

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 1 of 64

The Groton Area School District will be participating in a mock crash exercise this morning. The event will begin shortly after 8:30 AM and will involve emergency personnel, emergency vehicles, and equipment in the high school parking lot. Please be aware that this is a planned event and, as such, there is no need to be alarmed.

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Kurtz awarded Medal of Honor](#)
- [2- Groton City Sump Pump Ad](#)
- [3- 407th Ave. goes under](#)
- [3- Updated Groton Track Schedule](#)
- [4- Weekly Vikings Recap - Drafting a Wide Receiver](#)
- [5- Prairie Doc: "American Indian Healthcare"](#)
- [6- EarthTalk - Refurbish electronics](#)
- [7- SD Searchlight: South Dakota's members of Congress are wasting their potential influence on gun violence](#)
- [9- Weather Pages](#)
- [13- Daily Devotional](#)
- [14- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [15- Subscription Form](#)
- [16- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [17- News from the Associated Press](#)

Groton Community Calendar

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

Tuesday, April 18

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, winter bled vegetables, cookie, apricots.

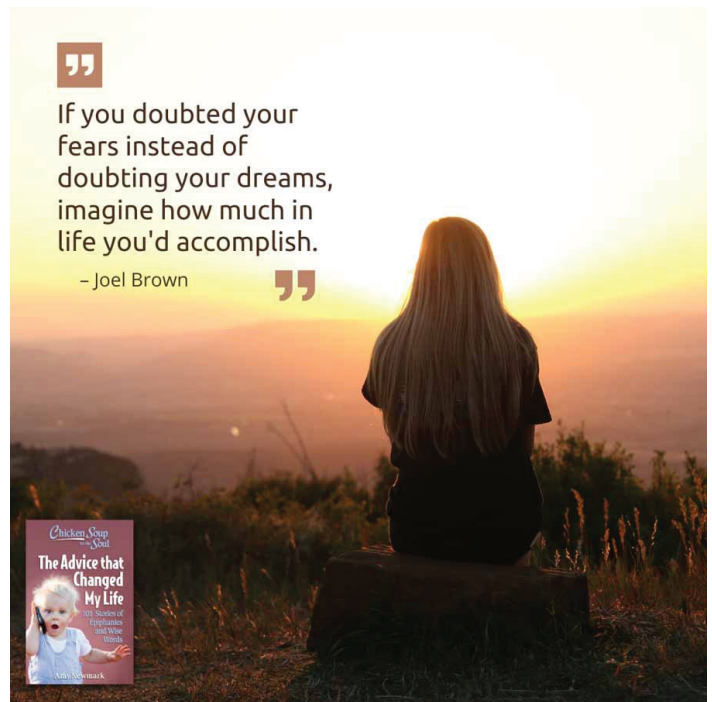
School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.

Groton Daily Independent

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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”

If you doubted your fears instead of doubting your dreams, imagine how much in life you'd accomplish.

- Joel Brown

”

School Lunch: Sub sandwiches, chips
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.; Conde Ad Council

State FFA Convention at SDSU, Brookings
Track at Britton-Hecla, 2 p.m.

Wednesday, April 19

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, cauliflower, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Eggs and breakfast potatoes.

School Lunch: Emmanuel Lutheran: Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Book Study with Lindsey Tietz, 4 p.m.; Confirmation, 4 p.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.

FCCLA Banquet, 6 p.m.

Kurtz awarded Medal of Honor



Casey Kurtz was awarded the Medal of Honor. (Photo from Brown County Sheriff's Office Facebook Page)

Brown County Deputy Casey Kurtz was awarded the Medal of Honor by the South Dakota Sheriff's Association and the South Dakota's Police Chief's Association. The medal is awarded to law enforcement officers who willingly distinguish themselves through an act of courage, involving a risk of imminent serious injury or death, for the purpose of saving or protecting a human life.

On July 22nd, 2022 Deputy Kurtz was dispatched to a call for service involving a juvenile who had accidentally fell into a river and the current pulled her downstream. She could not swim and the only thing keeping her from drowning was holding onto a large branch that was submerged in the water. Upon arriving on scene, Deputy Kurtz did not hesitate to immediately jump into the river and swim out to the juvenile. He gave her his own life jacket and swam her back to shore.

Due to his swift and selfless response, the juvenile survived the drowning incident unharmed. Deputy Kurtz is an outstanding Deputy who characterizes the value of service before self.

Brown County Sheriff's Office and the community thanks him for his hard work.

- Brown County Sheriff's Office Facebook Page

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**

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 3 of 64



407th Avenue going south from Old Highway 12 went under water on Sunday. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Updated Groton Area Track Schedule

Thursday, April 20: Sully Buttes (Onida) Charger Invite
Tuesday, April 25: Miller Booster Club Meet (Groton invite cancelled)
Friday, April 28: Webster Area Invitational
Tuesday, May 2: Valley Queen Cheese Invite, Milbank
Friday, May 5: Sisseton Twilight Meet
Saturday, May 6: Eureka Legion Meet
Thursday, May 11: Northeast Conference Meet at Groton Area
Thursday, May 18: Region 1A at Groton Area
May 25-27: State Track Meet, Sioux Falls

Weekly Vikings Recap - Drafting a Wide Receiver

By Jack & Duane Kolsrud

With the NFL Draft less than two weeks away, it's time to start looking at possible players the Minnesota Vikings might draft at the 23rd overall pick in the first round, should they not trade out of that pick.

One of the most commonly mocked positions for the Vikings in the first round is wide receiver. The main name that seems to be going around is TCU wide receiver, Quentin Johnston. Johnston, who was a catalyst for a TCU football team who made a magical run to the national championship game, presents a unique skill set for the Vikings, should they draft him. Unlike Justin Jefferson, who has mastered the wide receiver position with his route-running and catching ability, Johnston seems to be very underdeveloped in those skill categories. However, what Johnston lacks in route-running and catching, he makes up for with his 6'3" size and ability to make plays once the ball is in his hands. To me, he reminds me a bit of Cordarrelle Patterson, without the kick-returning ability. Perhaps the Vikings see the potential to grow into a fundamentally sound wide receiver, but I think it would be somewhat of a reach if the Vikings were to take Johnston with their 23rd overall pick. Moreover, news came out this week that Johnston was not invited to attend the NFL Draft because it is believed he will not be taken in the first round.

The other two wide receivers that the Vikings might take at their 23rd overall pick are USC wide receiver Jordan Addison, and Boston College wide receiver Zay Flowers. Both Addison and Flowers are undersized wide receivers with dynamic quickness that the NFL seems to be looking for in wide receivers these days.

For Jordan Addison, his quickness is utilized in his route-running, as he has been labeled as the best route-runner in the entire draft. Addison, who won the Biletnikoff award in 2021 at Pitt for being the best wide receiver in all of college football, transferred to USC this past season and had an underwhelming season, to say the least. He finished with nearly half the stats he did the previous season at Pitt, despite having the Heisman trophy winner, Caleb Williams, as his quarterback. Perhaps this lack of production will help Addison drop to the Vikings at the 23rd pick.

The other intriguing wide receiver possibility for the Vikings in the first round, as mentioned, is Zay Flowers. Flowers, who stands only 5'10", is probably the most exciting player to watch of all the wide receiver prospects. When watching his college tape, the first player that comes to mind with Flowers is Tyreek Hill because of his ability to be the fastest guy on the field no matter the direction and angle he is running at. What is concerning with Flowers is that he only ran a 4.42 40-yard dash at the NFL combine earlier this year. Perhaps he is one of those players who has "game speed" and becomes faster once he steps on the field rather than when he is running a 40-yard dash in shorts. This may be a concern, however, to teams that Flowers' speed does not translate from college to the NFL.

If I had to rank these three wide receiver prospects based on how they would fit with the Vikings, the order would be Jordan Addison, Zay Flowers, and Quentin Johnston. If there is one player who can take Adam Thielen's role with the team, it's Jordan Addison. I would feel much better about the Vikings taking an elite route-runner in Addison rather than a guy like Johnston who needs the ball in his hands to see his value. As for Flowers, his size has me putting him behind Addison, but I also would prefer if the Vikings took him over Johnston as I think he is a better overall wide receiver. It will be interesting to see what the Vikings' regime thinks come draft time.

"American Indian Healthcare"

By Sophie Two Hawk, MD; Arna Mora, MD; Carol Whitman, MD

American Indians face some unique challenges when it comes to caring for their health. Culturally, we view health in a Holistic manner as a balance of our bodies, mind and spirit that allows for good health. Historically, the women would have knowledge of herbs and men would be spiritual healers.

Healthcare was one of the items guaranteed under the treaties. Initially, healthcare was overseen by the Army and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Then Indian Health Service was formed in 1955 to oversee healthcare. Funding for Indian Health Service varies from one year to the next and only provides part of what is needed. Therefore, patients need to enroll in programs such as Medicare, Medicaid and Private Insurance which allows the facilities to be able to fully function. Separate limited funding is given to pay for Purchase Referred Care, i.e. those services that cannot be provided at an IHS hospital or clinic. The referrals are only covered if you meet certain criteria, such as living within the reservation boundaries. If you live in three other cities in SD then there are Urban Indian Health clinic which are able to provide some limited health care.

American Indians face unique challenges to attaining healthcare as well. There are language, knowledge, and trust issues that impact seeking out healthcare. There is an inherent mistrust by American Indians of IHS and other government agencies due to many historical abuses and mistreatment over the years. This in turn has led to decline in overall individual wellbeing. We were not made citizens of this country until 1924. We were not legally allowed to practice our Native religion until 1978. Many were taken from their families at young ages and sent to boarding schools. They faced many abuses during their time in these schools. In addition, there were other issues such as forced sterilization and studies done without consent or knowledge in the past. These historical traumas continue to affect current generations.

There are current economic issues such as lack of employment, housing, and transportation which negatively impact health. We see differences in types of diseases, age of onset of diseases, and ways that treatments need to be given as well. We see higher rates of conditions and deaths due to conditions such as Diabetes, Liver disease, Infectious Diseases, Injuries, and Suicides. Some of these rates are higher than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States.

American Indian Healthcare can be improved by increasing funding, increasing the numbers of tribal members who become healthcare providers and improving the education of those who provide healthcare.

Dr. Sophie Two Hawk practices internal medicine in Sioux Falls, SD and is Lakota. Arna Mora, MD is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and is currently a 2nd year Family Medicine Resident at the Center for Family Medicine in Sioux Falls and will complete her residence in June of 2024. Carol Whitman, MD is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and is currently a 3rd year Psychiatry Residence at the USD Psychiatric Residency Program in Sioux Falls, SD. She will complete her residency in Psychiatry with a Fellowship in Adolescent and Child Psychiatry in 2025. Find the Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc® a medical Q&A show celebrating its twentieth season of truthful, tested, and timely medical information, broadcast on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



Based on Science, Built on Trust



Sophie Two Hawk, MD

Arna Mora, MD

Carol Whitman, MD

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: Is buying refurbished electronics better for the planet than buying brand new ones?

-- Peter Behr, Chicago, IL

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the world produces some 50 million tons of electronic waste each year, and the figure is increasing. Meanwhile, only 20 percent of this electronic waste is disposed of properly. The remaining 80 percent is either sent to landfills, incinerated or illegally traded, resulting in a host of environmental problems including groundwater pollution, reduced air quality and the depletion of virgin natural resources to replace discarded items. As a result, buying refurbished electronics is a step in the right direction.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that buying refurbished electronics can significantly reduce the environmental impact of electronic waste. The EPA estimates that for every million smartphones that are refurbished and reused, approximately 35,000 pounds of copper, 772 pounds of silver, 75 pounds of gold and 33 pounds of palladium can be recovered. This is a considerable number of valuable resources that can be conserved by buying refurbished electronics.

Refurbishing electronics not only conserve resources but also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as 50 percent, according to the EPA. This is because the production of new electronics requires a lot of energy, and greenhouse gas emissions are generated during the manufacturing process. "Most of the pollution that's made actually is in the manufacturing of the device, not the use," says Lucas Guterman of the non-profit public interest group, U.S. PIRG. "So buying refurbished and using things for as long as we possibly can, really helps protect the environment."

Buying refurbished is also good for the pocketbook, given that they cost less. But is the savings worth it? Refurbished items sold by reputable retailers undergo tests and inspections to ensure that they meet the same quality standards as new items. According to the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), a trade association for the consumer electronics industry, buyers should look for refurbished electronics that come with a warranty that assures that the item has been thoroughly vetted and is of high quality.

"Some credit card companies will extend coverage on refurbished goods, too, as long as they come with a preexisting warranty," notes Consumer Reports' Yael Grauer. Another smart consumer tip is to always check the return policy on a refurbished item before hitting the "buy" button. "It might take you a little while to notice poor performance and defects in a refurbished product, so it helps to have at least one month to decide whether you want to keep it," adds Grauer.

Apple, Dell, Amazon, Walmart and BestBuy are among the large companies that sell many refurbished electronics with limited warranties and a return policy. Dozens of other smaller resellers (e.g., Refurb.io, Gazelle, TechForLess, RefurbMe, etc.) also specialize in refurbished products and typically offer similar if not better terms for consumers. "Buying refurbished products positively impacts the environment by boosting the circular economy, lowering the replacement cycle, reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, avoiding additional e-waste, and reducing energy and fuel consumption," says Simo Elalj of RefurbMe. "You do this by giving a new life to a pre-owned device."



