives unprecedented powers to the military conscription offices.

Lyudmila Narusova, the widow of former St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak, was the only house member who spoke against the measure when the Federation Council, the upper house of parliament, considered the bill Wednesday.

Narusova, whose late husband was Putin's mentor, charged that the bill contradicts the country's constitution and various laws, and strongly objected to its hasty approval.

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The swift enactment of the law fueled fears of the government initiating another wave of mobilization following the one that Putin ordered in the fall.

Russian authorities deny that another mobilization is being planned. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said this week that the measure was needed to streamline the outdated call-up system in view of the flaws that were revealed by last fall's partial mobilization.

"There was a lot of mess in military conscription offices," he said. "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.

Observers say the new law appears to give authorities a mechanism for quickly beefing up the ranks in preparation for a new Ukrainian attack.

"A possible reason is that they see that the Ukrainians are getting ready for an offensive," said Abbas Gallyamov, a former Putin speechwriter turned Kremlin critic who has left Russia.

Gallyamov has been labeled a "foreign agent" by the Russian authorities, a designation that implies additional government scrutiny and carries strong pejorative connotations aimed at undermining the recipient's credibility. He also has been put on a wanted list for criminal suspects.

Gallyamov said the law could fuel smoldering discontent but would be unlikely to trigger protests.

"On the one hand, there is a growing discontent and reluctance to fight, but on the other hand there is a fear of escalating repressions," he said. "People are put before a difficult choice between going to battle and dying, or landing in prison if they protest."

## Macron's new pension age overcomes last hurdle amid protests

By ELAINE GANLEY and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's Constitutional Council on Friday approved an unpopular plan to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 in a victory for President Emmanuel Macron after months of mass protests that have damaged his leadership.

The decision dismayed or enraged critics of the pension plan. Hundreds of union activists and others gathered peacefully in Paris Friday evening before some groups broke off in marches toward the historic Bastille plaza and beyond, setting fires to garbage bins and scooters as police fired tear gas or pushed them back.

Unions and Macron's political opponents vowed to maintain pressure on the government to withdraw the bill, and activists threatened scattered new protests Saturday.

Macron's office said he would enact the law in coming days, and he has said he wants it implemented by the end of the year. Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said Friday's decision "marks the end of the institutional and democratic path of this reform," adding that there was "no victor" in what has turned into a nationwide standoff and France's worst social unrest in years.

The council rejected some measures in the pension bill, but the higher age was central to Macron's plan and the target of protesters' anger. The government argued that the reform is needed to keep the pension system afloat as the population ages; opponents proposed raising taxes on the wealthy or employers instead, and said the changes threaten a hard-won social safety net.

In a separate but related decision, the council rejected a request by left-wing lawmakers to allow for a possible referendum on enshrining 62 as the maximum official retirement age. The council will rule on a second, similar request, next month.

Carl Pfeiffer, a 62-year-old retiree protesting outside City Hall, warned that the Constitutional Council's decision won't spell the end of tensions.

The council members "are irresponsible, because the anger that will come right after in the country, it's their fault," he said.

Bartender Lena Cayo, 22, said she was disappointed but not surprised by the decision.

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"We are protesting for so many weeks and the government didn't hear us," she said. "Workers who have gone on strike or protested the legislation since January are fighting "for their rights, but nothing changes."

As tensions mounted hours before the decision, Macron invited labor unions to meet with him on Tuesday no matter what the Constitutional Council decision was, his office said. The unions rejected Macron's invitation, noting that he had refused their previous offers of a meeting, and called for mass new protests on May 1, international workers' rights day.

Unions have been the organizers of 12 nationwide protests since January and have a critical role in trying to tamp down excessive reactions by protesters. Violence by pockets of ultra-left radicals have marked the otherwise peaceful nationwide marches.

The plan to increase the retirement age was meant to be Macron's showcase measure in his second term. The council decision caps months of tumultuous debates in parliament and fervor in the streets.

Spontaneous demonstrations were held around France ahead of the nine-member council's ruling. Opponents of the pension reform blockaded entry points into some cities, including Rouen in the west and Marseille in the south, slowing or stopping traffic.

The prime minister was interrupted while visiting a supermarket outside Paris by a group of people chanting, "We don't want it," referring to the way she skirted the vote by lawmakers to advance the pension reform.

The government's decision to get around a parliamentary vote in March by using special constitutional powers heightened the fury of the measure's opponents, as well as their determination. Another group awaited Borne in the parking lot.

Union leaders have said the Constitutional Council's decisions would be respected, but have vowed to continue protests in an attempt to get Macron to withdraw the measure.

The leader of the moderate CFDT, Laurent Berger, warned that "there will be repercussions."

Holding out hope to upend the decision, unions and some protesters recalled parallels with a contested 2006 measure about work contracts for youth that sent students, joined by unions, into the streets. That legislation had been pushed through parliament without a vote and given the green light by the Constitutional Council — only to be later scrapped to bring calm to the country.

Far-right lawmaker Marine Le Pen denounced the pension reform as "brutal and unjust." In a statement, she said that once the reform is put into practice it "will mark the definitive rupture between the French people and Emmanuel Macron."

Polls have consistently shown that the majority of French citizens are opposed to working two more years before being able to reap pension benefits. The legislation also requires people to work 43 years to receive a full pension, among other changes to the system.

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Jade le Deley and Jeffrey Schaeffer in Paris contributed.

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Follow AP's coverage of the French government at <https://apnews.com/hub/france-government>

## America's first heroes: Revolutionary War soldiers reburied

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The 12 U.S. soldiers died in a pine forest in South Carolina in 1780, their bodies hastily buried beneath a thin layer of soil as their comrades fled from the British who appeared ready to put a quick and brutal end to the American Experiment.

But later this month, the carefully gathered and studied remains of the dozen unknown soldiers are getting a proper memorial and burial where they fell on the Camden battlefield. It's part of the ongoing 250th anniversary commemorations of the Revolutionary War, which historians hope will highlight history that unites instead of divides.

"Our democracy is the oldest in the world — we don't always get it right, and we have fought amongst ourselves more than I care to think about. But today, we are the most powerful country in the world. This

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is what you paid for with your life," reads a letter from Air Force veteran Stacey Ferguson that was placed in the soldiers' coffins in late March as she helped prepare the remains for reburial.

But the soldiers' excavation and reburial is not only a memorial. It's also illustrative of what modern science can do. Several of the fallen were teenagers, and one had a musket ball in his spine. Their names may soon be discovered through DNA testing and genealogy.

However, there are limits to what can be discovered. Time took its toll on the bodies. Bones that didn't decompose to dust were scattered by wild animals, souvenir hunters and a mid-1900s farmer growing watermelons. Some of the remains showed scars from plows or other equipment. Consequentially, a gap in a bone might be a wound from a musket ball or a bayonet — or it might not be.

"For a lot of these people, we were not able to ascertain their exact cause of death. The skeletons are very fragmented," said Madeline Atwell, a deputy coroner and forensic anthropologist with the Richland County Coroner's Office.

Atwell's office has spent several months helping other archeologists carefully dig up the soil at the site. When remains were found, they were draped in a U.S. flag and a veteran escorted them to a truck.

The remains have been X-rayed, tested and meticulously cataloged. They are now being prepared for a reburial ceremony worthy of what historians are calling America's first heroes.

"They are truly America's first veterans. We have a responsibility to honor their sacrifice," said Doug Bostick, the CEO of the South Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust.

A huge ceremony is planned in South Carolina from April 20-22. The soldiers will be honored at the national cemetery at Columbia's Fort Jackson Army basic training base before heading on a 20-mile (32-kilometer) procession to Camden. They will lie in state for two days before horse-drawn caissons carry them back to their resting places.

A similar project is underway in New Jersey, where the bodies of as many as 12 German soldiers, called Hessians, who fought for the British were found in a mass grave at the Red Bank battlefield. In-depth testing, including DNA, are taking place there as well.

"History is an ongoing process. It's not like we've written the Battle of Red Bank and we know everything that happened," said Jennifer Janofsky, a public historian at Rowan University and director of Red Bank Battlefield Park. "We have a better opportunity to tell a more complete story of these individuals. Who were they? Why were they here? What was their fate?"

These soldiers are the lucky ones — they can be remembered.

Many of the 900 killed in Camden — one of the most disastrous battles for the U.S. — were left above ground, where wild animals and South Carolina's heat and humidity removed any trace of them within a few years. Nearly every American soldier in the Battle of Camden on August, 16, 1780, either deserted or was killed, wounded or captured, historians have said.

But it was a turning point. The Continental Congress followed George Washington's recommendation and appointed Nathanael Greene to take over the Southern armies. In a little more than a year, Greene's forces pushed the British north into Virginia, eventually trapping them with French help at Yorktown, effectively winning the Revolutionary War.

Key to that victory was South Carolina, where Bostick and other Revolutionary War enthusiasts are trying to revive enthusiasm for the conflict. In the first half of the 1800s, historians gave South Carolina credit for winning the U.S. independence. Battles and skirmishes were fought in 42 of the state's 46 counties.

But South Carolina rebelled again and lost the Civil War, and historians reacted to that attempt to tear apart what was knitted together in 1776.

"The South really got written out of the Revolutionary War in history books after the Civil War," Bostick said.

Organizers of South Carolina's commemorations of the 250th anniversary of the Revolutionary War are remembering battles, but also want to emphasize American ideals of democracy and the country's ability to change, mature and acknowledge where it has fallen short.

Ferguson thought about that as she worked on her note to the long-fallen soldiers. As director of opera-

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tions for the Historic Camden Foundation, she has been there every step of the way in preserving and honoring them. Among the total of 14 excavated bodies are one Scottish Highlander and one soldier from North Carolina, both of whom were fighting for the British. They will be honored as well.

The U.S. soldiers appear to be from Maryland or Delaware. Researchers are collecting DNA from them, and people who have ancestors who died in the Revolutionary War are already volunteering to give samples in hopes the soldiers won't remain unknown forever. That work is still months or years away.

For now, Ferguson has helped other archeologists and Richland County Coroner's Office employees carefully place the remains into handmade longleaf pine coffins, built from 18th century designs, which will be sealed with nails a blacksmith made individually.

They sprinkled dirt from the site where each man was recovered into the coffin. And they all signed Ferguson's letter, in which the one-time Air Force officer told the soldiers they probably couldn't fathom the power and riches their country gained in the 250 years since they died.

As an officer, Ferguson said she felt a duty to take care of them like she did the men and women in her command.

"You died a brave, yet horrible death far from home and loved ones. You were unceremoniously dumped into a shallow grave with so many more just like you. Now we will give you the hero's farewell you deserve," Ferguson wrote. "All I can say is thank you on behalf of a grateful nation."