Given the buildup of e-waste these days, environmentalists are increasingly looking at refurbished items when shopping for new electronics. Credit: Pexels.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota's members of Congress are wasting their potential influence on gun violence

Dana Hess

Whenever there is a mass shooting in the United States, it seems as if a memo goes out to Republican members of Congress so that they are all on the same page when asked about the prospect of reforming the country's gun laws.

Sometimes they say they don't want to politicize a tragedy, and other times they say it's not proper to consider new laws while the country is grieving. After the school shooting in Nashville, Tennessee, it seemed like the memo said that, when asked, Republican members of Congress should say that they were still waiting for more information.

After the shooting in Nashville, Sen. John Thune was quoted in a South Dakota Public Broadcasting story saying that discussing legislation was "premature" and that the investigation of the incident had to bring out the facts. A roundup of Republican leaders in the Washington Post showed that many of them had the same idea about waiting until the investigation into the murders was finished.

Other members of the South Dakota delegation had more substance in their comments, but refused to go on record as supporting any sort of gun safety legislation. Rep. Dusty Johnson noted his ongoing support for "robust" funding for mental health programs. Sen. Mike Rounds pointed toward his legislation that would transfer federal funding from accounts designed to fund solar panels for schools and use it to reinforce school security measures.

Rounds' bill would make schools eligible to share \$100 million per year for installing the security measures that they choose. Turning schools into armed camps likely isn't the best solution to halt the mass shootings across our nation.

The responses from the South Dakota delegation are in line with that of other Republicans in Congress who refuse to acknowledge that a strong majority of Americans support some changes to gun laws. Many favor universal background checks, raising the minimum age to buy guns or banning the sale of AR-15s.

Thune, Rounds and Johnson each have A+ ratings from the National Rifle Association. Their comments about the Nashville shooting show that they are disinclined to jeopardize that rating by discussing any reforms that have anything to do with guns.

That's a shame, because the three of them have set high standards for leadership and getting legislation approved. A recent South Dakota Searchlight roundup of congressional news noted that in the "effectiveness scores" tallied by the Center for Effective Lawmaking, South Dakota's delegation gets high marks.

Johnson ranked 14th in effectiveness among 222 Republican House members. Among 50 Republican



South Dakota's Republican congressional delegation, from left: Sen. John Thune, Rep. Dusty Johnson and Sen. Mike Rounds. (Photos courtesy of Thune/Johnson/Rounds offices; composite by South Dakota Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 8 of 64

Senate members, Rounds ranked ninth and Thune 13th. The rankings are based on 15 metrics that measure bills sponsored, how far they make it through the legislative process and how substantial their policy proposals are.

South Dakota's delegation is also top-heavy in leadership positions. Thune is the minority whip in the Senate — the No. 2 position in Senate Republican leadership. In the House, Johnson is the chairman of the 67-member Main Street Caucus. That group is known for its conservative principles and its belief in governing in a thoughtful and pragmatic manner.

That's exactly what this country needs — a thoughtful, pragmatic approach to gun reforms. Too often in this nation, anyone with the temerity to talk about gun reforms is labeled as weak or woke or unpatriotic. With their South Dakota hunting background and their seal of approval from the NRA, if they chose to take on gun reform legislation, it would be hard to accuse the delegation of being anything but concerned about curtailing gun violence.

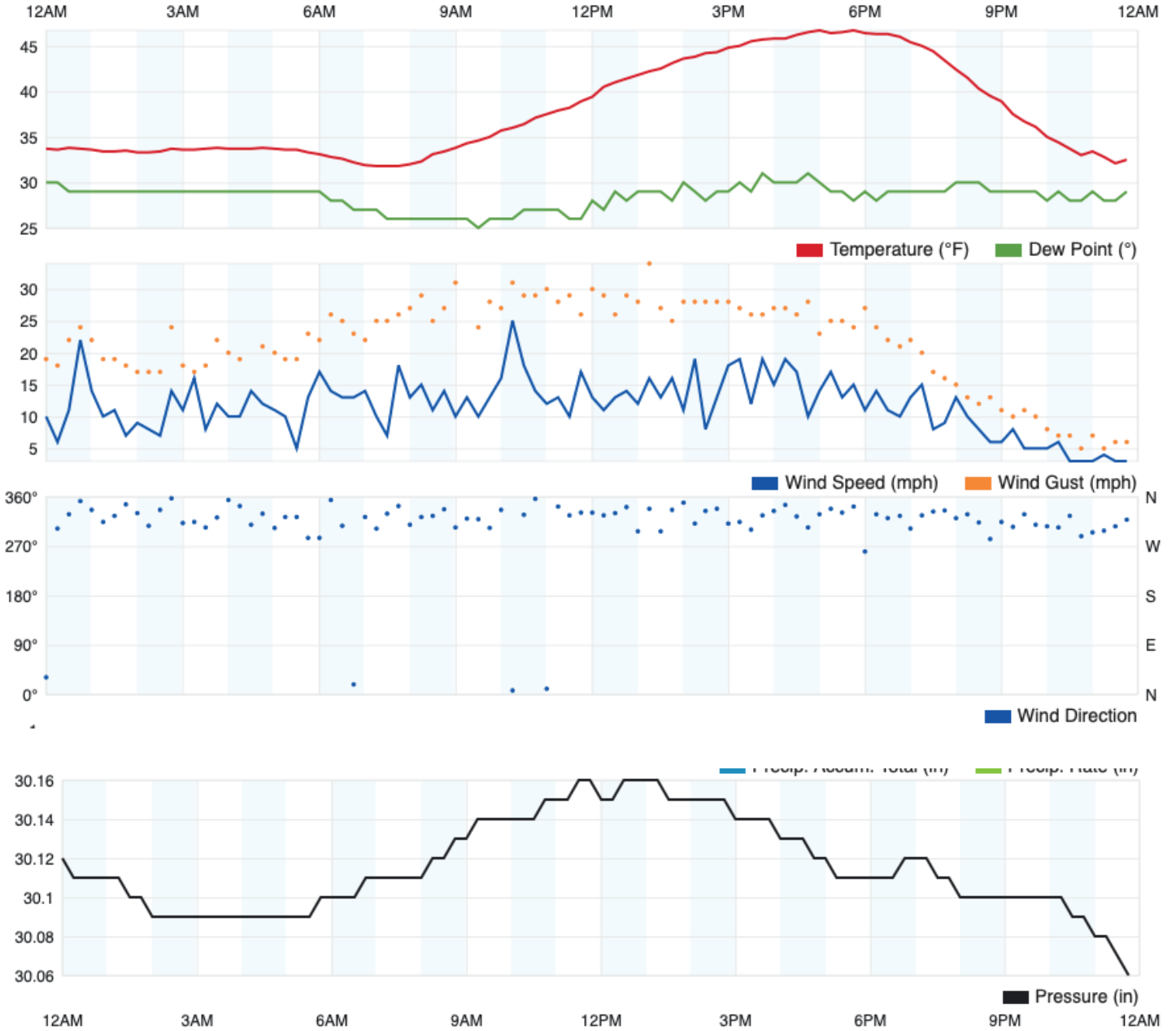
Here's hoping they can use their effectiveness credentials and their leadership positions to put gun safety reforms on the congressional agenda. If they can't, it will just be a waiting game until the next mass shooting and the next memo comes out telling them how to sidestep questions about how Congress should respond to gun violence.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Groton Daily Independent




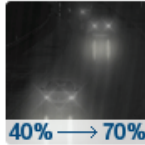



Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 9 of 64

Yesterdays Groton's Weather Graphs










Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 10 of 64

| Today | Tonight | Tuesday | Tuesday Night | Wednesday | Wednesday Night | Thursday |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sunny | Mostly Clear | Mostly Sunny then Partly Sunny and Breezy | 40% → 70% Breezy. Chance Rain then Rain Likely | 30% Chance Rain | Mostly Cloudy | 20% Partly Sunny then Slight Chance Rain and Breezy |
| High: 51 °F | Low: 25 °F | High: 59 °F | Low: 38 °F | High: 55 °F | Low: 30 °F | High: 51 °F |

Mild To Start The Week- Turning Cooler

| Today | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|--|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Breezy | Windy | Breezy | | |
| Highs: 45 - 62°F | Highs: 53 - 74°F | Highs: 53 - 59°F | Highs: 49 - 56°F | Highs: 40 - 45°F |
|  |  | | | |
| <p>Warmer Temps in Central SD - Coolest in NE SD/Western MN</p> <p>April 17, 2023 4:16 AM</p> | | | | |

We're going to start out mild, with breezy to windy conditions. Dry areas in central South Dakota and west river will see heightened fire danger since we've yet to see any greenup. A mid week system will bring some moisture, however rumors of snow thus far are just that (for South Dakota now anyway). Cooler, wet conditions will mark the latter half of the work week.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 11 of 64

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 47 °F at 5:37 PM

Low Temp: 32 °F at 7:36 AM

Wind: 34 mph at 1:07 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 40 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1913

Record Low: 10 in 1953

Average High: 59

Average Low: 32

Average Precip in April.: 0.85

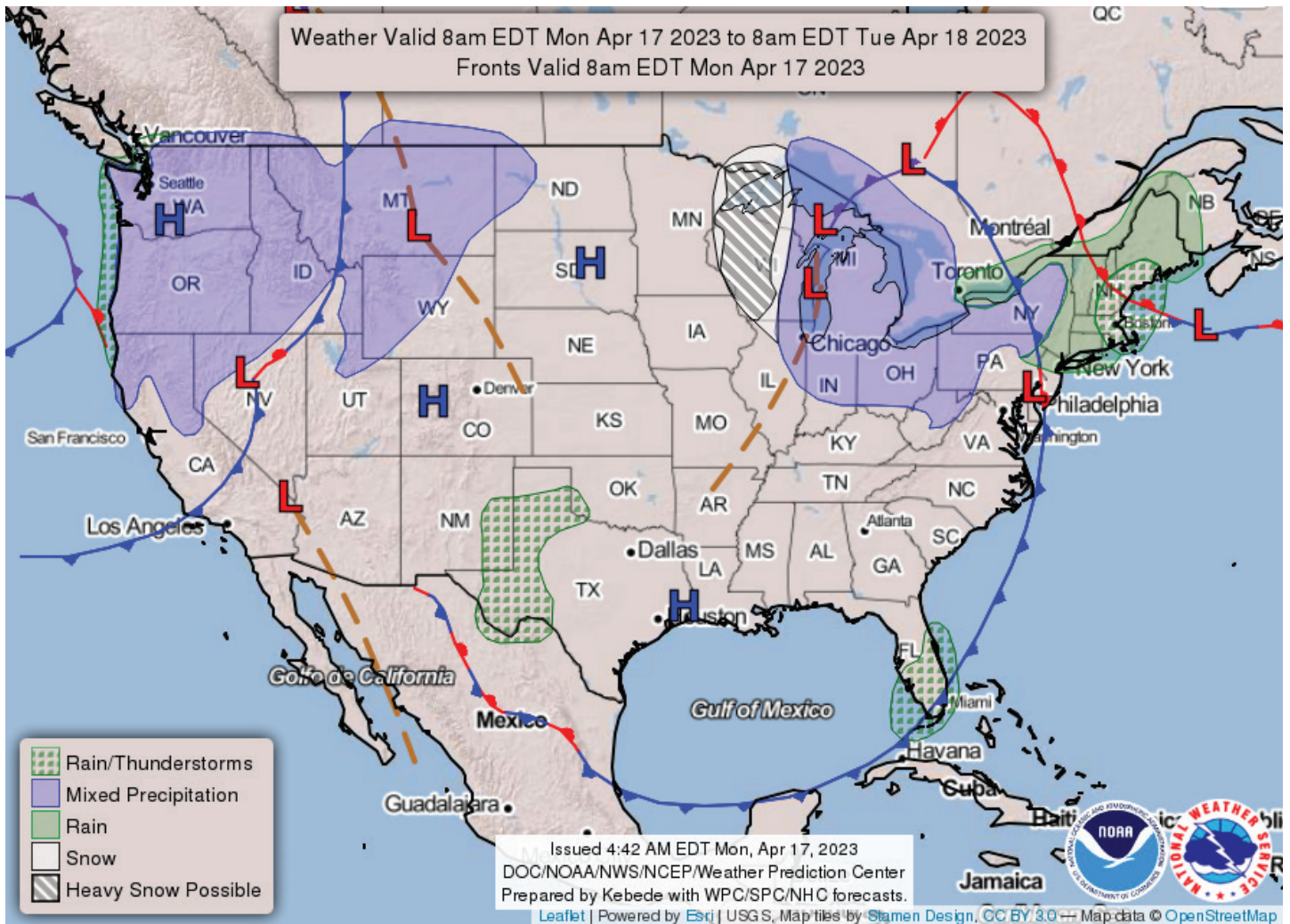
Precip to date in April.: 0.76

Average Precip to date: 2.91

Precip Year to Date: 4.69

Sunset Tonight: 8:22:13 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:39:57 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 12 of 64

Today in Weather History

April 17, 2006: A strong spring storm moved across the Northern and Central Plains, bringing precipitation and stiff northwest winds. Sustained winds of 30 to 50 mph, with gusts around 70 mph, were felt across a good portion of western South Dakota for more than 24 hours as the storm slowly crossed the region.

1922: Southern Illinois and Western Indiana saw two rounds of severe weather, including tornadoes. The first significant tornado occurred just before midnight on the 16 near Oakdale, Illinois. This tornado killed 4 and injured 22 others. Five additional tornadoes took place between midnight and 3 AM on the 17. During the mid-morning and early afternoon hours, two estimated F4 tornadoes caused devastation in Hedrick and near Orestes in Indiana. A postcard from one farm near Orestes was dropped near Mt. Cory, Ohio, 124 miles away.

1942: West Palm Beach, FL was soaked by 8.35 inches of rain in just two hours.

1953 - One of the few severe hailstorms accompanied by snow, sleet, glaze, and rain, pelted parts of Kay, Osage, Creek, Tulsa, Washington, and Rogers Counties in northeastern Oklahoma late in the day. Nearly 10,000 insurance claims were filed. (The Weather Channel)

1965 - The Mississippi River reached a flood crest at Saint Paul MN four feet higher than any previous mark. During the next two weeks record levels were reached along the Mississippi between Saint Paul and Hannibal MO. Flooding caused more than 100 million dollars damage, but timely warnings kept the death toll down to just twelve persons. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Twenty-two cities in the central U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. Temperatures warmed into the 70s and 80s from the High Plains Region to the Mississippi Valley, with readings in the low 90s reported in the Southern Plains Region. Tulsa OK hit 92 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Heavy snow blanketed northern Arizona. Snowfall totals ranged up to 16 inches at Pinetop, with 10 inches reported at Flagstaff. Afternoon thunderstorms spawned a couple of tornadoes in Idaho. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Arctic cold invaded the north central U.S. Missoula MT was blanketed with four inches of snow, and Glasgow MT reported a record cold morning low of 14 degrees above zero. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - High winds in northern Utah, gusting to 90 mph in Weber County, blew a trampoline through a living room window, and strong winds associated with a cold front crossing the Middle Atlantic Coast Region gusted to 75 mph in the Chesapeake Bay area of Virginia. Unseasonably cold weather prevailed in the north central U.S. Valentine NE was the cold spot in the nation with a record low of 10 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002: The heat wave continued across the east as high pressure off the Carolina blocked a frontal boundary across the Plains. Records for the date included:

Newark, New Jersey: 97

NYC Central Park: 96

Hartford, Connecticut: 95

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 95

Reagan National Airport, DC: 95 (Tied monthly high)

Lynchburg, Virginia: 94

Atlantic City, New Jersey: 94

Norfolk, Virginia: 93

Providence, Rhode Island: 93

Boston, Massachusetts: 93

Portland, Maine: 80

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 13 of 64

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

PRIORITY ONE

Dwight Eisenhower once said, "I do many things that are urgent but few things that are important."

What a most revealing statement from one who successfully served his country as a general and president. It would be good to make it a question for each of us to ask ourselves every day: How do I separate the urgent from the important?

Or should we begin with the question: What is the difference between something that is urgent and something that is important?

Something urgent suggests I must give my immediate attention to an event that is happening now! Important, on the other hand, means that something of significance, value or consequence to me is occurring. I quickly answer a ringing phone because it is annoying and gets my immediate attention. I answered it with urgency, but the call may not be important.

Our Scripture for today talks about the difference between urgent and important. The Rich Fool was overly concerned about wealth and was in a hurry to expand his financial worth. But Jesus said, "Guard against greed and focus on your relationship with God."

We must always make certain that our number one priority as Christians is our relationship with God. We must constantly focus on Him and closely follow Him every day by communicating with Him daily, reading His Word always, and investing time in prayer.

Prayer: I ask, Father, that in Your power and through Your strength, You will always be first in my life. May I think of Your words constantly, and follow them carefully. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus replied, "Friend, who made me a judge over you to decide such things as that?" Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every



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

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 14 of 64

2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 15 of 64

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

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

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- 9 Months \$42.60
- 12 Months \$53.25

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Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

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

E-mail _____

Password _____

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

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 16 of 64



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.14.23

23 27 41 48 51 22

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 52

DRAW: Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.23

10 17 24 30 37 3

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,300,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 52 Mins 34

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.16.23

6 21 29 34 47 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 22 Mins 34

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.23

2 5 16 18 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$29,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 52

DRAW: Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.23

4 6 15 19 28 15

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 51 Mins 34

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.23

1 33 34 56 59 18

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$235,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 51 Mins 34

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Sudan battles intensify on 3rd day; civilian deaths reach 97

By JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Sudan's embattled capital awoke Monday to a third day of heavy fighting between the army and a powerful rival force for control of the country, as the weekend's civilian death toll rose to 97.

Airstrikes and shelling intensified in parts of Khartoum and the adjoining city of Omdurman. Rapid, sustained firing was heard near the military headquarters, with white smoke rising from the area. Residents hunkering down in their homes reported power outages and incidents of looting.

"Gunfire and shelling are everywhere," Awadeya Mahmoud Koko, head of a union for thousands of tea vendors and other food workers, said from her home in Khartoum.

She said a shell stuck a neighbor's house Sunday, killing at least three people. "We couldn't take them to a hospital or bury them."

The clashes are part of a power struggle between Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the commander of the armed forces, and Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group. The two generals are former allies who jointly orchestrated an October 2021 military coup that derailed Sudan's short-lived transition to democracy.

Both men have dug in, saying they would not negotiate a truce, instead engaging in verbal attacks and demanding the other's surrender.

On Monday, Dagalo, whose forces grew out of the notorious Janjaweed militias in Sudan's Darfur region, portrayed himself in a statement on Twitter as a defender of democracy and branded Burhan as the aggressor and a "radical Islamist."

Pro-democracy activists have noted that both generals have a long history of human rights abuses. At the same time, both men have powerful foreign backers, making them potentially susceptible to mounting diplomatic pressure to end the fighting.

Since fighting erupted on Saturday, 97 civilians have been killed and hundreds have been wounded, said the Sudan Doctors' Syndicate, a pro-democracy group monitoring casualties.

There has been no official word on the number of fighters killed.

Footage posted online Monday purported to show RSF barracks in Omdurman. The bodies of dozens of men in camouflage uniforms were seen sprawled on beds and the floor of a medical ward and in a sandy outdoor area.

The authenticity of the videos could not be confirmed independently, but they surfaced after the military said it has targeted RSF bases with airstrikes. Mohamed al-Mokhtar al-Nour, an RSF adviser, told the Al Jazeera satellite network Sunday that RSF forces have withdrawn from the camp.

The chaotic scenes of fighting with tanks, truck-mounted machine guns, artillery and warplanes in densely populated areas of the capital are unprecedented. Sudan has a long history of civil strife, but much of that has taken place in remote tribal areas, far from Khartoum.

Fighting also spread to the war-wrecked western Darfur region, and areas of northern and eastern Sudan, near the borders with Egypt and Ethiopia.

The violence erupted during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, which ends later this week and is capped by the three-day Eid al-Fitr holiday.

The battles created more hardships for Sudan, where about 16 million people, or one-third of the population, depend on humanitarian assistance.

Over the weekend, the World Food Program suspended operations in Sudan after three employees were killed in Darfur. On Monday, the International Rescue Committee also said it was halting its work because of the conflict, with the exception of a refugee camp in the southeast.

On Sunday, the warring sides agreed to a three-hour pause in fighting to allow civilians to stock up on

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 18 of 64

necessities. Compliance was spotty, and there were reports of casualties during the humanitarian pause. Volker Perthes, the U.N. envoy for Sudan, called out the breaches Monday and urged both sides to "ensure the protection of all civilians."

Koko, the head of the tea vendors' union, said Burhan and Dagalo must stop fighting and withdraw troops from residential areas. "We, the people, want to live in peace," she said. "We want security."

Top diplomats urged the sides to stop fighting, including the U.S. secretary of state, the U.N. secretary-general, the EU foreign policy chief, the head of the Arab League and the head of the African Union Commission. The U.N. Security Council was to discuss the developments in Sudan later on Monday.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken renewed his call for a truce and a return to negotiations during a meeting of the Group of Seven wealthy nations in Japan on Monday.

"People in Sudan want the military back in the barracks," he said. "They want democracy. They want the civilian-led government, Sudan needs to return to that path."

In recent months, negotiations had been under way to get back on a path to democracy. Under international pressure, Burhan and Dagalo agreed to a framework agreement with political parties and pro-democracy groups.

However, the deal was vague on key points of dispute, including how the RSF would be integrated into the armed force and who would have final control. The signing of the deal was put off repeatedly as tensions rose between Burhan and Dagalo.

The fighting marks a deadly setback for Sudan, a resource-rich nation strategically located at the crossroads of Africa and the Arab world. Only four years ago, Sudan inspired hope after a popular uprising helped depose long-time autocratic leader Omar al-Bashir.

Magdy reported from Cairo.

House where King planned Alabama marches moving to Michigan

By COREY WILLIAMS Associated Press

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — A lot was happening in March 1965 in the bungalow in Selma, Alabama, that then-4-year-old Jawana Jackson called home, and much of it involved her "Uncle Martin."

There were late-night visitors, phone calls and meetings at the house that was a safe haven for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders as they planned the Selma to Montgomery marches calling for Black voting rights.

The role the Jackson House played was integral to the Civil Rights Movement, so Jackson contacted the The Henry Ford Museum near Detroit about a year ago to ask if it would take over the preservation of the Jackson House and its legacy.

"It became increasingly clearer to me that the house belonged to the world, and quite frankly, The Henry Ford was the place that I always felt in my heart that it needed to be," she told The Associated Press last week from her home in Pensacola, Florida.

Starting this year, the Jackson House will be dismantled piece-by-piece and trucked the more than 800 miles (1,280 kilometers) north to Dearborn, Michigan, where it will eventually be open to the public as part of the history museum. The project is expected to take up to three years.

Owned by dentist Sullivan Jackson and his wife, Richie Jean, the 3,000-square-foot (28-square-meter) home was where King and others strategized the three marches against racist Jim Crow laws that prevented Black people from voting in the Deep South.

King was inside the home when President Lyndon Johnson announced a bill that would become the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

"There was a synergy going on in that house during those critical times," Jawana Jackson said. "Whether that was when Uncle Martin was praying the morning of the Selma to Montgomery march or whether he was talking to President Johnson (by phone) in the little bedroom of that home, I always got a sense of energy and a sense of hope for the future."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 19 of 64

The house and artifacts, including King's neckties and pajamas, and the chair where he sat while watching Johnson's televised announcement, will be part of the acquisition by The Henry Ford. The purchase price is confidential.

Named after Ford Motor Co. founder and American industrialist Henry Ford, the museum sits on 250 acres (100 hectares) and also features Greenfield Village where more than 80 historic structures are displayed and maintained. The Jackson House will be rebuilt there, joining the courthouse where Abraham Lincoln first practiced law, the laboratory where Thomas Edison perfected the light bulb, and the home and workshop where Orville and Wilbur Wright invented their first airplane.

Also among the collection's artifacts are the Montgomery city bus whose seat Rosa Parks refused to give up to a white man in 1955 and the chair that Lincoln was sitting on in 1865 when he was assassinated at Ford's Theatre in Washington.

Visitors to Greenfield Village will be able to walk through the Jackson House, according to Patricia Mooradian, The Henry Ford's president and chief executive.

"This house is the envelope, but the real importance is what happened inside," Mooradian said. "We want people to immerse themselves in that history ... to feel and experience what may have gone on in that home. What were the conversations? What were the decisions that were being made around the dining room table?"

Built in 1912, the home served as a guest house for Black authors W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington who held "fireside chats" regarding education, religion, the arts, community building and economic sustainability, according to the Alabama African American Civil Rights Heritage Sites Consortium.

It took on a greater importance following the fatal shooting of a young Black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, by an Alabama trooper.

On March 7, 1965, weeks after that slaying, about 600 people participated in a peaceful protest. The late Georgia U.S. Rep. John Lewis was one of the leaders of the planned 54-mile (86-kilometer) march to the state Capitol, which was part of the larger effort to register Black voters. But police beat protesters as they tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma in what is now known as "Bloody Sunday."

Television and newspaper reports seared images of that confrontation into the nation's consciousness. Days later, King led what became known as the "Turnaround Tuesday" march, in which marchers approached police at the bridge and prayed before turning back.

Johnson introduced the Voting Rights Act of 1965 eight days after "Bloody Sunday." On March 21, King began a third march, under federal protection, that grew to thousands of people by the time it arrived at the state Capitol. Five months later, Johnson signed the bill into law.

The Jackson House brings a new dimension to understanding the role Black Americans played in defeating Jim Crow, according to historian Gretchen Sullivan Sorin.

"The Jacksons are unsung heroes," Sorin said. "Their generosity and courage shows us how we, as ordinary Americans, can stand up against injustice."

Jackson said her parents felt the risks were worth taking.

"For them, it was all about the future for me and millions of other children that were going to grow up," she said. "They felt that everyone deserved a peaceful and more democratic society to grow up in."

Williams is a member of AP's Race & Ethnicity team.

US tax breaks lure European clean tech companies as EU lags

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Norwegian startup Freyr will first build batteries to power electric vehicles and store clean energy in a remote town near the Arctic Circle. Up next? An Atlanta suburb.

That's because a new U.S. clean energy law offers generous tax credits — up to 40% of costs — in what is a "massive, massive incentive" for producing in America, CEO Tom Einar Jensen said.

Across Europe, companies seeking to invest in the green energy boom — churning out everything from

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 20 of 64

solar panels to windmills and EV batteries — are making similar calculations, weighing up the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act's \$375 billion in benefits for renewable industries against a fragmented response that European leaders have been scrambling to patch together for months.