## Minneapolis OKs dawn Muslim prayer call, 1st for big US city

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (AP) — Minneapolis will allow broadcasts of the Muslim call to prayer at all hours, becoming the first major U.S. city to allow the announcement or "adhan" to be heard over speakers five times a day, year-round.

The Minneapolis City Council unanimously agreed Thursday to amend the city's noise ordinance, which had prevented dawn and late evening calls at certain times of the year due to noise restrictions, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported. The vote came during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"The Constitution doesn't sleep at night," said Jaylani Hussein, executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, after the vote. He said the action in Minneapolis shows the world that a "nation founded on freedom of religion makes good on its promise."

Minneapolis has had a flourishing population of East African immigrants since at least the 1990s, and mosques now are common. Three of 13 members of the council identify as Muslim. The decision drew no organized community opposition. Mayor Jacob Frey is expected to sign the measure next week.

"Minneapolis has become a city for all religions," said Imam Mohammed Dukuly of Masjid An-Nur mosque in Minneapolis, who was among several Muslim leaders who witnessed the vote.

Three years ago, city officials worked with the Dar Al-Hijrah mosque to allow the adhan to be broadcast outdoors five times daily during Ramadan. Prayers are said when light appears at dawn, at noon, at mid- to late afternoon, at sunset and when the night sky appears. In Minnesota, dawn arrives as early as before 5:30 a.m. in summer, while sunset at the solstice happens after 9 p.m.

The city allowed year-round broadcasts last year, but only between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. — typically excluding early morning prayer and sometimes night prayer.

At a recent public hearing, Christian and Jewish leaders expressed support for extending the hours for the adhan.

Council Member Lisa Goodman, who on Thursday was observing the final day of Passover, said the Jewish call to prayer — which is generally spoken rather than broadcast — doesn't face legal restrictions. Observers said church bells regularly toll for Christians.

"It's something I grew up with, but not my children," council member Jamal Osman said, adding that hearing the call to prayer from local mosques brings him joy.

## Leak suspect appears in court as US spells out its case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A Massachusetts Air National Guardsman accused in the leak of highly classified military documents appeared in court Friday as prosecutors unsealed charges and revealed how billing records and interviews with social media comrades helped pinpoint the suspect.

Among the revelations: That the platform Discord provided information that helped lead the FBI to guardsman Jack Teixeira, and that Teixeira used his government computer to search for the word "leak" on the day last week when news media reports revealed that classified documents had been improperly disclosed.

President Joe Biden said the government was working to determine "the validity" of the leaked documents. In the meantime, he said in a White House statement, "I have directed our military and intelligence community to take steps to further secure and limit distribution of sensitive information, and our national security team is closely coordinating with our partners and allies."

Friday's new details about the highest-profile intelligence leak in years shed light on how investigators came to zero in on Teixeira, 21, even though a motive for the disclosures remains publicly unexplained. The Justice Department has said its investigation is continuing, and the Pentagon, which earlier in the week called it a serious national security breach, said it would conduct its own review of access to sensitive intelligence to prevent a similar leak in the future.

Teixeira appeared in federal court in Boston to face charges, under the Espionage Act, of unauthorized retention and transmission of classified national defense information. He did not enter a plea, but a federal magistrate judge ordered him jailed until a detention hearing next week.

The court appearance came less than 24 hours after Teixeira was arrested by heavily armed tactical agents on Thursday following a weeklong criminal investigation into the disclosure of the government records, a breach that exposed to the world unvarnished secret assessments on the war in Ukraine, the capabilities and geopolitical interests of other nations and other national security issues.

"This is not just about taking home documents. That is of course itself illegal. But this is about the transmission, both the unlawful retention and the transmission of the documents. Everyone knows here that the documents in the end were transmitted," Attorney General Merrick Garland said Friday at the Justice Department.

Investigators believe Teixeira was the leader of an online private chat group on Discord, a social media platform popular with people playing online games and where Teixeira is believed to have posted for years about guns, games and his favorite memes.

The eight-page court affidavit details several steps in the FBI investigation, including an interview Monday with a Discord user familiar with Teixeira's online posts. The document does not identify the person or say how he or she was located. But the source told the FBI that a username linked to Teixeira began posting what appeared to be classified information roughly in December in an online chat that the user said was meant for the discussion of geopolitical affairs and past and current wars.

The person provided the FBI with basic identifying information about Teixeira, including that he called himself "Jack," claimed to be part of the Air National Guard and appeared to live in Massachusetts, according to the affidavit.

Billing records the FBI subsequently obtained from Discord, which has said it was cooperating with the bureau, helped lead investigators to Teixeira, according to the FBI affidavit.

The person also told the FBI that Teixeira switched from typing out documents in his possession to taking them home and photographing them because he "had become concerned that he may be discovered making the transcriptions of text in the workplace."

That's different from what posters have told The Associated Press and other media outlets, saying the user they would call "the O.G." started posting images of documents because he was annoyed other users weren't taking him seriously.

Known as Thug Shaker Central, the group drew roughly two dozen enthusiasts who talked about their favorite types of guns and also shared memes and jokes. The group also held a running discussion on

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wars that included talk of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The affidavit also alleges Teixeira was detected on April 6 – the day The New York Times first published a story about the breach of documents – searching for the word “leak” in a classified system. The FBI says that was reason to believe Teixeira was trying to find information about the investigation into who was responsible for the leaks.

The Justice Department has not alleged a particular motive. Accounts of those in the online private chat group where the documents were disclosed have depicted Teixeira as motivated more by bravado than ideology.

His court appearance Friday was brief. He entered the room in tan jail clothes and sat at the defense table next to his lawyer. At the end, a man who appeared to be a family member in the front row told Teixeira he loved him and the defendant responded “I love you, too.” His lawyer did not return a message seeking comment.

The Biden administration has scrambled to contain the potential diplomatic and military fallout from the leaks since they were first reported, moving to reassure allies and assess the scope of damage.

The classified documents — which have not been individually authenticated in public by U.S. officials — range from briefing slides mapping out Ukrainian military positions to assessments of international support for Ukraine and other sensitive topics, including under what circumstances Russian President Vladimir Putin might use nuclear weapons.

Classified documents have strict guidelines on how they must be handled, secured and destroyed. They are required to be kept in secure facilities, protocols Teixeira would have violated if copies were taken to his house.

It's still not known how Teixeira, an information technology specialist, allegedly obtained the documents, or what safeguards had been in place. The FBI said that he has held a top secret security clearance since 2021 with access to highly classified programs.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, in a statement issued after the arrest, said the Pentagon would conduct a review of its “intelligence access, accountability and control procedures” to prevent such a leak from happening again.

At the Justice Department, Garland noted government officials and others who have clearance to review classified documents sign agreements that “acknowledge the importance to national security of not disclosing those documents.”

“We intend to send that message: how important it is to our national security,” he said.

AP writers Tucker and Merchant reported from Washington. AP writers Lindsay Whitehurst and Tara Copp contributed to this report.

## Profits at big US banks show few signs of industry distress

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The nation's largest banks appear to be weathering the current turmoil in their industry just fine.

Despite a pair of historical failures last month that put the nation's banking industry into crisis mode, the nation's biggest banks posted strong profits last quarter, helped by higher interest rates and a U.S. economy that keeps growing and adding jobs even as the Federal Reserve attempts to curb inflation.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. posted a 52% jump in its first-quarter profits. The bank saw deposits grow noticeably, as businesses and customers flocked to the banking titan after the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank last month. Wells Fargo said that it earned \$5 billion, or \$1.23 per share, in the three months ended March 31, beating analyst projections by 10 cents a share. Revenue also topped Wall Street's forecast.

Meanwhile Citigroup also beat analysts' estimates on revenue, although its bottom line was impacted by one-time losses on some investments.



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"These were the most watched bank earnings announcements in over a decade, with market participants scouring the results looking for signs of cracks in the US banking sector. Those analysts looking for signs of the banking crisis were greatly relieved to not find any," said Octavio Marenzi, CEO of the consulting firm Opimas LLC, in an email.

"What crisis?" analysts at UBS titled a report after JPMorgan, Wells and PNC Financial reported their results.

Investors have been deeply concerned about the banks going into this earnings season after the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. While banks have benefitted from being able to charge customers more for loans in a higher interest rate environment, banks have also accumulated billions of dollars in paper losses on bonds and other securities bought when interest rates were lower.

The biggest banks have been the least of investors' worries because the size of their massive balance sheets and diversity of their businesses — business loans, credit cards, trading, investment banking, etc. — allow them to hold a variety of securities. But more notably, the largest banks have long carried an implicit government backstop as being "too big to fail" since the 2008 financial crisis.

This backstop has attracted billions of deposits to the largest banks since Silicon Valley Bank's collapse. JPMorgan grew deposits by \$37 billion during the quarter, up to \$2.4 trillion. Deposits at big banks had been falling for several quarters as consumers spent down their pandemic savings and businesses tapped into their stored cash to pay bills. But following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in March, some businesses withdrew their funds from smaller banks and moved them into the larger banks.

With midsize banks facing potential runs on their deposits, regulators again turned to the larger institutions for help, particularly JPMorgan and its CEO, Jamie Dimon, which have been the industry's go-to problem solvers for banking issues for years now.

After Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank failed, JPMorgan helped put together a consortium of other big banks to keep First Republic Bank from being next to collapse. The group of banks put \$30 billion in uninsured deposits into First Republic, a move that appears to have at least bought the midsize bank some time to repair its balance sheet and maybe find a buyer.

"The U.S. economy continues to be on generally healthy footings — consumers are still spending and have strong balance sheets, and businesses are in good shape. However, the storm clouds that we have been monitoring for the past year remain on the horizon, and the banking industry turmoil adds to these risks," Dimon said in a statement.

In a call with reporters, JPMorgan executives said they saw roughly \$50 billion come into the bank after SVB failed. They aren't sure how long those deposits will stay with the bank, however, as depositors have been broadly looking for higher yielding bank accounts and could choose to move their money elsewhere.

While the biggest banks seem fine, it's the midsize banks that report next week that will attract more attention than usual. Banks such as KeyCorp, Zions Bank, Comerica and others saw their stocks get hit hard due to being similar in business and size to Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

While the biggest banks reported strong results, most banks on their calls with investors still expect some sort of slowdown in the U.S. economy later this year. Citigroup's CEO Jane Fraser told investors that the bank now expects a "mild" recession at the end of the year, saying there are signs that consumer spending is slowing down. A report Friday showing shoppers pulled back on spending at retail stores supported that analysis.

The big banks also said they haven't tightened their lending since the two banks' failures as well, one thing economists and investors had been concerned about as banks typically try to protect their balance sheets during times of turmoil.

## City: Schwarzenegger repaired utility trench, not a pothole

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The “giant pothole” that Arnold Schwarzenegger said he recently filled on a street in his Los Angeles neighborhood was actually a trench that had been dug for utility work, according to the city.

Southern California Gas Co. had covered the trench with temporary asphalt that was to be replaced with a permanent surface, the Los Angeles Department of Public Works said in a statement.

“We have notified the Gas Company of the issue and the need for them to maintain the site pavement until their permanent paving is constructed,” the statement said.

After months of heavy rains that have turned roads into tire-popping swiss cheese for many commuters, Schwarzenegger struck a chord when he released a video of himself and a crew filling a depression on a street with packaged asphalt patch.

“Today, after the whole neighborhood has been upset about this giant pothole that’s been screwing up cars and bicycles for weeks, I went out with my team and fixed it,” he wrote on Twitter. “I always say, let’s not complain, let’s do something about it. Here you go.”

A passing motorist paused to thank the actor, who also filled another smaller hole.

SoCal Gas said in a statement that an upgrade of a pipeline system there was completed on Jan. 26 but rain delayed permanent paving, which is usually done in about 30 days. The utility’s crews returned to the site on Wednesday, a day after Schwarzenegger posted his video, and leveled off the patch he’d completed to make it stronger. It expects to finish permanent paving of the site on Tuesday.

“Teamwork. Happy to help speed this up, and thanks to the crew for pumping up my fix,” the former governor tweeted Friday.

## El Chapo sons among 28 Sinaloa cartel members charged by US

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Friday announced charges against more than two dozen members of Mexico’s powerful Sinaloa cartel, including sons of notorious drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, in a sprawling fentanyl-trafficking investigation.

The three Guzman sons charged — Ovidio Guzmán López, Jesús Alfredo Guzmán Salazar and Iván Archivaldo Guzmán Sálazar — are known as the Chapitos, or little Chapos, and have earned a reputation as the more violent and aggressive faction of the cartel.

Of the three, only Guzmán López is in custody, in Mexico.

Attorney General Merrick Garland, standing alongside Drug Enforcement Administration chief Anne Milgram and other top federal prosecutors, unveiled the indictments in three districts aimed at hitting the cartel’s global network.

The defendants span a broad swath of a complex manufacturing and supply network. They include Chinese and Guatemalan citizens accused of supplying precursor chemicals required to make fentanyl, as well as those suspected of running drug labs in Mexico and others accused of providing security, weapons and illicit financing for the drug trafficking operation.

The wide-ranging case comes as the U.S. remains in the grip of a devastating overdose crisis largely by fentanyl poisonings. Nearly 107,000 Americans died of drug overdoses in the U.S. in 2021, a record-setting number.

Fentanyl seizures by U.S. Customs and Border Protection have increased by more than 400% since 2019, officials said, and this fiscal year’s seizures have already surpassed the total for all of 2022.

Most of the fentanyl trafficked in the United States comes from the Sinaloa cartel, the Drug Enforcement Administration says.

“Families and communities across our country are being devastated by the fentanyl epidemic,” Garland said. “We will never forget those who bear responsibility for this tragedy. And we will never stop working to hold them accountable for their crimes in the United States.”

The Sinaloa cartel’s notorious drug lord, known as El Chapo, was convicted in 2019 of running an

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industrial-scale smuggling operation. At Guzman's trial, prosecutors said evidence gathered since the late 1980s showed he and his murderous cartel made billions of dollars by smuggling tons of cocaine, heroin, meth and marijuana into the U.S. A defiant Guzman accused the federal judge in his case of making a mockery of the U.S. justice system and claimed he was denied a fair trial.

In outlining the charges Friday, Garland described the violence of the Sinaloa cartel and how its members have tortured perceived enemies, including Mexican law enforcement officials. That has included people fed to tigers owned by Guzman's sons, sometimes while the victims were still alive, Garland said.

Eight of those charged have been arrested and remain in the custody of law enforcement officials in Colombia, Greece, Guatemala and the U.S., Milgram said. The U.S. government is offering rewards for several others charged in the case, including up to \$10 million for Guzman's other two sons.

Friday's indictments were filed in New York, Illinois, and Washington, D.C.

Along with the five defendants from China and Guatemala accused of supplying the cartel with precursor chemicals, two Chinese firms were also sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control Friday.

U.S. government officials are pressing Chinese officials to do more to stem the shipment of those chemicals. With Washington-Beijing relations strained, the Biden administration says it has looked to allies in Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere to make clear to China that the issue is a global problem, according to senior Biden administration officials who briefed reporters following the announcement of the indictment.

Ovidio Guzmán López, one of Guzmán's sons, was arrested in January in the Sinaloa capital of Culiacan. Ovidio Guzmán, nicknamed the Mouse, had not been one of El Chapo's better-known sons until an aborted operation to capture him three years earlier. This time Mexico successfully got Guzmán out of Culiacan. In 2019, authorities had him, but they released him after his gunmen began shooting up the city.

Some 30 people among authorities and suspected gunmen died in the operation, which unleashed hours of shootouts shutting down the city's airport. The U.S. government is currently awaiting the younger Guzmán's extradition.

Ovidio Guzmán López and another brother, Joaquín Guzmán López, allegedly helped move the Sinaloa cartel hard into methamphetamines, producing prodigious quantities in large labs. They were previously indicted in 2018 in Washington on drug trafficking charges.

The other two sons, Jesús Alfredo Guzmán Salazar and Iván Archivaldo Guzmán Salazar, are believed to have been running cartel operations together with Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada. They were previously also charged in the U.S. in Chicago and San Diego.

Zambada had been rumored to be in poor health and isolated in the mountains leading the sons to try to assert a stronger role to keep the cartel together.

The DEA said it investigated the case in 10 countries: Australia, Austria, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Greece, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and the United States.

"Death and destruction are central to their whole operation," Milgram said of the cartel. "Today's indictments strike a blow against the Chapitos and the global network they operate, a network that fuels violence and death on both sides of the border."

Sherman reported from Mexico City. Associated Press writers Fatima Hussein and Amer Madhani in Washington contributed to this story.

## **NJ charges itself with damaging land it was bound to protect**

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection has charged itself with damaging habitat for threatened and endangered birds that it was supposed to protect.

The work was designed to create habitat for one species of bird, but actually wound up destroying habitat for two others.

The department acknowledged it sent a violation notice and threatened penalties against its own Division of Fish and Wildlife regarding unauthorized work in February and March at the Glassboro Wildlife

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Management Area in Clayton, Gloucester County.

It was unclear how any penalties might work when the DEP is both the accuser and the accused. It also was not immediately clear whether any money might actually change hands. The department did not respond to questions about potential fines.

The work involved the clearing of vegetation and disturbance of soils on nearly 3 acres of what the state calls "exceptional resource value freshwater wetlands." Before the work was done, this land was considered suitable habitat for the barred owl, which is listed as a threatened species, and the red-shouldered hawk, an endangered species.

The project also cleared and disturbed an additional 12 acres of land near wetlands known as transition areas, which also are protected.

The DEP refused Friday to discuss how the work happened without authorization.

On its website, the department wrote on Feb. 1 that the work sought to create 21 acres of habitat for the American woodcock, a member of the sandpiper family that uses its long, narrow beak to forage for earthworms in damp soil. The project was designed to create "meadow habitat."

But in doing so, the state destroyed mature oak and pine forests in and near wetlands, and filled in some wetlands, four conservation groups said in a letter to the department in early March complaining about the work. The agency issued the violation notice on April 6.

"The wetland soil and flora that were previously undisturbed have been destroyed, and the mature forest that was already habitat for numerous rare species of plants and birds was clear-cut logged," the groups wrote. "All trees have been cut, and all stumps bulldozed."

Tom Gilbert, a leader of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, said, "This never should have happened. They must also take steps to improve their clearly inadequate internal review process and meaningfully engage the public."

Jaclyn Rhoads, assistant executive director of the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, commended the state for owning up to its mistake, but said the DEP should provide a list of current projects on its website for public review.

"It is because of the public that we were able to stop further destruction of this landscape," she said.

Agency spokesman Larry Hajna said the Fish and Wildlife Division's Bureau of Land Management must implement appropriate soil conservation measures within 10 days and submit a plan within 30 days to restore the site. That must include removal of wood chips placed there.

By the end of April, the DEP intends to issue a notice of penalty assessment.

Fish and Wildlife will propose additional environmentally beneficial measures, which will be subject to a public comment period, Hajna said.

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Follow Wayne Parry on Twitter at [twitter.com/WayneParryAC](https://twitter.com/WayneParryAC)

## European spacecraft on way to Jupiter and its icy moons

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

A European spacecraft rocketed away Friday on a decadelong quest to explore Jupiter and three of its icy moons that could hold buried oceans.

The journey began with a perfect morning liftoff by Europe's Ariane rocket from French Guiana on the coast of South America. But there were some tense minutes later as controllers awaited signals from the spacecraft.

When contact finally was confirmed close to an hour into the flight, Mission Control in Germany declared: "The spacecraft is alive!"

It will take the robotic explorer, dubbed Juice, eight years to reach Jupiter, where it will scope out not only the solar system's biggest planet but also Europa, Callisto and Ganymede. The three ice-encrusted moons are believed to harbor underground oceans, where sea life could exist.

Then in perhaps the most impressive feat of all, Juice will attempt to go into orbit around Ganymede:

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No spacecraft has ever orbited a moon other than our own.

With so many moons — at last count 95 — astronomers consider Jupiter a mini solar system of its own, with missions like Juice long overdue.

“This is a mission that is answering questions of science that are burning to all of us,” said European Space Agency’s director general, Josef Aschbacher after the launch. “Of course, one of these questions is: Is there life out there?”

It can’t find life, “but Juice will be identifying the habitability of these icy moons around Jupiter,” he added.

The spacecraft is taking a long, roundabout route to Jupiter, covering 4 billion miles (6.6 billion kilometers)

It will swoop within 125 miles (200 kilometers) of Callisto and 250 miles (400 kilometers) of Europa and Ganymede, completing 35 flybys while circling Jupiter. Then it will hit the brakes to orbit Ganymede, the primary target of the 1.6 billion-euro mission (nearly \$1.8 billion).

Ganymede is not only the solar system’s largest moon — it surpasses Mercury — but has its own magnetic field with dazzling auroras at the poles.

Even more enticing, it’s thought to have an underground ocean holding more water than Earth. Ditto for Europa and its reported geysers, and heavily cratered Callisto, a potential destination for humans given its distance from Jupiter’s debilitating radiation belts, according to Carnegie Institution’s Scott Sheppard, who’s not involved with the Juice mission.