The law aims to kick-start the U.S. transition away from climate-changing fossil fuels with tax credits and rebates that favor clean technology made in North America.

It blindsided Europe when it became law in August, putting the U.S. on course to eclipse the continent in the global push to reduce carbon emissions and leaving European leaders fuming over rules that favor American products, threatening to suck green investment from Europe and spark a subsidy race.

The European Union's executive branch responded with plans aimed at ensuring least 40% of clean technology is produced in Europe by 2030 and limiting the amount of strategic raw materials from any single third country — typically China — to 65%. It also opened negotiations with President Joe Biden on making Europe-sourced minerals for EV battery manufacturing eligible for U.S. tax credits.

Executives, simply looking for the most money they can get to boost their businesses, are hailing the U.S. program's simplicity. Some complain that the EU plan is underwhelming, confusing and bureaucratic, putting Europe at risk of falling behind in the green energy transition, notably as the auto industry moves to EVs.

"While the United States are catching up thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, Europe is more and more lagging behind," Volkswagen's board member overseeing technology, Thomas Schmall, posted on LinkedIn. "The conditions of the IRA are so attractive that Europe risks to lose the race for billions of investments that will be decided in the coming months and years."

Volkswagen said last month that its new PowerCo battery business would build its first gigafactory for EV battery cells outside Europe in St. Thomas, Ontario — following two others under construction in Germany and Spain. The Canadian plant, set to open in 2027, is expected to benefit from the IRA because of provisions for U.S. neighbors and free-trade partners Canada and Mexico.

Meanwhile, the German auto giant has reportedly put on hold a decision for a battery plant in Eastern Europe while it waits for more information on the EU's plan. Volkswagen didn't respond to a request for comment.

Another Scandinavian battery startup, Sweden's Northvolt, was poised to build a third gigafactory, and the first outside its home country, in northern Germany. The U.S. law led it to hit pause, and it's looking over the new EU proposals before deciding next month where to put that facility.

The EU keeps a tight rein on state aid for businesses to avoid distorting competition in the 27-nation bloc's single market, where some countries — like Germany and France — are much larger and richer than others. But to compete with the U.S., the EU relaxed those restrictions for clean industries, marking a fundamental change for Brussels from its long-held view that government should take a hands-off approach to free markets.

European business leaders say the U.S. incentives could upend the global ways of producing technology.

"We're building cars in the U.S. but sometimes the engine or other parts come from Europe. The IRA puts this model in question because it requires manufacturing to take place in the U.S.," said Luisa Santos, deputy director general of BusinessEurope, a Brussels-based lobbying group.

"You might have more proximity, but the cost will be much higher" if global supply lines disappear, she warned. "Will the consumer be willing to pay?"

Italian energy giant Enel credited the IRA when it announced plans in November to build a massive solar panel factory in the U.S.

Enel's factory initially will be able to churn out 3 gigawatts of solar panels and cells, ultimately expanding to 6 gigawatts. The plant is expected to be operating by the end of 2024.

It's not just Europe. Companies in Asia also want a piece of the IRA.

South Korean tech giant LG last month unveiled plans to build a \$5.5 billion battery manufacturing complex in Arizona, which it called the biggest single investment ever for a standalone battery manufacturing facility in North America.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 21 of 64

By setting up manufacturing in the U.S., LG “aims to respond to the fast-growing needs for locally manufactured batteries on the back of the IRA,” the company said.

The factory is scheduled to start making electric car batteries by 2025 and batteries for energy storage systems a year later.

For its part, Freyr is expanding its footprint from its first battery gigafactory being built in Mo i Rana in northern Norway to a second in Coweta County, Georgia, each costing \$1.7 billion.

“It’s important for us to produce batteries on both sides of the Atlantic because our customers and our supply chain partners want us to be present in both places,” CEO Jensen said at an opening ceremony for a pilot plant in Mo i Rana.

He said in an interview that the IRA provides up to \$45 in tax credits toward the typical cost of making a battery, which is \$110 to \$115 per kilowatt hour.

The IRA has stoked so much demand for standalone energy storage systems like the ones that Freyr makes — big banks of batteries that utility companies use to store renewably generated electricity — that the company moved the U.S. completion date up by a year to 2025, Jensen said.

Freyr is now trying to figure out “how we can fast-track it even further” because “our customers are really screaming for locally produced” batteries, which, Jensen said, allow them to get their own incentives.

“That, of course, increases demand for our product,” he said.

Clinton, Blair marking Northern Ireland peace milestone

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (AP) — Former U.S. President Bill Clinton and past leaders of the U.K. and Ireland gathered in Belfast on Monday, 25 years after their charm, clout and determination helped Northern Ireland strike a historic peace accord.

They met to remember a moment, said former U.S. Senator George Mitchell, “when history opened itself to hope,” in a Northern Ireland that has changed dramatically since 1998 — and where some wonder if the accord that created peace is still capable of sustaining it.

“Twenty-five years ago the people of Northern Ireland and their leaders changed the course of history,” said Mitchell, 89, who chaired two arduous years of peace negotiations that led to the accord.

A quarter-century on, “the people of Northern Ireland continue to wrestle with their doubts, their differences, their disagreements,” he said. But, he added: “The people of Northern Ireland don’t want to return to violence — not now and not ever.”

A young peacetime generation is increasingly shedding the rival identities — British unionist and Irish nationalist — that erupted into three decades of bloodshed that killed 3,600 people. But at the same time, Northern Ireland is locked in a political crisis that threatens to rattle the peace secured by the Good Friday Agreement.

“You’ve got a transformed society in which (the labels) unionist, nationalist for many young people doesn’t mean anything,” said Katy Hayward, professor of political sociology at Queen’s.

“But on the other hand, society is in a state of quite severe disrepair. We haven’t had a functioning Assembly for four out of the last six years, and our public services are crumbling around our ears.”

Clinton, who recently called the day the peace deal was struck “one of the happiest days of my presidency, indeed of my entire life,” is joining former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair, ex-Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and Northern Ireland politicians and peacemakers at the Queen’s University Belfast conference.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Queen’s University’s chancellor, urged people in Northern Ireland to show the same “unstoppable grit and resolve” that secured the peace deal.

“You have always found a way through, and I believe you will again,” she told delegates.

The three-day gathering caps commemorations of the April 10, 1998, peace accord that included a flying visit last week by President Joe Biden, on his way to explore his Irish roots in the neighboring Republic of Ireland. During speeches in Belfast and Dublin, Biden reminded Northern Ireland’s politicians how strongly the U.S. remains invested in peace.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 22 of 64

"I wanted to make clear there's a lot at stake, a lot at stake," Biden told reporters as he left Ireland on Friday. "And I think the combination of Ireland, the whole island, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, United States can change the way things occur."

The Good Friday Agreement has been held up around the world as proof that bitter enemies can make peace. It committed armed groups to stop fighting and set up a Northern Ireland legislature and government with power shared between unionist and nationalist parties.

U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who is due to host a gala commemorative dinner in Belfast on Wednesday, hailed "the courage, imagination and perseverance" of the peacemakers, including those, like former Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam, who have since died.

But critics say the U.K. government has been, at best, careless with Northern Ireland's peace — especially by leading Britain out of the European Union following a 2016 referendum.

Brexit shook the peace settlement by creating friction between Britain, the EU — including member state Ireland — and the U.S. It also destabilized the delicate political balance in Northern Ireland, by reviving the need for a customs border between the EU and now ex-member the U.K. An open border between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland is one of the foundations of peace, so checks were imposed instead on goods moving from mainland Britain to Northern Ireland.

That unsettled unionists, who see the economic barrier as undermining Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom. The Democratic Unionist Party walked out of the government in protest more than a year ago, collapsing it. The party has not returned, despite a deal reached by the U.K. and the EU in February to remove many of the border checks.

As they reflect on the past, conference participants will grapple with how to get the power-sharing government back up and running.

Entreaties from the U.K., the EU and the United States have so far failed to coax the DUP back into government. Local elections in Northern Ireland next month will give an indication of whether the party's intransigence has cost it votes.

Increasing numbers of people argue that power-sharing must be tweaked to reflect the growing importance of forces such as the Alliance Party, which defines itself as neither unionist nor nationalist.

Meanwhile, violence hasn't disappeared completely. In February, IRA dissidents opposed to the peace process shot and wounded a senior police officer.

Former Irish leader Ahern, who played a key role in the 1998 peace talks, urged the DUP to compromise. "You do not make much progress in politics if you don't do that," Ahern told Sky News on Sunday. "We have to get away from, you know, 'This is the position and no other position is satisfactory.' It's not tenable or sustainable. And it's not in the interests of the people in Northern Ireland."

Nonprofits scramble for help amid dearth of volunteers

By THALIA BEATY and GLENN GAMBOA Associated Press

CASA of Lexington has tried just about everything to find volunteers to serve as advocates for abused and neglected children with the Kentucky nonprofit.

Since 2020, it has hired someone to focus on recruiting volunteers, added in-person and virtual outreach events and options to complete the required 30-hour training, and printed information on fans to hand out in churches, Melynda Milburn Jamison, its executive director, said. She even visited a men's-only barbecue to make a quick 10-minute pitch.

The result? In 2022, CASA of Lexington had 62 new volunteers complete training, short of its target of 80. Only two came from the group's recruitment events, with the rest mostly via word of mouth, Jamison said.

"We've been able to retain keeping the number of children we serve fairly consistent," she said, "but we should have been increasing because we've taken on new counties and we've added additional staff."

Jamison is not alone in her frustration. Her experience reflects the latest twist in a decadeslong trend of declining volunteer participation. As pandemic-related government aid programs end and inflation rises, nonprofits of all kinds are looking everywhere and trying everything to get volunteers. According to a

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 23 of 64

recent U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps survey, formal volunteer participation dropped 7% between 2019 and 2021 — the largest decrease the survey has recorded since a version of it started in 2002.

It's reached the point where the lack of volunteers strains the safety net that nonprofits provide to many of society's most vulnerable.

"This is a wake-up call for the social sector, which depends on volunteers, especially as needs for services remain high," said Michael D. Smith, CEO of AmeriCorps, which has opened its yearly grant program to award \$8 million to help nonprofits recruit and retain volunteers.

The largest drop between 2019 and 2021 in any state was Colorado at 16.1%. Hawaii, Wisconsin and Ohio also saw double-digit drops. Utah, with its highest-in-the-nation participation rate of 40.7% in 2021, the most recent figures that are available, saw an 8.8% drop.

Researchers, nonprofit professionals and volunteers offer a variety of explanations for the decline, including the COVID-19 pandemic and economic woes.

Historically, volunteering has been strongest among college graduates, married people and people with children. However, many Millennials and Gen Zers are delaying those traditional markers of adulthood, and even their peers who do reach these milestones are volunteering at lower rates, researchers at the University of Maryland found in a 2019 report.

"Younger generations today are much more likely to work several jobs, more likely to have to share places to live long past the college roommate stage of life," said Mark Snyder, director of the Center for the Study of the Individual and Society at the University of Minnesota. "These are barriers to getting involved. They are not all blessed to have the discretionary time to go out and volunteer."

The COVID-19 pandemic also played a role, as closures and fears about getting sick led some people to break their volunteering habit. Some did not return, instead putting their attention on their families or, as local United Ways report, their own needs for help with food, rent, utilities and health care.

At CASA of Lexington, the recruiting problems mean the nonprofit cannot increase the number of children it provides an advocate for as quickly as it would like.

"Even though we served just shy of 700 kids last year, that was less than 20% of the need here. So there's a huge need," Jamison said. "We typically get the worst of the worst cases."

Shannon Arimura, who runs volunteer support programs with Nevada Volunteers, said organizations should clearly outline the commitment and skills needed in volunteer postings, build relationships with new volunteers, and offer appreciation for their work.

"If you're only going to give so much of your resources towards volunteer management, then it shouldn't surprise you when you don't have volunteers that will stay," she said.

Karmit Bulman, executive director of Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement, recommends nonprofits learn from informal volunteering networks, meaning the help neighbors provide each other when needed. Those behaviors remained largely steady through the pandemic, the census survey found. The rate was 50.9% in 2021, compared with 51.4% in 2017.

"We need to stop thinking that we can do everything we used to do in the same way. So it's a time for some pretty intensive change management," she said.

Her advice is to seek volunteers from within the communities that nonprofits are serving, make the onboarding process as efficient as possible and meet volunteers when and where they are.

"A lot of our systems were set up as a best practice for the professionals who might typically be a white woman who's leading the program as opposed to being a best practice for anyone" else, Bulman said.

Companies, long an important sources of volunteers, are looking to prioritize in-person volunteering again but are asking employees to take on a larger role organizing that and choosing programs, according to a recent survey by Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose, which advises companies on sustainability and corporate responsibility issues.

"This orchestrated corporate vision of a day of service and one-day activities is shifting to companies wanting their employees to chart their own path of volunteerism and being ambassadors in the community," Kari Niedfeldt-Thomas, a managing director with that organization, said. "And they're providing the

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 24 of 64

toolkits and the resources to be able to make those decisions.”

The only state that saw an increase in formal volunteer participation from 2019 to 2021 was Wyoming. Rachel Bailey, executive director of the Food Bank of Wyoming, said many residents wanted to help when the pandemic hit and were willing to participate despite potential health risks.

The demand for food assistance also spiked, with her organization increasing the number of mobile food pantries from four to 19. Almost all of the new pantries are staffed by volunteers, some of whom are also seeking food assistance.