“The ocean worlds in our solar system are the most likely to have possible life, so these large moons of Jupiter are prime candidates to search,” said Sheppard, a moon hunter who’s helped discover well over 100 in the outer solar system.

The spacecraft, about the size of a small bus, won’t reach Jupiter until 2031, relying on gravity-assist flybys of Earth and our moon, as well as Venus.

“These things take time — and they change our world,” said the Planetary Society’s chief executive, Bill Nye. The California-based space advocacy group organized a virtual watch party for the launch.

Belgium’s King Philippe and Prince Gabriel, and a pair of astronauts — France’s Thomas Pesquet and Germany’s Matthias Maurer — were among the spectators in French Guiana. Thursday’s launch attempt was nixed by the threat of lightning.

Juice — short for Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer — will spend three years buzzing Callisto, Europa and Ganymede. The spacecraft will attempt to enter orbit around Ganymede in late 2034, circling the moon for nearly a year before flight controllers send it crashing down in 2035, later if enough fuel remains.

Europa is especially attractive to scientists hunting for signs of life beyond Earth. Juice will keep its Europa encounters to a minimum, however, because of the intense radiation there so close to Jupiter.

Juice’s sensitive electronics are encased in lead to protect against radiation. The 14,000-pound (6,350-kilogram) spacecraft also is wrapped with thermal blankets — temperatures near Jupiter hover around minus 380 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 230 degrees Celsius). And its solar panels stretch 88 feet (27 meters) tip to tip to soak in as much sunlight that far from the sun.

Late next year, NASA will send an even more heavily shielded spacecraft to Jupiter, the long-awaited Europa Clipper, which will beat Juice to Jupiter by more than a year because it will launch on SpaceX’s mightier rocket. The two spacecraft will team up to study Europa like never before.

NASA has long dominated exploration at Jupiter, beginning with flybys in the 1970s by the twin Pioneers and then Voyagers. Only one spacecraft remains humming at Jupiter: NASA’s Juno, which just logged its 50th orbit since 2016.

Europe provided nine of Juice’s science instruments, with NASA supplying just one.

If Juice confirms underground oceans conducive to past or present life, project scientist Olivier Witasse said the next step will be to send drills to penetrate the icy crusts and maybe even a submarine.

“We have to be creative,” he said. “We can still think it’s science fiction, but sometimes the science fiction can join the reality.”

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## China vows not to sell arms to any party in Ukraine war

BEIJING (AP) — China won't sell weapons to either side in the war in Ukraine, the country's foreign minister said Friday, responding to Western concerns that Beijing could provide military assistance to Russia.

China has maintained that it is neutral in the conflict, while backing Russia politically, rhetorically and economically at a time when Western nations have imposed punishing sanctions and sought to isolate Moscow for its invasion of its neighbor.

Qin Gang is the highest-level Chinese official to make such an explicit statement about arms sales to Russia. He added that China would also regulate the export of items with dual civilian and military use.

"Regarding the export of military items, China adopts a prudent and responsible attitude," Qin said at a news conference alongside visiting German counterpart Annalena Baerbock. "China will not provide weapons to relevant parties of the conflict, and manage and control the exports of dual-use items in accordance with laws and regulations."

The minister also reiterated China's willingness to help find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

At the same news conference, Qin also blamed Taiwan's government for heightened regional tensions after Beijing held large-scale military drills in an attempt to intimidate the island it claims as its own territory.

In February, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. had intelligence suggesting China was considering providing arms and ammunition to Russia — and warned that such involvement in the Kremlin's war effort would be a "serious problem."

The White House on Friday welcomed Qin's pledge that China won't supply weapons to Russia, but expressed a measure of trepidation.

"As we've said all along, we don't believe it's in China's best interest to move in that direction. We will continue to monitor closely," White House National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said in a statement.

European leaders have issued similar warnings, even as they visited China, and the European Union's foreign policy chief lashed out at Beijing, saying its support of Russia during the invasion was "a blatant violation" of its United Nations commitments.

In her remarks, Baerbock also referred to China's role as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, saying it bore a special responsibility for helping end the conflict.

"But I have to wonder why the Chinese positioning so far does not include a call for the aggressor, Russia, to stop the war," she said. "We all know that President (Vladimir) Putin would have the opportunity to do so at any time, and the people in Ukraine would like nothing more than to finally be able to live in peace again."

A visit to Moscow last month by Chinese leader Xi Jinping underscored how Beijing is increasingly becoming the senior partner in the relationship as it provides Russia with an economic lifeline and political cover. China announced Friday that Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu would visit Russia next week for meetings with counterpart Sergei Shoigu and other military officials.

On both Ukraine and Taiwan, Qin articulated well-worn defenses of Chinese policies that underscore Beijing's rejection of criticisms from the West, particularly the U.S. Under the ardently nationalist Xi, China has sharpened its rhetoric, particularly on the issue of Taiwan, which split from mainland China amid civil war in 1949.

Tensions around the island rose significantly after China deployed warships and fighter planes near Taiwan last weekend in retaliation for a meeting between U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and the island's president, Tsai Ing-wen.

China insists that self-governing Taiwan submit to its rule, either peacefully or by force, and Qin said the pursuit of independence by Taiwan's government and its foreign supporters — a veiled reference to chief ally the United States — were the reason for the tensions.

Baerbock warned that a conflict in the Taiwan Strait, through which much of the world's international trade passes, would bring global disaster.

"We therefore view the increasing tensions in the Taiwan Strait with great concern," she said. "Conflicts must be resolved peacefully. A unilateral change of the status quo would not be acceptable to us as Eu-

ropeans.”

Apparently rejecting Baerbock’s concerns, Qin said Taiwan was “China’s internal affair.”

“Taiwan independence and peace cannot co-exist,” he said.

## Senegal gas deal drives locals to desperation, prostitution

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

SAINT-LOUIS, Senegal (AP) — When the gas rig arrived off the coast of Saint-Louis, residents of this seaside Senegalese town found reason to hope. Fishing has long been the community’s lifeblood, but the industry was struggling with climate change and COVID-19. Officials promised the drilling would soon bring thousands of jobs and diversification of the economy.

Instead, residents say, the rig has brought only a wave of problems, unemployment and more poverty. And it’s forced some women to turn to prostitution to support their families, they told The Associated Press in interviews.

To make way for the drilling of some 15 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (425 billion cubic meters) discovered off the coasts of Senegal and neighboring Mauritania in West Africa in 2015, access to fertile fishing waters was cut off, with the creation of an exclusion zone that prevents fishermen from working in the area.

At first, the restricted areas were small, but they expanded to 1.6 square kilometers (0.62 square miles), roughly the size of 300 football fields, with construction of the platform that looms about 6 miles (10 kilometers) offshore.

Soon the work was overtaking the diattara, a word in the local Wolof language for the fertile fishing ground that lies on the ocean floor beneath the platform. With 90% of the town’s 250,000 people relying on fishing for income, the catch — and paychecks — were shrinking. Boxes of fish turned into small buckets, then nothing at all.

Saint-Louis, Senegal’s historic center for fishing, has faced many troubles over the past decade. Sea erosion from climate change washed away homes, forcing moves. Thousands of foreign industrial trawlers, many of them illegal, snapped up vast amounts of fish, and local men in small wooden boats couldn’t compete. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down market sales of the tiny hauls they could manage.

The rig was the final straw for Saint-Louis, pushing it to the brink of economic disaster, according to locals, officials and advocates. The benefits promised from the initial discovery of energy off the coast haven’t materialized. Production for the liquified natural gas deal — planned by a partnership among global gas and oil giants BP and Kosmos Energy and Senegal and Mauritania’s state-owned oil companies — has yet to begin.

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Traditionally, many women make a living processing fish, while the men catch it; sons, husbands and fathers spend weeks at sea. But with the restrictions, families couldn’t feed their children or pay rent. They begged for leftovers from neighbors. Some were evicted.

Senegalese officials and the gas companies say people should be patient, as jobs and benefits from the gas deal will materialize. But locals say they’ve been stripped of their livelihoods and provided with no alternatives. That’s driven some women to prostitution, an industry that’s been legal in Senegal for five decades but still brings shame for those who break cultural and religious norms.

For them, prostitution is faster and more reliable than working in a shop or restaurant — jobs that don’t pay well and can be hard to find.

Four women who have started having sex with men for money since the rig came to town shared their stories with the AP on condition of anonymity because of the shame they associate with the work. They’ve hidden it from their husbands and families. They say they know many others like them.

The women explain the influx of cash as loans from friends and relatives. They know prostitution is

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legal but won't register with Senegalese officials. That would mean a health screening and an official ID to carry with them.

They're unwilling to legitimize work they say has been forced upon them.

\_\_\_\_\_ For one family of seven, hitting bottom came when they were evicted. The father, a 45-year-old fisherman, lost his job. There wasn't enough food to feed the five children, ages 2 to 11.

The mother tried washing clothes and other jobs, but at less than \$10 a day, it wasn't enough. The family moved in with relatives and she had nothing to feed the children before school each morning.

"I'm obliged to find money through prostitution," she told the AP, her shoulders hunched and voice weary in a hotel room where she wouldn't be seen by her husband or friends.

"When we use the money, when my children eat the food I cook from that money, it's hard," she said.

The family and others in Saint-Louis learned of the gas discovery shortly after it was announced in 2015. Two years later, energy companies BP and Kosmos established a presence in both Senegal and Mauritania and partnered with Petrosen and SMHPM, the state-owned companies, respectively.

The Greater Tortue Ahmeyim project, as the overall deal is called, is expected to produce around 2.3 million tons (2.08 million metric tons) of liquified natural gas a year, enough to support production for more than 20 years, according to the gas companies. Total cost for the first and second phases is nearly \$5 billion, according to a report by Environmental Action Germany and Urgewald, a German-based environmental and human rights organization. The energy companies say phase one of the project is a multibillion-dollar investment, but didn't specify the amount.

Completion of phase one is expected by the end of this year, when gas production should start, the companies said.

As early as 2018, Saint-Louis residents say, they were warned they would lose access to some of their favored fishing waters. Installation of the breakwater, the area where the platform sits, began by 2020.

BP is the operator and investor, owning nearly 60% of the project in Senegal and Mauritania. The deal promises to create thousands of jobs and provide electricity to a nation where approximately 30% of its 17 million people live without power.

The AP asked BP and Kosmos officials via email to comment for this story. The AP also sought comment about the companies' efforts to mitigate effects of lost income in the community, their response to the women who say they've turned to prostitution, and other matters related to the deal.