Her organization has been able to expand its volunteer force in part because it dedicated a paid staff to managing them and increased its warehouse space, Bailey said.

“We had some other team members that joined us that really have been looking at our volunteer program and understanding how important it is to the organization and how important it is for us to have the ability to distribute the amount of food that we do across the state,” she said.

Associated Press coverage of philanthropy and nonprofits receives support through the AP’s collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content. For all of AP’s philanthropy coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/philanthropy>.

Russian opposition activist given 25-year prison sentence

MOSCOW (AP) — A top Kremlin foe was convicted Monday on charges of treason and denigrating the Russian military and sentenced him to 25 years in prison after a trial that marked the latest move in a relentless crackdown on the opposition amid the fighting in Ukraine.

Vladimir Kara-Murza, Jr., a prominent opposition activist who twice survived poisonings he blamed on the Kremlin, has been behind bars since his arrest a year ago. He has rejected the charges against him as political and likened the judicial proceedings against him to the show trials during the rule of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

In his final statement last week, Kara-Murza said that he remains proud of standing up to Russian President Vladimir Putin’s “dictatorship” and his decision to send troops into Ukraine.

“I know that the day will come when the darkness engulfing our country will clear,” Kara-Murza said in remarks last week that were posted on social networks and Russian opposition media. “And then our society will open its eyes and shudder when it realizes what terrible crimes were committed in its name.”

The charges against Kara-Murza stem from his March 2022 speech to the Arizona House of Representatives in which he denounced Russia’s military action in Ukraine. Investigators added the treason charges while he was in custody.

Russia adopted a law criminalizing spreading “false information” about its military days after it sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. Authorities have used the law to stifle criticism of what the Kremlin calls “a special military operation.”

Kara-Murza, a journalist, was an associate of Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was killed near the Kremlin in 2015. Kara-Murza survived poisonings in 2015 and 2017 that he blamed on the Kremlin. Russian officials have denied responsibility.

Another prominent opposition figure, Ilya Yashin, was sentenced to 8½ years in prison late last year on charges of discrediting the military.

Orthodox Easter mixes spiritual and pagan in equal measure

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Millions of Orthodox Christians across Eastern and Southern Europe, the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, have celebrated Easter, capping weeklong religious celebrations.

The most important holiday on the Orthodox religious calendar is essentially an outdoor celebration, with equally intense spiritual and pagan parts and religious services followed by feasts, familial and communal.

Customs such as eating spit-roasted lambs, knocking red-colored hard-boiled eggs together as a sort of contest and launching fireworks in celebration as soon as the priest intones “Christ has risen from the

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 25 of 64

dead," at midnight on Saturday, likely predate Christianity itself. But new customs, or variations of old ones, appear constantly.

In the neighborhood of Neos Kosmos, in Greece's capital, Athens, younger parishioners have recently taken to throwing Molotov cocktails — the rioters' weapon of choice — into open spaces. On the Greek island of Chios, two neighborhoods in the village of Vrontados wage a "rocket war" by throwing thousands of flares at each other, to the consternation of the quieter citizens who have seen houses set alight in years past. Municipal authorities are conflicted: The custom is welcome because it brings notoriety that attracts visitors, but they must also address safety concerns.

This year, the event was relatively chaste: state TV ERT reported that "only" 20,000 flares were launched, compared with about 100,000 before the COVID-19 pandemic. It was filmed by a documentary crew; the film will reportedly be shown on the world's largest video screen, the Viva vision screen in Las Vegas.

In countries such as Greece, Easter is also an occasion to flee the big cities for ancestral villages: It was reported that over 575,000 cars, almost all packed with families, left the Athens area. Authorities are bracing for the return, which will start Monday afternoon, hoping that the drivers have had enough time to get over the inevitable hangover.

Easter is not just about merriment, however. This year, it also had its somber moments, such as the celebrations in Ukraine among the devastation of war. It has its moments of reflection as well, such as when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Istanbul, the "first among equals" of Orthodox Christian prelates, celebrated Easter in his birthplace, the Turkish island of Gokceada — Imvros in Greek — fulfilling a promise he made 10 years ago.

This year, as in previous ones, the Holy Fire, miraculously lit, or so the faithful believe, in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Saturday, made its way abroad, sent by plane to countries including Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Lebanon, North Macedonia, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine. In many places, it is received with the honors due a visiting head of state. In Greece, it somehow arrives at every parish before midnight Saturday, a miracle in its own right.

Shooting at Alabama birthday party kills 4 people, wounds 28

By JEFF AMY and KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

DADEVILLE, Ala. (AP) — Alabama law enforcement officers Sunday were imploring people to come forward with information about a shooting that killed four people and injured 28 others during a teenager's birthday party.

Among those killed was a high school senior who planned to play college football and was celebrating his sister's 16th birthday. The shooting erupted Saturday night at a dance studio in downtown Dadeville.

During two news conferences Sunday, Sgt. Jeremy Burkett of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency did not take questions. He did not say if a suspect was in custody or if investigators knew about any motivation. He did not provide the names of those killed.

"We've got to have information from the community," Burkett said during a Sunday evening news conference.

Philstavious "Phil" Dowdell, a Dadeville High School senior who had committed to Jacksonville State University, was celebrating at his sister Alexis' party before he was shot to death, his grandmother Annette Allen told the Montgomery Advertiser.

"He was a very, very humble child. Never messed with anybody. Always had a smile on his face," Allen told the newspaper, calling it "a million-dollar smile."

Dowdell's mother was among those hurt in the shooting.

"Everybody's grieving," Allen said.

Burkett said the shooting occurred about 10:30 p.m. Saturday. "There were four lives tragically lost in this incident," he said.

The shootings rocked the city of 3,200 residents, which is about 57 miles (92 kilometers) northeast of

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 26 of 64

Montgomery, Alabama.

Keenan Cooper, the DJ at the party, told WBMA-TV that the party was stopped briefly when attendees heard someone had a gun. He said people with guns were asked to leave, but no one left. Cooper said when the shooting began some time later, some people took shelter under a table where he was standing, and others ran out.

Pastor Jason Whetstone, who leads the Christian Faith Fellowship, said the granddaughter of one of his church members was shot in the foot and underwent surgery Sunday.

"All of our hearts are hurting right now. We're just trying to pull together to find strength and comfort," Whetstone said before an interfaith vigil in the parking lot of First Baptist Church.

"We are a loving community," he said. "We're pulling together in every aspect to comfort each and every one of these children, the teachers, all of the community."

Dadeville's compact downtown is centered around a courthouse square with one- and two-story brick buildings. The town's busiest commercial district is a few blocks north of the square, off a bustling four-lane highway that runs between Birmingham and Auburn. Dadeville is close to Lake Martin, a popular recreational area.

Investigators on Sunday continued filing in and out of the Mahogany Masterpiece dance studio, denoted by a banner hanging on the outside of a one-story brick building just off the square. At least five bullet holes were visible in the studio's front windows. Less than a block away, the American and Alabama flags were lowered to half staff outside the Tallapoosa County Courthouse.

Dadeville Mayor Frank Goodman said he was in bed asleep when a council member called him just before 11 p.m. Saturday. He said he went to Lake Martin Community Hospital in Dadeville, where some of the people who had been shot were taken.

"It was chaotic," Goodman said. "There were people running around. They were crying and screaming. There were police cars everywhere, there were ambulances everywhere. People were trying to find out about their loved ones. That was a scene, where we never had anything like this happen in our city before."

Pastor Ben Hayes, who serves as chaplain for the Dadeville Police Department and for the local high school football team, said most of the victims are teenagers. Dowdell was within weeks of graduation and faced a bright future, Hayes told The Associated Press.

"He was a strong competitor on the field," Hayes said. "You didn't want to try to tackle him or get tackled by him. But when he came off the field, he was one of the nicest young men that you could ever meet, very respectful and well-respected by his peers."

Antojuan Woody, from the neighboring town of Camp Hill, was a senior and fellow wide receiver with Dowdell on a Dadeville Tigers football team that went undefeated before losing in the second round of the playoffs last year. He said he and Dowdell had been best friends for all of their lives.

"It hurts," Woody said as a steady stream of friends and teammates walked over to hug him during Sunday's prayer vigil. "It's unreal. I can't believe it."

Woody said he and Dowdell had a special relationship on the football field. "Us being friends forever like that, our chemistry was spot on. We always celebrated together on the field," he said.

He described the victims "as great people who didn't deserve what happened to them."

Hayes, the pastor, said worried families swarmed the local hospital Saturday night trying to find the condition of their children. He said serious crime is rare in Dadeville, and the small city is "sad, traumatized, in shock."

Jacksonville State football coach Rich Rodriguez said in a statement Sunday: "Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of Philstavius Dowdell and the other victims of the senseless tragedy last night. He was a great young man with a bright future."

Dowdell also recently won medals at a high school track meet at Troy University.

Counseling will be available for students at Tallapoosa County schools Monday, said the school district superintendent, Raymond C. Porter.

"This morning, I grieve with the people of Dadeville and my fellow Alabamians. Violent crime has NO place in our state, and we are staying closely updated by law enforcement as details emerge," Alabama

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 27 of 64

Gov. Kay Ivey said on social media.

President Joe Biden was briefed on the shooting, the White House said, adding that it is closely monitoring the situation and has been in touch with local officials and law enforcement to offer support.

"What has our nation come to when children cannot attend a birthday party without fear? When parents have to worry every time their kids walk out the door to school, to the movie theater, or to the park?" Biden said in a statement Sunday. "Guns are the leading killer of children in America, and the numbers are rising – not declining. This is outrageous and unacceptable."

Biden called on Congress to "require safe storage of firearms, require background checks for all gun sales, eliminate gun manufacturers' immunity from liability, and ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines."

The mayor said Dowdell was "a great young man." He also said he is concerned about those wounded and psychologically traumatized by the shooting.

"We are praying for them," Goodman said. "We ask God, if it's his will, to bring them back to their parents safe, so they can mend."

Goodman said guns and violence are not a frequent presence in Dadeville. He said trying to control guns would prove as futile as trying to control illegal drugs.

Dadeville High School had 485 students in grades 6-12 in 2022, according to Alabama state data. It serves Dadeville and nearby parts of Tallapoosa County. Like the rest of Dadeville, it's tucked away just out of view off a busy highway that runs from Birmingham to Auburn.

Dadeville High's head football coach Roger McDonald said he would try his best to support grieving students.

"There's not a playbook for something like this," he said. "So the best you've got to do is just love on your kids, let them all know how much you care about them, be there for them."

McDonald said Dowdell had something special.

"He was a leader, and as far as his ability, an electrifying player," the coach said.

Michael Taylor, an assistant coach, said he met Dowdell when the boy was 9 and coached him in youth football. Taylor said the team was invited to Atlanta to play in the stadium used by the NFL's Atlanta Falcons.

"He did some amazing things there, and he never stopped doing them since then," he said. "He was the No. 1 athlete in the school."

Taylor said he last heard from Dowdell on Friday, when Dowdell was seeking video of his athletic exploits. Taylor said he drove to the shooting scene Saturday night from his home in nearby Camp Hill.

"Man, I couldn't get close," Taylor said. "So once I found out what's going on, I really I just had to leave because it was going to be all night."

Taylor said he returned Sunday to see Dowdell's body carried out from the dance studio. He said he's not sure what he will tell other athletes Monday.

"The first thing we've got to do is we've got to pray our way out of this," Taylor said Sunday. "There ain't no other way. And then I can tell you, they're all real close like family at the high school."

This is at least the second time in recent years that multiple people were shot in Dadeville. Five people were wounded in July 2016 during a shooting at an American Legion hall, and a man was later charged with five counts of attempted murder, news outlets reported.

Chandler reported from Huntsville, Alabama.

G-7 diplomats reject Chinese, N. Korean, Russian aggression

By MATTHEW LEE and FOSTER KLUG Associated Press

KARUIZAWA, Japan (AP) — Top diplomats from the Group of Seven wealthy democracies are vowing a tough stance on China's increasing threats to Taiwan and on North Korea's unchecked tests of long-range missiles, while building momentum on ways to boost support for Ukraine and punish Russia for its invasion.

Russia's war in Ukraine will consume much of the agenda Monday as the envoys gather in this Japanese

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 28 of 64

hot spring resort town for Day Two of talks meant to pave the way for action by G-7 leaders when they meet next month in Hiroshima.

The world is at "turning point" on the fighting in Ukraine and must "firmly reject unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, and Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its threats of the use of nuclear weapons," Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi told his colleagues, according to a Japanese summary.

For the American delegation, the meeting comes at a crucial moment in the world's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and efforts to deal with China, two issues that G-7 ministers from Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, Italy and the European Union regard as potent challenges to the post-World War II rules-based international order.

A senior U.S. official traveling with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters that the Biden administration's goal for the talks is to shore up support for Ukraine, including a major initiative on Ukraine's energy infrastructure launched at last year's G-7 gatherings in Germany, as well as to ensure the continued provision of military assistance to Kyiv. Ramping up punishment against Russia for the conflict, particularly through economic and financial sanctions that were first threatened by the G-7 in December 2021, before the invasion, will also be a priority, the official said.

Ukraine faces an important moment in coming weeks with Russia's current offensive largely stalled and Ukraine preparing a counter-offensive. The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss Blinken's priorities at the closed-door meetings, said there would be discussion about ways to deepen support for Ukraine's long-term defense and deterrence capabilities. That might also improve Kyiv's position for potential negotiations that could end the conflict on its terms.