In a statement to the AP, spokesman Thomas Golembeski said Kosmos had worked to build community relationships and that its employees visit Saint-Louis regularly to inform people of operations and act on feedback. Golembeski emphasized the project will provide a source of low-cost natural gas and expand access to reliable, affordable and cleaner energy. He also cited access to a micro-finance credit fund established for the fishing community.

He referred other questions to BP, as operator of the project.

BP sent prepared statements in response to the AP's inquires. BP said it is engaging with the fishing communities in Senegal and Mauritania and trying to benefit the wider economy by locally sourcing products, developing the workforce and supporting sustainable development. More than 3,000 jobs in some 350 local companies have been generated in Senegal and Mauritania, according to the company. BP also cited its work to renovate the maternity unit at the Saint-Louis hospital and its help of 1,000 patients with a mobile clinic operating in remote areas.

But local officials, advocates and residents say they haven't seen many jobs or other options to combat the economic loss.

BP did not respond to follow-up questions. Neither BP nor Kosmos addressed the AP's questions about women who say they've been driven to prostitution.

\_\_\_\_\_ When locals talk about the hardships stemming from the gas project, they use just one word: Fuel. To them, it encompasses all they feel has gone wrong in the community.

The rig looms in the background off the coast. Easy to spot on a clear day, the lights on the platform shine at night and resemble a cruise ship docked offshore. The smell of fish still permeates Saint-Louis,



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as pirogues — small wooden boats — line the shores and horse-drawn carts carry the diminishing catch to town.

Seasoned fishermen who've weathered past storms and changes to the industry say the gas deal poses problems on a different scale, largely thanks to the exclusion zone. Smaller boats aren't equipped to venture past it, creating overcrowding in other fishing areas and depleting stocks for fishermen.

"Going to the diattara now is like going to hell," said Aminou Kane, vice president for the Association of Fishermen Anglers of Saint-Louis.

Since the area became inaccessible, fishermen are quitting, risking their lives migrating to Europe, or fishing illegally in neighboring Mauritania where they face arrest, he said.

Kane, 46, is in the last group. He used to earn more than \$1,000 a week fishing in Senegal and now makes roughly half that fishing secretly across the border, he said.

The mother who described turning to prostitution said her husband, too, tried to fish in Mauritanian waters. He left home to seek work there one year ago and she hasn't heard from him since.

Despite money coming in from prostitution, the women who spoke to the AP said they and others struggle to feed and shelter their families. Some have pulled children out of private school because they can't pay tuition.

The women can earn about \$40 per client. Most work several times per week, in hotels or at the men's homes when wives are away. The women describe most clients as well-off Senegalese men, including business leaders and government officials, though some are from neighboring or Western countries.

They find the clients through local contacts. In some cases, the men are family friends to whom the women initially turned to for money or loans. But they say the men eventually insisted upon sex in return for the cash. Some of the men paid well at first, but not as much anymore.

In other cases, women go through intermediaries with established networks of men looking for prostitutes.

A woman who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity said she's been running a business in Saint-Louis connecting men with prostitutes for seven years. She uses the name Coumbista in her work to protect her identity from her family and said she's seen her clientele drop in recent years, with young fishermen seeing a loss of income due to the gas project.

Simultaneously, she said, the number of women seeking sex work spiked, increasing her roster by half. She knows of nearly 30 women who started sex work because of gas-related financial woes, and because of general poverty. Most then do the work secretly, she said.

A 29-year-old who turned to her for help last year after her husband stopped fishing sneaks out of the house several times a week after putting their three children to bed. She tells her husband she's going to see friends or family.

"I am always afraid that I'll be seen by people who know me," she told the AP in the backseat of a car turning onto a quiet downtown street as she pointed to a nondescript building, one of two hotels where she has had sex with more than 20 men since she started. "I never thought that one day I would be doing this."

The local government admits there has been an increase in illegal prostitution in recent years in Saint-Louis. Officials attribute the rise not directly to the energy deal, but to economic troubles overall.

"It's not only the fishermen population or the traders, but it's poverty in general that forces women into prostitution," said Lamine Ndiaye, deputy to the Saint-Louis mayor.

People's grievances about the rig are overblown and the community needs to be patient as it will take time to see the dividends, at least until after production, he said.

\_\_\_ Fossil fuel extraction hits communities particularly hard when the local economy depends on natural resources, according to environmental experts.

"If the land or sea that farmers or fishers rely on is poisoned and out of bounds, then their jobs and access to food have been robbed, and their communities can fall apart," said Dr. Aliou Ba, head of Greenpeace Africa's oceans campaign and a Senegalese resident. "That has happened in several countries in Africa, including in the Niger Delta. Oil and gas came in, contaminated the water, killed the fish and ruined many fishers' way of life."

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He said the process is already playing out in Saint-Louis, and the community is suffering: "If the authorities let this spread along our coast, hundreds of thousands of fisheries jobs will be at risk, and the millions of people in this region who depend on fish for protein will be threatened."

Shortly after the gas deal was signed, the companies noted there could be problems in Saint-Louis. A 2019 environmental and social impact assessment by BP and its partners said there were "a lot of uncertainties around the consequences for Saint-Louis fishermen of losing access to potential fishing grounds." Still, it considered the intensity of the impact low, according to the report.

To mitigate economic consequences, the gas companies are evaluating options for a sustainable artificial reef project in Senegal and supporting 47 national apprentice technicians on a multiyear training program in preparation to work offshore and create jobs and supply chain opportunities, BP said in statements.

The technicians have been provided with 16 months of university training at Scotland's Glasgow Caledonian University and will gain internationally recognized qualifications, BP said.

BP did not respond to questions about whether it stood by the company's initial risk assessment.

Papa Samba Ba, director of hydrocarbons for Senegal's gas and energy ministry, said the objective is that by 2035 half of all gas projects will go to local jobs, companies and services.

Phase one of the project will invest about 8.5% of the gas into Senegal; however, the local gas market isn't set up yet and could take up to two years to be operational, he said.

There's also concern among industry experts that because Senegal doesn't have a history of oil and gas drilling, it won't have enough skilled laborers, despite the training.

Fossil liquified natural gas infrastructure provides few direct jobs, and those often go to experts from outside the community, not locals, said Andy Gheorghiu, a climate consultant and co-founder of the Climate Alliance against LNG, a German-based organization focused on the environment.

Some experts point to scenarios that have played out in the U.S. In the fishing village of Cameron in Louisiana, which operates gas export terminals, people haven't benefited from promised jobs and fishermen have been displaced from the community, according to locals.

"If you drive around Cameron Parish, home of three of these export terminals, you would not believe that these terminals have benefited the community in any way," said James Hiatt, who lives close to Cameron and is director of For a Better Bayou, an environmental organization. The gas companies promised a new marina, restaurant and fishing pier, none of which have opened, he said.

The AP emailed Venture Global, the gas terminal operator that residents say made the promises, multiple times but received no response.

Environmental watchdogs say it would make more sense to invest in renewable energy. Senegal could create more than five times as many jobs in that sector yearly until 2030, compared with jobs in the fossil fuel industry, according to the Climate Action Tracker, an independent project that tracks government climate action.

But despite the suffering the community attributes to the gas, most say they don't want the companies to leave. What they want is for the situation to change.

"When I think of my former life and my life today, it's hard," said one 40-year-old woman, wiping away tears.

The mother of three said she had to resort to prostitution last year after her husband left the city and cut contact. She's pulled two of her children out of private school and sent them to public school, where the teachers sometimes don't show up for days.

"I hope someone can help me out of this situation," she said. "One in which no one would ever want to live."

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## Russell Crowe stars as Vatican's 'James Bond of exorcists'

By DEEPA BHARATH The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Rev. Edward Siebert's journey with "The Pope's Exorcist," a film about arguably the most famous exorcist in the Catholic Church, began with an adventuresome visit to Milan about six years ago.

The Jesuit priest recalls sitting at a restaurant sipping wine and mulling the costly airline ticket he had purchased a day earlier. He also worried about the deal he had just closed with the Society of St. Paul to purchase the rights to the life story of the Rev. Gabriele Amorth — the late Pauline priest known as "the James Bond of exorcists."

Siebert, who teaches film at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and runs the college's film production company, had no motion picture credits to his name and wondered at the time: "What have I gone and done?"

Today, he heaves a sigh of relief as a version of Amorth's life unfurls on the big screen as "The Pope's Exorcist," starring Oscar-winner Russell Crowe in the titular role. It opens in U.S. theaters Friday.

Amorth was appointed chief exorcist of the Diocese of Rome in 1986 and remained there until 2016, when he died at age 91. In those three decades, Amorth claimed to have conducted over 60,000 exorcisms. The first of his books, "An Exorcist Tells His Story," came out in 1990 and was an instant bestseller, translated into 30 languages. That same year, Amorth, who named "The Exorcist" as his favorite film, founded the International Association of Exorcists.

Siebert, one of the film's executive producers, says he was an unlikely candidate to take on this project. But Michael Patrick Kaczmarek, a New Mexico-based filmmaker he had worked with previously, convinced him of the power of Amorth's stories, he said.

Kaczmarek, one of the film's producers, said he reached out to Amorth through his religious order's publishing company in 2015 and was told by their executives that many had tried to secure film and television rights to the exorcist's books, "but they were always denied." But Kaczmarek's persistence paid off.

"Through the use of translators, I sent Father Amorth detailed correspondence where I assured him of my religious devotion and sincere desire to respect his exorcism ministry," Kaczmarek said, adding that his partnership with Siebert helped convince Amorth of his intent to preserve the story's religious integrity.

Siebert said Amorth's stories initially "frightened him," but he was touched by the priest's faith and determination to help people.

Amorth said 98% of the people who came to him needed a psychiatrist, not an exorcist, a detail Crowe's Amorth clarifies in the film. When a cardinal asks him about the remaining 2%, he says: "Ah, the other 2% — this is something that has confounded all of science and all of medicine for a very long time." He adds after a dramatic pause: "I call it evil."

Like Siebert, Crowe has said during various media interviews that he is no horror movie fan, preferring "to sleep deeply at night." But he said Amorth's character fascinated him; he read the priest's first two books and spoke with people who had watched him perform exorcisms. Crowe said two aspects of Amorth's character hooked him — his "unshakable purity of faith and his wicked sense of humor."

In the 2017 documentary "The Devil and Father Amorth," the priest — before beginning an exorcism — can be seen thumbing his nose in the direction of the woman said to have been possessed. It was a gesture he made before each exorcism to let the demon know he wasn't afraid.

In the "The Pope's Exorcist," set in 1987, Crowe's Amorth heads to Spain with his apprentice, a younger priest, tasked with investigating a young boy's possession. There he uncovers a "centuries-old conspiracy" that the Vatican has tried to cover up in a plot that appears to channel The Da Vinci Code, Indiana Jones and numerous buddy-cop movies.

Crowe and the film's creators have taken liberal creative license with Amorth's character and his stories. Crowe looks nothing like the priest, who was bald-headed, bespectacled and clean-shaven. On screen, Crowe knocks back double espressos and rides a Lambretta scooter through Rome, his cassock billowing in the breeze to the music of Faith No More. His scooter has a Ferrari sticker — a nod to Amorth's

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hometown, Modena, where the luxury automaker is based.

Amorth's convoluted road to the priesthood included fighting as a partisan in World War II, getting a law degree and working as a journalist. He didn't become an exorcist until he was 61. He was no stranger to controversy, claiming Hitler and Stalin were possessed, that pedophile cults operated within the Vatican, and that yoga and Harry Potter were gateways to the demonic.

Amorth's work as an exorcist has influenced and inspired many in the Catholic Church who came after him, said Monsignor Stephen J. Rossetti, a psychologist and exorcist in the Archdiocese of Washington who has over 76,000 followers on an Instagram account he started six months ago. Rossetti says there is an increasing and renewed appetite for information about demonic possession and exorcism.

"All of us owe a debt of gratitude to Father Amorth," Rossetti said. "He kept this ministry alive when the church and society had pretty much ignored it."

Though exorcism was a recurring part of Jesus Christ's ministry, Catholic seminarians and priests are not being trained to do it, he said, adding that films like "The Exorcist" have raised awareness about the phenomenon of demonic possessions. Rossetti, like Amorth, maintains that "demonic influences" have increased amid declining faith, a surge in sinning and the practice of occult.

Exorcism when practiced correctly is "an act of healing and faith," Rossetti said, adding that he has witnessed "darkness and evil" in 15 years as an exorcist.

"Demons do manifest in a session and the exorcist faces an incredibly evil visage that no human can mimic," he said. "Things do fly across the room. Demons engage in antics like immature 12-year-olds trying to scare you."

But with faith and God on his side, this has always been a "joyful ministry," Rossetti said.

The International Association of Exorcists posted a statement on its website criticizing "The Pope's Exorcist" based on the trailer. The association called it "a show aimed at arousing strong and unhealthy emotions, thanks to a gloomy scenography, with sound effects ... to arouse only anxiety, restlessness and fear in the spectator."

Joseph Laycock, associate professor of religious studies at Texas State University, said that despite protests from religious circles after the release of such films or television shows, "exorcists do benefit from media even when their portrayal is sensationalized."

Laycock's latest book, "The Exorcist Effect," looks into the demand the 1973 film created for exorcism; he says the film had a role in shifting the Catholic Church's attitude toward the practice. He describes Amorth as "the single most important priest in the revival of exorcism" after "The Exorcist" and predicts the rising interest in exorcism will continue.

"The kind of Christianity we had in America during the mid-20th century, emphasizing ethics over the supernatural, was an anomaly," Laycock said. "Most of Christian history has emphasized the supernatural and spiritual warfare. This is Christianity returning to its supernatural roots."

Siebert, who worked for nearly eight years to bring Amorth's story to the big screen, says "The Pope's Exorcist" has not changed his views about horror films or exorcism; both give him the chills. But it warms his heart to see a priest shown in a positive light after so many films and TV shows have vilified or belittled them.

"It's good to see a priest talking about prayer, forgiveness, God's love, and on top of all that, vanquishing demons," he said. "It feels good to finally see a priest as a hero."

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## DeSantis signs 6-week abortion ban in closed-door ceremony

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has signed a bill to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, giving the Republican a major conservative policy victory as he prepares to launch an expected presidential candidacy.

DeSantis signed the measure late Thursday night in a private ceremony without fanfare, hours after the Republican-dominated statehouse approved the bill.

The law will take effect only if the state's current 15-week ban is upheld in an ongoing legal challenge that is before the state Supreme Court, which is controlled by conservatives.

For DeSantis, the late night, closed door bill signing was a departure from his usual bombastic style and signals the difficult political line he is walking on abortion politics ahead of his anticipated White House run. Restrictions, popular among some conservative GOP primary voters, are seen as potentially damaging among the broader electorate and have led to bruising losses at the ballot box for Republicans in recent months.

"We are proud to support life and family in the state of Florida. I applaud the Legislature for passing the Heartbeat Protection Act that expands pro-life protections and provides additional resources for young mothers and families," DeSantis said in a statement.

A six-week ban would diminish the Florida's status as destination for the procedure in a region that has severely tightened access after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi have banned abortion at all stages of pregnancy, while Georgia forbids the procedure after cardiac activity can be detected, which is around six weeks.

"This ban would prevent four million Florida women of reproductive age from accessing abortion care after six weeks — before many women even know they're pregnant," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement issued after the bill passed the Legislature. "This ban would also impact the nearly 15 million women of reproductive age who live in abortion-banning states throughout the South, many of whom have previously relied on travel to Florida as an option to access care."

The law contains some exceptions, including to save the woman's life. Abortions for pregnancies involving rape or incest would be allowed until 15 weeks of pregnancy, provided a woman has documentation such as a restraining order or police report. DeSantis has called the rape and incest provisions sensible.

Drugs used in medication-induced abortions — which make up the majority of those provided nationally — could be dispensed only in person or by a physician under the Florida law. Separately, nationwide access to the abortion pill mifepristone is being challenged in court.

DeSantis, who has rocketed to Republican stardom through his focus on divisive cultural issues, had been uncharacteristically tepid in his support for the six-week ban, typically only saying, "We welcome pro-life legislation," when asked about the measure. Last year, DeSantis signed a 15-week abortion ban in a large public ceremony at an evangelical church.

The governor is expected to announce his presidential candidacy after the session ends in May, with his potential White House run in part buoyed by the conservative policies approved by the Republican supermajority in the statehouse this year.

"DeSantis signed the extremist 6-week abortion ban into law just before 12 am, hoping Floridians won't notice he stripped away a right most people agree with," House Democratic Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell said on Twitter. "If we don't want FL's present to become America's future, we must stop him in '24."

Abortion bans are popular among some religious conservatives who are part of the GOP voting base, but the issue has motivated many others to vote for Democrats. Republicans have recently lost in elections centered on abortion access in states such as Kentucky, Michigan and Wisconsin.

"Ron DeSantis, continues to put his political ambitions over the rights and well being of Floridians. He's not looking out for their best interests — he's thinking only of himself and his future presidential campaign. Make no mistake: this dangerous decision will backfire and harm the very people he is supposed to protect," Jenny Lawson, the executive director of Planned Parenthood Votes, said in a statement.

## Top Fed official sees need for more interest rate increases

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A senior Federal Reserve official said Friday that there has been little progress on inflation for more than a year and that more interest rate hikes are needed to get prices under control.

Christopher Waller, a member of the Fed's governing board, did not specify how many more increases he supports, but said that inflation "is still much too high and so my job is not done."

Last month, inflation slowed as food and gas prices fell, but excluding those volatile categories, "core" prices kept rising and are 5.6% higher than a year ago. Waller pointed out that core prices have risen at about that same pace, or higher, since December 2021.

Waller's comments expressing support for more rate hikes follow a forecast by the Fed's staff economists, revealed in Fed minutes Wednesday, for a "mild recession" later this year.

Waller said that, like most of his colleagues, he is closely watching whether the collapse of two large banks last month will lead to a broad cut back in lending by the banking system, which could slow the economy.

But so far it's not clear how large the impact will be, he said, and job growth remains strong and inflation is far above the Fed's 2% target, "so monetary policy needs to be tightened further."

His comments, delivered in San Antonio, Texas, echo those of several of his colleagues, who have said in recent weeks that they support at least one more rate hike. That would put the Fed's benchmark rate at about 5.1%, the highest in 16 years.

Waller also underscored that he supported keeping the Fed's benchmark rate elevated for much longer than investors expect. Traders in interest-rate futures expect that the central bank will lift rates one last time at the Fed's next meeting in May, and then cut them three times by the end of the year, according to the CME Fedwatch tool.

Those expectations likely reflect an assumption that the economy will tumble into a recession, forcing the Fed to pivot toward lower interest rates.

Waller, however, said that the slow progress on inflation meant that, "Monetary policy will need to remain tight for a substantial period of time, and longer than markets anticipate."

Still, Waller did express some optimism, particularly about signs in Wednesday's inflation report that showed rental price growth is finally slowing, after months of sharp gains. The number of new apartments under construction is at historically high levels and vacancies have ticked up, pushing developers to lower rents on new apartment leases.

Waller said as those trends continue to feed into government rental price data, inflation will fall further. By the end of this year it could reach as low as 3% to 3.5%, he said.

## MLB players find less time for small talk with pitch clock

By PAT GRAHAM AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — Home plate used to be a place where the sociable Brandon Crawford would touch base with catchers and umpires.

Just a casual conversation to catch up: How's the family? What's up? That sort of thing.

These days, the San Francisco Giants infielder keeps the chatter to a minimum. There's simply no spare time for small talk while on a pitch clock.

Because that 15 seconds between pitches — 20 when someone's on base — goes by fast at the plate. The penalty for idle chatter could be stiff — a called strike on the hitter.

Social hour just has to wait.

"You have to figure out a different time to get your conversations in, whether it's pregame or going to dinner or breakfast," Crawford said.

The pitch clock hasn't just made baseball quicker. It's quieter now, too. There's no real chance to talk shop on the bases with former teammates, good friends or umpires. Batters only get 30 seconds between at-bats to get set.

Dodgers manager Dave Roberts can't even imagine the strikes he might've had called on him if he was

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playing under these rules. He's well known for his affable personality and would always greet the home-plate umpire when he batted, along with the catcher. He'd carry it right over to the bases, too, when he got aboard.

"Some guys are having a little harder time with it," Roberts said of cutting back on conversations. "I think the salutations and stuff like that have to be more minimized."

Roberts joked that he could strategize around his gift for gab — maybe engage players he knows before they dig into the box.

"Try to get his attention and get that clock going," Roberts cracked.

The players, though, are starting to realize that silence is golden. This is no social call when they step up. They can't afford to fall behind 0-1 in the count.

Last week, Padres slugger Manny Machado became the first player ejected in an argument that followed a pitch clock violation, which carries a penalty of an automatic strike for hitters and an automatic ball for pitchers. It wasn't for talking, but rather he thought he had called timeout as the pitch clock wound down to eight seconds — the deadline for batters to be alert to the guy on the mound.

A cautionary tale, though, that every second matters.

"It's all business," Giants outfielder Joc Pederson said.

Rangers first baseman Nathaniel Lowe once received friendly advice from longtime umpire Joe West: Greet each ump by their first name and make a little small talk.

It's guidance Lowe took to heart. It's guidance that's now hard to follow.