The role of Japan — the only Asian member of the G-7 — as chairman of this year's talks provides an opportunity to discuss coordinated action on China. Leaders and foreign ministers of G-7 countries, most recently France and Germany, have recently concluded visits to China, and the diplomats in Karuizawa are expected to discuss their impressions of where the Chinese stand on numerous issues, including the war in Ukraine, North Korea, and Taiwan, which is a particular sore point in U.S.-Chinese relations.

At a private working dinner on Sunday night that was the diplomats' first formal meeting, Hayashi urged continued dialogue with China on the many global challenges where participation from Beijing is seen as crucial. Among the Chinese interests that are intertwined with those of wealthy democracies are global trade, finance and climate efforts.

But the diplomats are also looking to address China's more aggressive recent stance in Northeast Asia, where it has threatened Taiwan, the self-governing democracy that Beijing claims as its own.

Hayashi told ministers that outside nations must continue "building a constructive and stable relationship, while also directly expressing our concerns and calling for China to act as a responsible member of the international community," according to a summary of the closed-door dinner.

China recently sent planes and ships to simulate an encirclement of Taiwan. Beijing has also been rapidly adding nuclear warheads, taking a tougher line on its claim to the South China Sea and painting a scenario of impending confrontation.

The worry in Japan can be seen in its efforts in recent years to make a major break from its self-defense-only post-WWII principles, working to acquire preemptive strike capabilities and cruise missiles to counter growing threats.

Blinken, the top U.S. diplomat, had been due to visit Beijing in February, but the trip was postponed because of a Chinese spy balloon incident over U.S. airspace and has yet to be rescheduled.

Blinken met briefly with China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Forum, but high-level contacts between Washington and Beijing have become rare. Thus, Blinken will be seeking insight from his French and German counterparts on their interactions with the Chinese, the senior U.S. official said.

Despite indications, notably comments from French President Emmanuel Macron, that the G-7 is split over China, the official said there is shared worry among G-7 nations over China's actions. The official

added that the foreign ministers would be discussing how to continue a coordinated approach to China. North Korea is also a key area of worry for Japan and other neighbors in the region.

Since last year, Pyongyang has test-fired around 100 missiles, including intercontinental ballistic missiles that showed the potential of reaching the U.S. mainland and a variety of other shorter-range weapons that threaten South Korea and Japan.

Hayashi "expressed grave concern over North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles with an unprecedented frequency and in unprecedented manners, including the launch in the previous week, and the G-7 Foreign Ministers strongly condemned North Korea's repeated launches of ballistic missiles," according to the summary.

What sparked the violent struggle to control Sudan's future?

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Tensions have been brewing for weeks between Sudan's two most powerful generals, who just 18 months earlier jointly orchestrated a military coup to derail the nation's transition to democracy.

Over the weekend, those tensions between the armed forces chief, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the head of the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary group, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, erupted into an unprecedented battle for control of the resource-rich nation of more than 46 million people.

Both men, each with tens of thousands of troops deployed just in the capital of Khartoum, vowed not to negotiate or cease fire, despite mounting global diplomatic pressure. It is a deadly setback for a country at the crossroads of the Arab world and Africa, which four years ago ended the rule of a long-time dictator in part through largely peaceful popular protests.

Here's a look at how Sudan, a country with a long history of coups, reached this point and what is at stake.

WHAT PRECEDED THE FIGHTING?

In recent months, negotiations had been under way for a return to the democratic transition that had been halted by the October 2021 coup.

Under mounting international and regional pressure, the armed forces and the RSF signed a preliminary deal in December with pro-democracy and civilian groups. But the internationally brokered agreement provided only broad outlines, leaving the thorniest political issues unsettled.

During tortuous negotiations to reach a final agreement, tensions between Burhan and Dagalo escalated. A key dispute is over how the RSF would be integrated into the military and who would have ultimate control over fighters and weapons.

Dagalo, whose RSF was involved in brutal crackdowns during tribal unrest and pro-democracy protests, also tried to fashion himself a supporter of the democratic transition. In March, he slammed Burhan, saying military leaders were unwilling to relinquish power.

Analysts argued that Dagalo is trying to whitewash the reputation of his paramilitary force, which began as brutal militias implicated in atrocities in the Darfur conflict.

HOW DID THE SITUATION ESCALATE?

On Wednesday, the RSF began deploying forces around the small town Merowe north of the capital. The town is strategic, with its large airport, central location and downstream electric dam on the Nile River. The next day, the RSF also sent more forces into the capital and other areas of the country, without the army leadership's consent.

On Saturday morning, fighting erupted at a military base south of Khartoum, with each side blaming the other for having initiated the violence. Since then, the military and the RSF have battled each other with heavy weapons, including armored vehicles and truck-mounted machine guns, in densely populated areas of the capital and the adjoining city of Omdurman. The military has pounded RSF bases with airstrikes.

By Monday, dozens of people have been killed and hundreds wounded in the fighting.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 30 of 64

The clashes spread to other areas in the country, including the strategic coastal city of Port Sudan on the Red Sea and eastern regions, on the borders with Ethiopia and Eritrea. Fighting was also reported in the war-wrecked Darfur region, where U.N. facilities were attacked and looted. The U.N. says three employees with the World Food Program were killed in the clashes there on Saturday.

WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS FOR A CEASE-FIRE AND A RETURN TO DIALOGUE?

The prospects for an immediate cease-fire appear to be slim. Burhan and Dagalo have dug in, demanding that the other surrender. The intense nature of the fighting also might make it harder for the two generals to return to negotiations.

On the other hand, the military and the RSF both have foreign backers, who unanimously appealed for an immediate halt to hostilities.

The Muslim religious calendar might also play a role. The fighting erupted during the last week of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, with the three-day holiday of Eid al-Fitr marking the end of the fasting month later this week. The population is increasingly strained for necessities, many homebound by the violence.

Meanwhile, there has been a flurry of diplomatic contacts. The U.N. Security Council is scheduled to discuss Sudan on Monday.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he discussed the developments in Sudan with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Saudi Foreign Minister said he spoke separately by phone with Burhan and Dagalo, and urged them to stop "all kinds of military escalation."

The Gulf Arab monarchies are close allies to the military as well as the RSF.

Cameron Hudson, a senior associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank and a former U.S. diplomat, said the Biden administration should get its allies in the region to push for peace.

"Without such pressure, we could find a conflict with the same pattern of the war in Tigray (in Ethiopia)," he said.

WHO ARE THE FOREIGN ACTORS AND WHAT RESOURCES ARE AT STAKE?

During the decades-long rule of strongman Omar al-Bashir, who was deposed in 2019, Russia was a dominant force. At one point, Moscow reached an initial deal to build a naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast.

After al-Bashir's ouster, the United States and European nations began competing with Russia for influence in Sudan, which is rich in natural resources, including gold, but has been mired in civil conflicts and military coups. In recent years, the Russian mercenary outfit Wagner has even made inroads in the country.

Burhan and Dagalo have also forged close ties with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Sudanese troops drawn from the military and the RSF have fought alongside the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen's long-running civil war.

Egypt, another regional power, also has deep ties with the Sudanese military. The two armies conduct regular war games, most recently this month. Egyptian troops were in a Sudanese military base for exercises when the clashes erupted Saturday. They were caught by the RSF which said they would be returned to Egypt.

The military controls most of the country's economy, but the RSF runs major gold mining areas, a key source of income for the powerful group.

Trump's House GOP allies take fight to Manhattan DA's turf

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Republicans upset with Donald Trump's indictment are escalating their war on the prosecutor who charged him, trying to embarrass him on his home turf partly by falsely portraying New York City as a place overrun by crime.

The House Judiciary Committee, led by U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican, is holding a field hearing Monday near the offices of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 31 of 64

The committee's Republican majority is billing it as an examination of the Democrat's "pro-crime, anti-victim" policies. One committee member, U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs, an Arizona Republican, tweeted that Bragg has "turned NYC into a wasteland," and that "lawlessness is completely out of control."

Democrats say the hearing is a partisan stunt aimed at amplifying conservative anger at Bragg, Manhattan's first Black district attorney.

New York City officials have urged Jordan to cancel the hearing. C-SPAN has declined to air it on TV.

"This is simply an in-kind donation or contribution to the Trump campaign," Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat and former police captain told CNN Friday. "This is really a charade and it's just unfortunate, during a time like this, they will use taxpayers dollars to host this charade."

Monday's hearing is the latest salvo in Jordan's weekslong effort to use his congressional powers to defend Trump from what he says is a politically motivated prosecution.

Jordan has sent letters to Bragg demanding testimony and documents, claiming his office is subject to congressional scrutiny because it gets federal grants. He subpoenaed a former prosecutor, Mark Pomerantz, who previously oversaw the Trump investigation.

Bragg sued Jordan last week to try to block the subpoena, calling it a "brazen and unconstitutional attack" and a "transparent campaign to intimidate" him over the Trump case. A federal judge scheduled an initial hearing for Wednesday.

Monday brings a House hearing designed to pump up the argument that Bragg is so focused on Trump, he is letting street crime flourish.

Attacking New York City, and its mostly Democratic leaders, over crime is an old trick for politicians who represent rural and suburban districts. It is a punch that can still land with some audiences, though in reality the city's violent crime rate remains substantially below the U.S. average.

In 2022, Bragg's first year in office, there were 78 homicides in Manhattan, a borough of 1.6 million people. That was a drop of 15 percent from the year before. By comparison, Palm Beach County, Florida, where Trump is one of about 1.5 million residents, had 96 killings.

"People hear New York and they think crime, and that's because they've been trained to think that way," said Dr. Jeffrey Butts, the director of the Research & Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan. "It's not real. It's just the stories that people tell."

"If you're living in some predominantly small, white county in Iowa, you hear New York and you just imagine all the scary movies and TV shows you've seen," Butts said. "I think that's what Congress is playing off of."

For Bragg, scrutiny from Republicans — and even some Democrats — is nothing new.

A Harvard-educated, former federal prosecutor, chief deputy state attorney general and civil rights lawyer, Bragg won an eight-way Democratic party primary and then soared to victory with 83% of the general election vote.

Soon after taking office, Bragg authored an internal memo that, among other things, said his office would not prosecute certain low-level misdemeanors.

That set up some early clashes with the New York Police Department leadership and also got the attention of Republicans outside the city, who quickly made Bragg a poster child for Democratic permissiveness.

Republican Lee Zeldin, then representing eastern Long Island in Congress, made Bragg a focal point of his campaign for governor, repeatedly promising to remove the independently elected prosecutor from office.

Zeldin lost, but his rhetoric about crime resonated in the suburbs, helping Republicans defeat Democrats in a number of key New York seats.

New York, in fact, wasn't immune from the nationwide spike in crime that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most categories of crime in the city are still above 2019 levels. Several types of crime, including burglaries, car thefts and assaults, rose in Manhattan during Bragg's first year in office, though they have been falling again this year.

Despite focusing on Bragg, the House Judiciary Committee has not invited him to testify, nor is anyone from his office expected to participate. Instead, the committee is planning to hear from at least six wit-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 32 of 64

nesses.

Among them: Jose Alba, a former convenience store clerk arrested after he stabbed an attacker to death in his shop. Bragg's office dropped the charges but critics say he should have dismissed them sooner; Madeline Brame, who blames Bragg for seeking long prison sentences only for two of the four people involved in her son's killing; and Jennifer Harrison, a victim advocate whose boyfriend was killed in New Jersey in 2005 — outside Bragg's jurisdiction and long before he took office.

Bragg's campaign sent an email to supporters Friday deriding the hearing as a "politically motivated sham." U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., the committee's ranking Democrat, told the news outlet Gothamist the hearing is "an attack on our system of justice."

On Sunday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., called the planned hearing "a circus if there ever was one."

Since taking power in the House, Republicans have launched a sweeping oversight agenda delving into the far reaches of President Joe Biden's administration, his family and the workings of the federal government.

While conducting oversight is a key function of Congress, the House GOP's wide-ranging probes have often delivered more sizzle than substance. Long on allegations, committees led by Jordan and others have been slow to produce findings that resonate and sometimes have diverged into conspiracy theories.

Associated Press reporters David B. Caruso in New York and Lisa Mascaro in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at twitter.com/mikesisak and send confidential tips by visiting <https://www.ap.org/tips/>.

Dozens killed as army, rivals battle for control of Sudan

By JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — The Sudanese military and a powerful paramilitary group battled for control of the chaos-stricken nation for a second day Sunday, signaling they were unwilling to end hostilities despite mounting diplomatic pressure to cease fire.

Heavy fighting involving armored vehicles, truck-mounted machine guns and war planes raged in the capital of Khartoum, the adjoining city of Omdurman and in flashpoints across the country. The rival forces are believed to have tens of thousands of fighters each in the capital alone.

At least 41 civilians were killed Sunday, bringing the two-day death toll to 97, the Sudan Doctors' Syndicate said Monday. Hundreds of people have been wounded since fighting started Saturday, the group said. In addition, dozens of fighters are believed to have been killed, according to the group.

The clashes are part of a power struggle between Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, the commander of the armed forces, and Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of the Rapid Support Forces group. The two generals are former allies who jointly orchestrated an October 2021 military coup that derailed Sudan's short-lived transition to democracy.

In recent months, internationally backed negotiations revived hopes for such a transition, but growing tensions between Burhan and Dagalo eventually delayed a deal with political parties.