"It feels like I'm more worried about, 'Am I facing the pitcher with 14, 12 seconds? Should I have my foot on the gas?'" Lowe explained. "I think the pitch clock definitely takes away from the social aspect of it."

Know this about Dominic Smith: He's not going to be as inviting at first base this season. The slick-fielding Washington Nationals player means no offense by the silent treatment, either.

"I'm trying to just kick people's butt, I guess, so I don't talk as much as I used to," Smith said with a smile. "I don't mind not talking to guys over there. I like being in my own space, thinking about the game, trying to figure out ways to help us win."

Dodgers pitcher Dustin May never quite understood being on speaking terms with the opposition during a game.

"Once I cross the lines, I didn't really talk to anybody" on the other team, May said.

Consider May a fan of the new rules. Batters can't step out as much to re-fasten their batting gloves over and over.

"We'd stand on the mound forever waiting on them," May said. "Now they're kind of forced to get in. They're on our pace now."

Rockies first baseman C.J. Cron prefers the quicker pace, too. He can afford to be a little more antisocial due to the time crunch.

"I'm not much of a converser over there," Cron said. "Just say, 'What's up?' and then move on with my life."

The lack of talk on the bases may actually fuel more rivalries — or at least that's the thinking of Dodgers infielder Max Muncy.

"Because you're not having a chance to converse with people and you don't get to know people as much," Muncy said. "Maybe there's a chance of that?"

But it takes some getting used to. Crawford would greet the umpire behind the plate before the game and the catcher as he stepped into the box. It was almost part of his routine.

The times have changed.

"It's such a rush from the on-deck circle to the plate that you don't have time to do that," Crawford said. "I'll say that real quick as I'm walking by. But there's no more conversations after that."

That's good, said Giants manager Gabe Kapler.

"I don't love seeing players talking to the first baseman and umpires," Kapler said. "I hope that is erased by the time."

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Some players, though, simply enjoy holding conversations while holding on runners.

"If I know the guy or if I've got a pretty good rapport with him, for sure, absolutely," Mets first baseman Pete Alonso said. "If it's just like an awkward silence, that's no fun."

AP Baseball Writers Janie McCauley and Mike Fitzpatrick, and AP Sports Writer Schuyler Dixon contributed to this report.

AP MLB: <https://apnews.com/hub/MLB> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sport](https://twitter.com/AP_Sport)

## JPMorgan Chase profits jump 52% amid banking turmoil

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

JPMorgan Chase & Co. posted a 52% jump in its first-quarter profits, helped by higher interest rates, which allowed the bank to charge customers more for loans. The bank saw deposits grow noticeably, as business and customers flocked to the banking titan after the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank last month.

With JPMorgan's strong results, as well as solid results from Citigroup and Wells Fargo on Friday, there seem to be few signs of potential trouble in the banking system — at least among the nation's biggest, most complex financial institutions.

"These were the most watched bank earnings announcements in over a decade, with market participants scouring the results looking for signs of cracks in the US banking sector. Those analysts looking for signs of the banking crisis were greatly relieved to not find any," said Octavio Marenzi, CEO of the consulting firm Opimas LLC, in an email.

JPMorgan, the nation's biggest bank by assets posted a profit of \$12.62 billion, compared to a profit of \$8.28 billion in the same period a year earlier. On a per-share basis, the bank earned \$4.10 a share, up from \$2.63 a share a year ago, beating analysts' expectations.

Most of the profit growth came from higher interest rates. The bank's net interest income was \$20.8 billion in the quarter, up 49% from last year.

JPMorgan grew deposits by \$37 billion during the quarter, up to \$2.4 trillion. Deposits at big banks had been falling for several quarters as consumers spent down their pandemic savings and businesses tapped into their stored cash to pay bills. But with the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank in March, businesses have been withdrawing their funds from smaller banks and moving them into the larger banks, which are considered "too big to fail" and have an implicit government backstop.

In a call with reporters, JPMorgan Chief Financial Officer Jeremy Barnum said most of the new deposits flowed into new business and company bank accounts opened in the past month. The new deposits reversed the flow of deposits exiting the bank for several quarters.

"What crisis?," analysts at UBS titled their report after JPMorgan, Wells and PNC reported their results.

JPMorgan and CEO Jamie Dimon have been the industry's go-to problem solvers for banking issues for years now. After the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, JPMorgan helped put together a consortium of other big banks to keep First Republic Bank from being next to fail. The group of banks put \$30 billion in uninsured deposits into First Republic, which appears to have at least bought the midsize bank some time to repair its balance sheet and maybe find a buyer.

"The U.S. economy continues to be on generally healthy footings — consumers are still spending and have strong balance sheets, and businesses are in good shape. However, the storm clouds that we have been monitoring for the past year remain on the horizon, and the banking industry turmoil adds to these risks," Dimon said in a statement.

JPMorgan continued to benefit from consumers switching from saving to spending. Credit card spending rose 13% from a year earlier, and more customers are now keeping a balance instead of paying off their credit cards, so the bank is making money from processing the transactions as well as the interest off the balances.



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Meanwhile business in the bank's corporate and investment bank remains relatively quiet, as many businesses and investors are holding off making big decisions amid high inflation. Revenue from advisory fees were flat, while revenue from trading stocks and bonds were flat to down.

JPMorgan shares rose more than 6% in early trading.

## 'Quiet luxury': No flash, no logos, but big-time style

By LEANNE ITALIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — They're the biggest of brands. But with no logos. And that's the whole point.

Call it stealth wealth, or quiet luxury. For the rich and those who aspire, logo-free fashion with outsized price tags is having a moment — at least among people who can spend in the face of higher inflation and a volatile economy.

It's a come-and-go trend that, while spiking in the pandemic's wake, traces its roots as far back as the American industrialists of the 19th-century Gilded Age and France in the 1700s. And retailers are taking note, as are more designers looking to capture not only the rich but their wannabes, too.

Think Hollywood nepo baby and Goop multimillionaire Gwyneth Paltrow and her head-to-toe Prada, luxurious cashmere sweaters and Celine boots during her week in a Utah courtroom in a dispute over a ski crash.

She was a picture of neutral-toned designer duds, and those who know luxury easily spotted the brands behind her staid, logoless, very pricey wardrobe.

"When you know, you know, and that's sort of the point," says Robert Burke, a luxury retail consultant. "The people they care about, the people in their rooms, know exactly what they're wearing. And they're the only ones who matter."

TV TRENDSETTERS

Cue HBO's hit "Succession," the story of the uber-rich, cutthroat Roys led by the snarly patriarch Logan.

Costume designer Michelle Matland has created pricey yet stealth wardrobes unique to key characters as they have evolved, delighting fans who have followed her fashion breadcrumbs since the show's 2018 premiere.

"It shouldn't have bling quality," she says. "You're always going to have your, I guess, Kardashians — you know, the people who wear things that draw attention. They may have the same amount of money, but different aspirations."

The stealth fashion world is perfectly tailored dark suits, often bespoke; bare baseball caps with perfectly rounded rims; and neutral power pieces worn by the only female Roy sibling, Shiv.

No logos for the Roys and their jet set, though one important striver in their midst had to learn about stealth wealth the hard way.

"It's incredibly accurate. Every time you look at it, it tells you exactly how rich you are," Shiv's outsider husband, Tom Wambsgans, tells Logan of the Patek Philippe he presents the billionaire early in "Succession."

With a trademark mumble and nothing in the way of a thank you, Logan rebuffs, then gives away, the birthday gift emblazoned with the name of the company whose watches can sell for north of \$300,000.

Fast-forward to the latest season, at yet another Logan birthday bash. This time it's Tom, still the groveler but a far savvier one, dissing wannabe Bridget's display of luxury: a conspicuously huge \$2,890 Burberry tote in a plaid familiar to fans of the company, sans logo.

"She's brought a ludicrously capacious bag," Tom snarls at his underling, Greg. "What's even in there, huh? Flat shoes for the subway? Her lunch pail? I mean, Greg, it's monstrous. It's gargantuan. You could take it camping. You could slide it across the floor after a bank job."

SPLASHY TO CLASSIC

Paltrow, to be fair, has always been drawn to a sleek, minimalist luxury. But her recent trial wardrobe was blasted out on TV at a time when more brands are putting understated (yet pricey) tones and shapes on runways and shelves.

Some are doing it while also staying true to customers living their spends out loud with flashy, recogniz-

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able silhouettes, fabrics, logos and bling.

"The stealth wealth mood was solidified in this season's buys when the usually splashier brands, like Loewe, Saint Laurent, Miu Miu, leaned into the more classic sensibility," says Jodi Kahn, vice president of luxury fashion at the high-end retailer Neiman Marcus.

Those designers joined companies that have always done it, including some worn on "Succession" and the back of Paltrow: The Row, Brunello Cucinelli and Loro Piana among them.

Burke says much of the moment can be explained by the pandemic, when young aspirational buyers flush with stimulus money and savings went after big brands with visibly big statements.

"To some degree, there is a fatigue now, along with uncertainty in the economy," he says. "People are feeling they don't want to show they have a lot of money necessarily."

The quiet luxury moment has counter-moments, as fashion cycles generally do.

Companies from toothpaste makers to discounters are putting more premium items like \$10 toothpastes and \$90 creams on supermarket shelves. Some are looking for new ways to pump up sales and profits by focusing on premium items amid an overall sales slowdown.

Martin Pedraza, CEO of The Luxury Institute, a research, consultancy and employee training firm, says stealth wealth is a long-standing code among the uber-rich. Now, with a white collar recession, "all the people getting laid off want to look very pristine."

Can they afford to do it in the \$1,390 Tom Ford hoodie worn by Kendall, another Roy? Maybe not, but they're picking up more affordable cashmere and other goods from mass-market labels like J.Crew, Banana Republic and Vince. It's the difference between \$400 or less and upwards of \$2,000.

"It's all about fabric and texture," Matland says. "You can have a cashmere sweater you get at J.Crew, but you can see the difference with what a more expensive one from another brand looks like."

## THE EVOLUTION OF QUIET

Analysts note that it's during good times when people want to show off, not when nerves are raw about financial futures. Explains Pedraza: The rich try to imitate the masses as those in the middle and top of the mass mimic the minimalist rich.

He cites other stealth eras in fashion. There was the minimalist aesthetic of the 1990s, when Donna Karan and Miuccia Prada made practical dressing fashionable, and a show of stealth wealth amid the recession of 2008-09.

Patricia Mears, deputy director of the Fashion Institute of Technology's Museum at FIT, goes back even further.

"People with real money and power have always done this, at least in the United States," she says. "We have this sort of WASP culture, Protestant culture, that turns away from maximalism."