Volker Perthes, the U.N. envoy for Sudan, said that both Burhan and Dagalo agreed to a three-hour humanitarian pause in fighting in the late afternoon Sunday, but violence continued to engulf the capital.

As night fell, residents reported heavy explosions and continued gunfire, as well as airstrikes pounding RSF targets. The clashes come as most Sudanese are preparing to celebrate the holiday that marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims traditionally fast from sunrise to sunset.

Fighting raged around the military's headquarters throughout the day. "Heavy explosions and gunfire around the clock," said Amany Sayed, a 38-year-old Khartoum resident. "The battles here (in the capital) never stopped."

In Khartoum and Omdurman, fighting was also reported around Khartoum International Airport and

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 33 of 64

state television headquarters. A senior military official said clashes with RSF fighters began earlier in the day around military headquarters.

"They are shooting against each other in the streets," said prominent rights advocate Tahani Abass who lives near the military headquarters. "It's an all-out war in residential areas."

Abass said her family spent the night huddling on the ground floor of their home. "No one was able to sleep and the kids were crying and screaming with every explosion," she said. Sounds of gunfire were heard while she was speaking to The Associated Press.

Satellite images analyzed by the AP showed columns of black smoke covering the sky over the capital's airport. The images by Maxar Technologies showed two large planes on fire, and four others damaged. Airlines have suspended flights to the Sudanese capital.

The military and the RSF both claimed to be in control of strategic locations in Khartoum and elsewhere in the county. Their claims couldn't be independently verified.

Both sides signaled that they were unwilling to negotiate.

Burhan's military called for dismantling the RSF, which it labeled a "rebellious militia." Dagalo told the satellite news network Al Arabyia that he ruled out negotiation and called on Burhan to surrender.

Khalid Omar, a spokesman for the pro-democracy block that negotiated with the generals in recent months, warned that the conflict could lead to war and the country's collapse.

In a series of tweets Sunday, Omar called on pro-democracy groups to set aside their disputes to find a way to end the crisis "immediately".

Meanwhile, diplomatic pressure appeared to be mounting.

Top diplomats, including the U.S. Secretary of State, the U.N. secretary-general, the EU foreign policy chief, the head of the Arab League and the head of the African Union Commission urged the sides to stop fighting. Members of the U.N. Security Council, at odds over other crises around the world, called for an immediate end of the hostilities and a return to dialogue.

The African Union's top council called Sunday for an immediate cease-fire "without conditions." It also asked the AU Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat to "immediately travel to Sudan to engage the parties towards a cease-fire."

Arab states with stakes in Sudan — Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — made similar appeals. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Farhan bin Faisal spoke by phone with Sudan's rival generals and urged them to stop "all kinds of military escalation," Saudi state TV reported.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he consulted with the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. "We agreed it was essential for the parties to immediately end hostilities without pre-condition," he said in a statement early Sunday.

On Sunday, the World Food Program said it temporarily suspended operations in Sudan after three agency employees were killed in clashes the previous day and an aircraft used by the WFP was damaged.

"We cannot do our lifesaving work if the safety and security of our teams and partners is not guaranteed," said Cindy McCain, the executive director of the agency. About 16 million people, or one-third of Sudan's population, require humanitarian assistance, according to the U.N.

The rival forces were fighting in several locations across Sudan, including the western Darfur region where tens of thousands of people live in camps for displaced people after years of genocidal civil war.

The three WFP employees were killed in clashes in the town of Kebkabiya in the province of North Darfur. Two agency employees were wounded.

Dozens of people were also killed and wounded since Saturday at a camp for displaced people in North Darfur, said Adam Regal, a spokesman for a Darfur charity.

In Nyala, the capital of South Darfur province, the two sides fought for control of the city's airport, said a military official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to brief media.

The official said fighting also spread to the eastern region, including the provinces of Kassala and al-Qadarif on the borders with Ethiopia and Eritrea. He said battles centered around RSF and army bases.

The recent tensions stem from disagreement over how the RSF, headed by Dagalo, should be integrated into the armed forces and what authority should oversee the process. The merger is a key condition of

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 34 of 64

Sudan's unsigned transition agreement with political groups.

Pro-democracy activists have blamed Burhan and Dagalo for abuses against protesters across the country over the past four years, including the deadly break-up of a protest camp outside the military's headquarters in Khartoum in June 2019 that killed over 120 protesters. Many groups have repeatedly called for holding them accountable. The RSF has long been accused of atrocities linked to the Darfur conflict.

Sudan, a country at the crossroads of the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, is known for its history of military coups and civil conflicts since it gained independence in 1950s. A decade-old civil conflict resulted in the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for those responsible for the death of civilians, including three employees with the U.N. food agency, to be held accountable, according to his spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric.

The U.N. Security Council will discuss the crisis in Sudan on Monday, said Fedor Strzhizhovskiy, the spokesman for the U.N. mission of Russia, which holds the council's presidency this month.

Magdy reported from Cairo.

Associated Press writer Frances D'Emilio in Rome contributed.

Progressives focus on local-level wins to counter setbacks

By WILL WEISSERT and SARA BURNETT Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — For many progressives, the past decade has been littered with disappointments. But recent down-ballot victories are providing hope of reshaping the Democratic Party from the bottom up, rather than from Washington.

In Chicago earlier this month, a former teacher's union organizer unexpectedly won the mayor's race. In St. Louis, progressives secured a majority on the municipal board. The next opportunities could lie in Philadelphia and Houston, which also hold mayoral elections this year.

The focus on lower-level contests already has helped progressives gain power and influence policy at a local level, organizers say, shaping issues such as the minimum wage. It also may help the movement find future stars, with today's city and county officials becoming tomorrow's breakout members of Congress and only moving further up the political ladder.

"Progressives have taken a look at how to be strategic and how to build power," said Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants who was a leading national voice for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2016 and 2020 presidential bids. "If you look around and you say, 'Who is ready to run for president?' If your field is shallow, what do you have to do? You've got to build the bench."

This year's focus on state and local races follows years of incremental progress and some stinging setbacks. Sanders electrified the left with 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns that centered on bold calls for universal, government-funded health care. But he lost each time to rivals aligned with the Democratic establishment who advocated for a more cautious approach.

On Capitol Hill, progressive candidates successfully defeated several high-profile incumbents during the 2018 midterms and the election of candidates like New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. But from New York to Michigan and Ohio and Texas, prominent progressives were defeated during primary campaigns last year. And, as President Joe Biden now gears up for reelection, he faces no serious challenge from the left.

Still, Sanders and others have left their mark, pushing mainstream Democrats to the left on key issues like combating climate change and forgiveness of student loan debt while inspiring some of those at the forefront of today's movement.

That includes Chicago Mayor-elect Brandon Johnson, who appealed to a diverse and young electorate as he campaigned with Sanders and other top congressional progressives.

"Let's take this bold progressive movement around these United States of America," Johnson said in his victory speech.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 35 of 64

Our Revolution, an activist group which grew out of Sanders' 2016 White House bid, endorsed Johnson and progressive candidates who recently won three of four seats on the St. Louis City Board of Aldermen. That gave progressives a slim majority in a city where the mayor, Tishaura Jones, is also a self-described progressive.

Our Revolution said it activated its 90,000 members in Chicago an average of three times each to urge them to vote for Johnson, and made 100,000 phone calls in St. Louis. The group is also backing Helen Gym, a progressive former Philadelphia City Council member who is among roughly a dozen candidates competing in next month's Democratic mayoral primary.

"When we win on the ground in our cities, that's actually the blueprint, because we cannot wait for Congress," Gym said during a recent call with Our Revolution volunteers.

Our Revolution's executive director, Joseph Geevarghese, said local progressive organizing, including for races like school board, is more effective now than it has been in decades.

"We're building power, bottom up, city by city," Geevarghese said, adding that "in major metropolitan areas you've got credible progressive slates vying for power against the Democratic establishment."

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers and a Democratic National Committee member, countered that there doesn't have to be tension between the party's left and moderate wings. She said Johnson called for addressing "quality of life issues" such as homelessness through consensus-building, rather than ideological confrontation.

"Every one of these cities are complicated places and you have to work together to get things done," Weingarten said. "You have to work with people you don't always agree with. And that is a strength and not a weakness."

It hasn't all been rosy for progressives. Moderate candidates topped progressive alternatives in last week's Denver City Council races.

But there are more opportunities ahead. In the nation's fourth-largest city of Houston, Democratic Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, who has been an outspoken progressive in Congress since she got there in 1995, is running for mayor.

And the left isn't abandoning congressional races.

Progressive champion Rep. Barbara Lee and fellow Democratic Rep. Katie Porter, who was a vocal supporter of Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's progressive campaign for president in 2020, are among those running to replace retiring California Sen. Dianne Feinstein next year.

In Arizona, Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego, a progressive 43-year-old Iraq war veteran and Spanish speaker who represents much of downtown Phoenix, is trying to unseat Sen. Kyrsten Sinema. She left the Democratic Party last year and, if she seeks reelection, would run as an independent.

"Working-class Democrats are getting elected, and corporate Democrats are not," said Chuck Rocha, a key architect of Sanders' 2016 campaign who heads Nuestro PAC, which has endorsed Gallego. But Rocha was quick to caution that Gallego isn't running as "a progressive or liberal savior."

"He's going to run as 'I was an enlisted Marine who had to sleep on my mama's couch until I got a bed in college' and has been a champion of working-class folks in the state of Arizona," Rocha said.

Questions about a resurgent Democratic left come as Biden prepares to formally kickoff his reelection campaign and will have to decide how to frame his political vision and ideology to appeal to swing voters. After besting Sanders and Warren in the 2020 primary, Biden embraced major progressive goals, promoting expanding social programs and climate-change fighting green energy.

Biden eventually oversaw passage of dramatic federal spending increases, including on health care and green technology. He tried to forgive student loans for millions of Americans, but saw the plan challenged in court.

On other issues, however, Biden has been more moderate. After major legislation to curb police brutality and institutional racism stalled in Congress, the president signed an executive order to make modest reforms. He also has said repeatedly that, rather than heed calls by some progressives to cut funding for law enforcement, the answer should be more police funding.

More recently, the president angered liberal Democrats by failing to veto Republican-championed legislation reversing new, local crime regulations in the nation's capital and approving a major oil drilling project in Alaska.

Biden campaign aides say he's shown flexibility to best respond to ongoing political and policy challenges. And Rocha said that Gallego will benefit from Biden's 2024 campaign, which should rely heavily on promoting his administration's legislative accomplishments and how they benefited working-class families in swing states like Arizona.

But some progressives say the White House should take notice of the movement's down-ballot wins.

"I hope he's paying attention," said Hannah Riddle, director of candidate services for the activist group the Progressive Change Campaign Committee. "Running on economic populism is a winning strategy. And that model can be replicated all over the country."

___ Weissert reported from Washington.

Russia's UN council presidency is most contentious in memory

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — First the Russians gave the U.N. spotlight to the commissioner of children's rights accused with President Vladimir Putin of war crimes for deporting Ukrainian children to Russia, sparking a walkout by the U.S. and several others.

Then Russia went after the West by claiming it is violating international laws in arming Ukraine, drawing blistering retorts that Ukraine has every right to defend itself against Putin's invading army.

So far, the Russian presidency of the U.N. Security Council has been the most contentious in the memory of longtime U.N. diplomats and officials. And it's just at the midway point.

More fireworks are to come later in the month when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov presides over the premier event of the presidency — an open council meeting on defending the principles of the U.N. Charter. Russia is widely accused of violating the charter by invading Ukraine and flouting its underpinning principles of respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The presidency of the Security Council rotates monthly in alphabetical order of its 15 members. As Russia's turn approached, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell both called it an April Fool's joke. The U.S. envoy promised to "use every opportunity to push back on their using their perch in the chair to spread disinformation, and to use their chair to push support of their efforts."

At the incoming president's traditional first-day news conference, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia pushed back against the April Fool's comments, asking Borrell, "Who's talking?" He said Russia had been "an honest broker" when chairing the council in the past and would try to maintain that approach.

As for U.S. claims Russia would spread disinformation about Ukraine, Nebenzia dismissed it as part of "the Western narrative."

"We think just the opposite," he said.

The Security Council president presides over meetings and gets to decide the topics of signature sessions, often chaired by foreign ministers and sometimes presidents. Lavrov on April 24 will preside over a session on "effective multilateralism through the defense of the principles of the U.N. Charter," where U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will brief members.

Nebenzia told reporters Russia is seeking a forward-looking discussion on the formation of "a new multipolar world order based on sovereign equality, equal rights and self-determination, justice and security, friendly relations and cooperation between nations, with full respect for the purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter." Ukraine's allies are already preparing their rebuttals.

There are also required monthly meetings, including on the Middle East, which Lavrov will also preside over. Others focus on global hotspots, including Syria, Mali, Libya, Yemen, Haiti, Africa's Great Lakes region and Colombia.

At last week's Mali meeting, Russia's Wagner Group, a private military contractor, which has close ties

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 37 of 64

to the West African nation and is fighting in Ukraine, was raised by several of Kyiv's supporters.

To start their presidency, the Russians chose one of the hottest issues of the Ukraine war — the fate of Ukrainian children taken to Russia. For the informal Security Council meeting, they chose as its briefer Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian children's rights commissioner, who along with Putin is being sought by the International Criminal Court on war crimes charges.