That's only part of a larger story, Mears says.

"You really have to go back to the end of the 18th century. You have the fall of the French monarchy, and then you have this sort of dual rise of industrialization and the rise of urbanization. And so men step into what is called the Great Renunciation."

There's a turn away from powdered wigs and floral-brocaded suits covered with lace.

"All of this court life goes away, and now you have the real power base being the industrialists. They come in, they build wealth and power, and they're doing it in a uniform, the dark suit," Mears says. "A lot of scholars have said that this really becomes the respectable uniform if you want to be both powerful and understated."

Does mimicking stealth wealth work? Investing in quality staple pieces is achieved for longer-lasting wear and less waste, but trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the rich with cheaper alternatives can be a problem. Because after all, when you know, you know.

But minimalism isn't everything. No one expects that logos, along with recognizable signature prints and edgier silhouettes, are going anywhere.

"There will always be people who want the logos. Chanel could hardly give up its logo," Pedraza says. "But there are always going to be brands that cave to what's going on."

Associated Press retail writer Anne D'Innocenzio in New York contributed to this story.

## 7.0 magnitude earthquake shakes Indonesia's main island

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — A strong earthquake shook parts of Indonesia's main island of Java and tourist island of Bali on Friday, causing panic but there were no immediate reports of serious damage or casualties.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the magnitude 7.0 quake was centered 96.5 kilometers (59.8 miles) north of Tuban, a coastal city in East Java province, at a depth of 594 kilometers (369 miles).

Indonesia's Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysical Agency said there was no danger of a tsunami but warned of possible aftershocks. The agency put a preliminary magnitude at 6.6. Variations in early measurements are common.

Videos circulating on social media showed local residents and tourists in the neighboring provinces of Central Java, Yogyakarta and Bali panicking as houses and buildings swayed for several seconds. Some places ordered evacuations, sending streams of people into the streets.

The country of more than 270 million people is frequently struck by earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis because of its location on the arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin known as the "Ring of Fire."

In 2004, an extremely powerful Indian Ocean quake set off a tsunami that killed more than 230,000 people in a dozen countries, most of them in Indonesia's Aceh province.

## DeSantis signs Florida GOP's 6-week abortion ban into law

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law a bill approved by the Republican-dominated Florida Legislature to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

The governor's office said in a statement late Thursday that he had signed the legislation. The ban gives DeSantis a key political victory among Republican primary voters as he prepares to launch an expected presidential candidacy built on his national brand as a conservative standard bearer.

The six-week ban will take effect only if the state's current 15-week ban is upheld in an ongoing legal challenge that is before the state Supreme Court, which is controlled by conservatives.

The policy would have wider implications for abortion access throughout the South in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision last year overturning *Roe v. Wade* and leaving decisions about abortion access to states. Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi have banned abortion at all stages of pregnancy, while Georgia forbids the procedure after cardiac activity can be detected, which is around six weeks.

"We have the opportunity to lead the national debate about the importance of protecting life and giving every child the opportunity to be born and find his or her purpose," said Republican Rep. Jenna Persons-Mulicka, who carried the bill in the House.

Democrats and abortion-rights groups have criticized Florida's proposal as extreme.

"This ban would prevent four million Florida women of reproductive age from accessing abortion care after six weeks — before many women even know they're pregnant," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement issued after Thursday's vote. "This ban would also impact the nearly 15 million women of reproductive age who live in abortion-banning states throughout the South, many of whom have previously relied on travel to Florida as an option to access care."

The law contains some exceptions, including to save the woman's life. Abortions for pregnancies involving rape or incest would be allowed until 15 weeks of pregnancy, provided a woman has documentation such as a restraining order or police report. DeSantis has called the rape and incest provisions sensible.

Drugs used in medication-induced abortions — which make up the majority of those provided nationally — could be dispensed only in person or by a physician under the Florida law. Separately, nationwide

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access to the abortion pill mifepristone is being challenged in court.

"I can't think of any bill that's going to provide more protections to more people who are more vulnerable than this piece of legislation," said Republican Rep. Mike Beltran, who said the bill's exceptions and six-week timeframe represented a compromise.

Abortion bans are popular among some religious conservatives who are part of the GOP voting base, but the issue has motivated many others to vote for Democrats. Republicans in recent weeks and months have suffered defeats in elections centered on abortion access in states such as Kentucky, Michigan and Wisconsin.

"Have we learned nothing?" House Democratic Minority Leader Fentrice Driskell said of recent elections in other states. "Do we not listen to our constituents and to the people of Florida and what they are asking for?"

DeSantis, who often places himself on the front lines of culture war issues, had said he backs the six-week ban but had appeared uncharacteristically tepid on the bill. He has often said, "We welcome pro-life legislation," when asked about the policy.

DeSantis is expected to announce his presidential candidacy after the session ends in May, with his potential White House run in part buoyed by the conservative policies approved by the Republican supermajority in the Statehouse this year.

Democrats, without power at any level of state government, had mostly turned to stall tactics and protests to oppose the bill, which easily passed both chambers on largely party-line votes. The Senate approved it last week, and the House did so Thursday.

A Democratic senator and chairwoman of the Florida Democratic Party were arrested and charged with trespassing during a protest in Tallahassee against the six-week ban. In a last ditch move to delay the bill's passage in the House on Thursday, Democrats filed dozens of amendments to the proposal, all of which were rejected by Republicans.

"Women's health and their personal right to choose is being stolen," said Democratic Rep. Felicia Simone Robinson. "So I ask: Is Florida truly a free state?"

## Today in History: April 15, Titanic sinks; 1,500 dead

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, April 15, the 105th day of 2023. There are 260 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 15, 1912, the British luxury liner RMS Titanic foundered in the North Atlantic off Newfoundland more than 2 1/2 hours after hitting an iceberg; 1,514 people died, while less than half as many survived.

On this date:

In 1865, President Abraham Lincoln died nine hours after being shot the night before by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington; Andrew Johnson became the nation's 17th president.

In 1892, General Electric Co., formed by the merger of the Edison Electric Light Co. and other firms, was incorporated in Schenectady, New York.

In 1945, during World War II, British and Canadian troops liberated the Nazi concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who died on April 12, was buried at the Roosevelt family home in Hyde Park, New York.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson, baseball's first Black major league player of the modern era, made his official debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers on opening day at Ebbets Field. (The Dodgers defeated the Boston Braves, 5-3.)

In 1955, Ray Kroc opened the first franchised McDonald's restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois.

In 1974, members of the Symbionese Liberation Army held up a branch of the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco; a member of the group was SLA kidnap victim Patricia Hearst, who by this time was going by the name "Tania" (Hearst later said she'd been forced to participate).

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In 1989, 96 people died in a crush of soccer fans at Hillsborough Stadium in Sheffield, England. Students in Beijing launched a series of pro-democracy protests; the demonstrations culminated in a government crackdown at Tiananmen Square.

In 1998, Pol Pot, the notorious leader of the Khmer Rouge, died at age 72, evading prosecution for the deaths of 2 million Cambodians.

In 2009, whipped up by conservative commentators and bloggers, tens of thousands of protesters staged "tea parties" around the country to tap into the collective angst stirred up by a bad economy, government spending and bailouts.

In 2013, two bombs made from pressure cookers exploded at the Boston Marathon finish line, killing two women and an 8-year-old boy and injuring more than 260. Suspected bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev (TAM'-ehr-luhn tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) died in a shootout with police; his brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv), was tried, convicted and sentenced to death.

In 2019, fire swept across the top of the Notre Dame Cathedral as the soaring Paris landmark underwent renovations; the blaze collapsed the cathedral's spire and spread to one of its landmark rectangular towers, but fire officials said the church's structure had been saved.

In 2020, the government reported that the nation's industrial output in March registered its biggest decline since the U.S. demobilized at the end of World War II as factories shut down amid the coronavirus epidemic.

Ten years ago: Venezuela's electoral council quickly certified the razor-thin presidential victory of Hugo Chavez's hand-picked successor, Nicolas Maduro. North Koreans celebrated the birthday of their first leader, Kim Il Sung, by dancing in plazas and snacking on peanuts. The Denver Post won a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the movie theater massacre in Aurora, Colorado, while The New York Times captured awards for reporting on a harrowing avalanche, the rise of a new aristocracy in China and the business practices of Apple and Wal-Mart. Adam Johnson's "The Orphan Master's Son" won the Pulitzer for fiction, while Ayad Akhtar's "Disgraced" won the drama prize.

Five years ago: A seven-hour battle over territory and money broke out among inmates armed with homemade knives at the Lee Correctional Institution in South Carolina, leaving seven inmates dead and 22 injured in the worst U.S. prison riot in a quarter-century. At the Academy of Country Music Awards, held in Las Vegas six months after the deadly shooting at a country music festival there, Jason Aldean paid tribute to the 58 people killed; he spoke after he was named entertainer of the year for the third consecutive time. (Aldean had been performing at the Las Vegas festival when the shooting began.)

One year ago: It was revealed that more than 900 civilian bodies had been discovered in the region surrounding the Ukrainian capital following the withdrawal of Russian forces. Police said many were "simply executed." Mississippi announced it was ditching a state song that was based on the campaign tune of a former governor who pledged to preserve segregation. Prince Harry and his wife Meghan visited Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle on their first joint visit to the U.K. since they gave up formal royal roles and moved to the U.S. more than two years earlier. Liz Sheridan, who played doting mom to Jerry Seinfeld on his hit sitcom, died at age 93.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Claudia Cardinale is 85. Author and politician Jeffrey Archer is 83. Rock singer-guitarist Dave Edmunds is 80. Actor Michael Tucci is 77. Actor Lois Chiles is 76. Writer-producer Linda Bloodworth-Thomason is 76. Actor Amy Wright is 73. Actor Sam McMurray is 71. Actor-screenwriter Emma Thompson is 64. Bluegrass musician Jeff Parker is 62. Singer Samantha Fox is 57. Olympic gold, silver and bronze medal swimmer Dara Torres is 56. Rock musician Ed O'Brien (Radiohead) is 55. Actor Flex Alexander is 53. Actor Danny Pino is 49. Actor Douglas Spain is 49. Country singer-songwriter Chris Stapleton is 45. Actor Luke Evans is 44. Rock musician Patrick Carney (The Black Keys) is 43. Rock musician Zach Carothers (Portugal. The Man) is 42. Actor-writer Seth Rogen is 41. Actor Alice Braga is 40. Americana singer-songwriter Margo Price is 40. Rock musician De'Mar Hamilton (Plain White T's) is 39. Actor Samira Wiley is 36. Actor Leonie Elliott is 35. Actor Emma Watson is 33. Actor Maisie Williams is 26.