In an initial protest, ambassadors from Western countries boycotted the meeting, sending low-level diplomats instead. And when Lvova-Belova started to address the council by video link from Russia, the diplomats from the United States, Britain, Malta and Albania walked out.

U.S. political adviser Ngoyi Ngoyi called it "outrageous" that she was allowed to speak and said children aged between 4 months and 17 years had been moved to 40 facilities in Russia or Russian-occupied Ukraine. He said at least two of those centers coordinate adoptions by Russians, which Russia denies.

"If Russia is not trying to hide a systematic program to force Russian citizenship upon Ukraine's children, then it should give humanitarian organizations full access," Ngoyi said. "It's as simple as that."

Lvova-Belova said the children were taken to Russia for their safety and Moscow was coordinating with international organizations to return them to their families. The International Committee of the Red Cross said later it has been in contact with her about returning Ukrainian children, and UNICEF also said it has been in communication with Russian officials "but has not received feedback on our offer to facilitate reunification processes."

There is a huge discrepancy over how many children have been removed from Ukraine.

Ukraine's U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, tweeted that more than 19,500 children had been seized from their families or orphanages and forcibly deported. Lvova-Belova said that since Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia has taken in more than 5 million Ukrainians, including 700,000 children — all with parents, relatives or legal guardians, except for 2,000 from orphanages in the eastern Donbas.

France's deputy human rights adviser, Thibault Samson, called the meeting a "new cynical exercise in disinformation," accusing Lvova-Belova of spreading "propaganda" and "a false version of the situation."

"A lie repeated ad nauseam remains a lie," Samson said.

Before Russia's second signature event, on the export of weapons and military equipment, its ambassador said the discussion would be "from an arms control perspective," rather than focusing on a specific country.

But at the April 10 official council meeting, Nebenzia accused the West of encouraging countries to violate agreements not to export arms from Russia without its written consent, with the aim of increasing supplies to Ukraine. He said the West also is urging the resumption of production of Soviet weapons by East European countries that were once part of the Soviet block and are now Western allies.

Nebenzia then denied what he called "baseless accusations" from the West that Iran and North Korea are providing weapons to Moscow in violation of Security Council sanctions.

Again, Western ambassadors boycotted the meeting, leaving seats in the council chamber filled by deputies and low-level diplomats.

When Albania's political coordinator, Arian Spasse, took the floor, he said the Security Council found itself in "unchartered waters" this month: "A country that has brutally violated the Charter of the United Nations and the very basic rules that govern relations among states is presiding over the body responsible for peace and security."

Without naming Russia, he said the permanent council member "has done everything to undermine peace and security and has endangered the world."

France's deputy political coordinator, Alexandre Olmedo, told the council it is well documented that Russia uses combat drones from Iran and has purchased missiles and ammunition from North Korea.

"France and the European Union will continue to provide Ukraine all the support needed, for as long as it is necessary," he said.

The U.S. deputy ambassador, Robert Wood, said Russia began its presidency "by trying to justify kidnapping Ukrainian children" and had moved on to making "a thinly veiled effort to portray Russia as a responsible actor on arms control, attempting to obfuscate the reality that it launched an unjustified armed invasion of its neighbor."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 38 of 64

"The most effective and obvious path towards peace and reducing risk of illicit diversion of arms would be for Russia to end the war that it started and withdraw its forces from all of Ukraine's sovereign territory," Wood said. "We once again urge Russia to do so, and to do it now."

GOP leader McConnell returning to Senate after head injury

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell will be back at work in the U.S. Capitol on Monday, almost six weeks after a fall at a Washington-area hotel and extended treatment for a concussion.

The longtime Kentucky senator, 81, has been recovering at home since he was released from a rehabilitation facility March 25. He fell after attending an event earlier that month, injuring his head and fracturing a rib.

He visited his office Friday, the first time since his injury, and is expected to be working a full schedule in the Senate this week.

"I am looking forward to returning to the Senate on Monday," McConnell tweeted on Thursday. "We've got important business to tackle and big fights to win for Kentuckians and the American people."

McConnell returns to the Senate ahead of a busy stretch in which Congress will have to find a way to raise the nation's debt ceiling and negotiate additional aid for the Ukraine war, among other policy matters. And he comes back as several other senators have been out for medical reasons, raising questions about how much the Senate will be able to achieve in the coming months with a 51-49 split between the parties.

Already, the GOP leader's absence, along with those of Democratic Sens. Dianne Feinstein and John Fetterman, among others, have added to the Senate's lethargic pace in the first few months of the year. Unlike the last two years, in which Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer was able to push through key elements of President Joe Biden's agenda with the help of a Democratic-led House, the Senate has been significantly slowed with Republicans now in charge in the House. And absences have made even simple votes like nominations more difficult.

One immediate question for McConnell upon his return is whether to help Democrats temporarily replace Feinstein on the Senate Judiciary Committee as she continues to recover in California from a case of the shingles. Democrats have become increasingly frustrated as the Democrat's more than six-week absence on the panel has stalled confirmation of some of Biden's nominees, and Feinstein has asked for a short-term substitute on the committee.

Democrats can't do that, though, without help from Republicans, since approval of the process would take 60 votes on the Senate floor. Republicans have so far been quiet about whether they will object.

It is unclear when Feinstein, 89, will return to Washington. Her office has so far declined to say.

Also returning to the Senate on Monday is Fetterman, who was hospitalized for clinical depression in February. He was treated for six weeks at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and his doctors say his depression is now "in remission."

Fetterman's announcement that he was checking himself into the hospital earlier this year came after he suffered a stroke last year and has struggled with auditory processing disorder, which can render someone unable to speak fluidly and quickly process spoken conversation into meaning. The Pennsylvania Democrat, 53, now uses devices in conversations, meetings and congressional hearings that transcribe spoken words in real time.

In a statement when he was released from Walter Reed late last month, Fetterman said the care he received there "changed my life."

"I'm excited to be the father and husband I want to be, and the senator Pennsylvania deserves," said Fetterman, who won praise for his decision to seek treatment.

When McConnell visited his Capitol office on Friday, video captured by NBC News showed him walking into the building without assistance as aides kept close by.

This was the second major injury for McConnell in recent years. Four years ago he tripped and fell at

his home in Kentucky, causing a shoulder fracture that required surgery. The Senate had just started a summer recess, and he worked from home for some weeks as he recovered.

McConnell had polio in his early childhood and he has long acknowledged some difficulty as an adult in climbing stairs.

Lack of security for Japanese prime minister surprised many

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

WAKAYAMA, Japan (AP) — The fishermen who tackled the man suspected of the second attack on a Japanese political leader in less than a year were surprised by the lack of security for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Fisherman Tsutomu Konishi was watching Kishida at a campaign event at this fishing port when an object flew overhead and landed near the prime minister, Konishi said. A security officer covered the object with a bulletproof briefcase, Konishi said. The fishermen swarmed the attacker.

"I never thought a crime like this would happen in my hometown, which is a rather small fishing area," Konishi, 41, said Sunday as he sipped a can of coffee at the port of Saikazaki. "I'm still shocked and stunned."

The prime minister was unhurt but like many others in Japan, Konishi was mulling Sunday what the country should do to better protect public figures.

"At a time when Japan's serving prime minister was visiting, perhaps we may have needed a metal detector," Konishi said.

Masaki Nishide, a 55-year-old fisherman from Saikazaki, said most of the people at Saturday's event were residents and supporters of the local candidate. He said the young man carrying the silver-gray backpack stood out.

"People here all dress like me, and nobody carries a backpack; it was only him," Nishide said, wearing a sweatsuit and red rubber boots. "If I were in charge of security, I would have asked for a bag check."

After the failed attack on the prime minister, one of the fishermen grabbed the suspect's neck from behind, another pushed his head down, and Konishi latched onto his leg. They were holding the man as police officers pulled him to the ground.

The chaotic scene was reminiscent of the assassination nine months ago of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, which prompted police to tighten their protective measures after an investigation found holes in Abe's security. Abe, one of Japan's most influential and divisive politicians, was killed with a homemade gun during a campaign speech.

Suspect Tetsuya Yamagami has been charged with murder and several other crimes, including violating gun-control laws.

Authorities have said Yamagami told investigators he killed Abe because of the former prime minister's apparent links to a religious group that Yamagami hated. In statements and in social media postings attributed to him, Yamagami said his mother's donations to the Unification Church bankrupted his family and ruined his life.

Violent crimes are rare in Japan, and with its strict gun control laws, the country has only a handful of gun-related crimes annually. Most of the cases are gang-related, though in recent years there has been growing concern about homemade guns and explosives. There also have been some high-profile cases of random knifing on subways and arson attacks.

Groups of several officers have guarded serving prime ministers. Fewer officers have been watching Cabinet ministers and former leaders.

Compared with the U.S. elections, audience at political campaigns in Japan are often allowed to be quite close to dignitaries. At the campaign event for Kishida the front-row audience was within touching distance.

Only one person, a police official, was hurt, his arm cut by fragments of the device, which didn't fully explode. Police arrested 24-year-old Ryuji Kimura on suspicion of throwing an explosive in a metal tube at Kishida.

Police sent a special counter-explosives team to the suspect's home in Hyogo prefecture to search for

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 40 of 64

evidence of bomb-making. There are nationwide local elections this month. and Japan is hosting a series of Group of Seven meetings leading up to the May 19-21 leaders' summit in Hiroshima. Diplomats arrived Sunday for the G-7 foreign ministers' meeting in Karuizawa.

Isao Itabashi, a public safety expert, said on NHK TV that the attack raised questions about how election campaigns are being handled. Guarding top politicians in campaigns is logistically hard, and balancing tight security with a free election is also difficult, he said.

Kiyotaka Hamada, 70, a senior member of the local fishing association, said he felt something hit his shoulder just as he heard the bang and was running from the scene. Police took his jacket to see if he'd been hit by a fragment of the explosive.

"I just want to ask the suspect why he had to come here to make trouble," he said.

For Hamada and other fishermen, there's worry also about the expected loss of income from the days they cannot work while the port facilities are closed for the investigation.

"We put so much effort throughout the village to welcome the prime minister here on his first ever visit," Hamada said. "Now we cannot even go out to sea."

This story corrects the suspect's surname in the 15th paragraph to Kimura, not Nakamura.

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

Judge delays trial over Fox News and 2020 election lies

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Without citing a reason, the Delaware judge overseeing a voting machine company's \$1.6 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News announced late Sunday that he was delaying the start of the trial until Tuesday.

The trial, which has drawn international interest, had been scheduled to start Monday morning with jury selection and opening statements.

The case centers on whether Fox defamed Dominion Voting Systems by spreading false claims that the company rigged the 2020 presidential election to prevent former President Donald Trump's reelection. Records produced as part of the lawsuit show that many of the network's hosts and executives didn't believe the allegations but aired them, anyway.

Claire Bischoff, a Dominion spokesperson, said the company would have no comment on the trial delay, as did Fox Corp., which is being sued along with Fox News. Representatives of the network did not return a request for comment.

In his statement, Delaware Superior Court Judge Eric Davis said only that the trial, including jury selection, would be continued until Tuesday and that he would announce the delay in court on Monday.

That's when Fox News executives and the network's star hosts were scheduled to begin answering for their role in spreading doubt about the 2020 presidential election and creating the gaping wound that remains in America's democracy.

Jurors hearing the \$1.6 billion lawsuit filed against Fox by Dominion Voting Systems would have to answer a specific question: Did Fox defame the voting machine company by airing bogus stories alleging that the election was rigged against then-President Donald Trump, even as many at the network privately doubted the false claims being pushed by Trump and his allies?

Yet the broader context looms large. A trial would test press freedom and the reputation of conservatives' favorite news source. It also would illuminate the flow of misinformation that helped spark the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and continues to fuel Trump's hopes to regain power in 2024.

Fox News stars Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity and founder Rupert Murdoch are among the people who had been expected to testify.

Barring a settlement, opening statements are now scheduled for Tuesday.

"This is Christmas Eve for defamation scholars," said Ronnell Andersen Jones, a University of Utah law professor.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 41 of 64

If the trial were a sporting event, Fox News would be taking the field on a losing streak, with key players injured and having just alienated the referee. Pretrial court rulings and embarrassing revelations about its biggest names have Fox on its heels.

Court papers released over the past two months show Fox executives, producers and personalities privately disbelieved Trump's claims of a fraudulent election. But Dominion says Fox News was afraid of alienating its audience with the truth, particularly after many viewers were angered by the network's decision to declare Democrat Joe Biden the winner in Arizona on election night in November 2020.

Some rulings by the judge have eased Dominion's path. In a summary judgment, Davis said it was "CRYSTAL clear" that fraud allegations against the company were false. That means trial time won't have to be spent disproving them at a time when millions of Republicans continue to doubt the 2020 results.

Davis said it also is clear that Dominion's reputation was damaged, but that it would be up to a jury to decide whether Fox acted with "actual malice" — the legal standard — and, if so, what that's worth financially.

Fox witnesses would likely testify that they thought the allegations against Dominion were newsworthy, but Davis made it clear that's not a defense against defamation.

New York law protects news outlets from defamation for expressions of opinion. But Davis methodically went through 20 different times on Fox when allegations against Dominion were discussed, ruling that all of them were fully or partly considered statements of fact, and fair game for a potential libel finding.

"A lawsuit is a little bit like hitting a home run," said Cary Coglianese, law professor at the University of Pennsylvania. "You have to go through all of the bases to get there." The judge's rulings "basically give Dominion a spot at third base, and all they have to do is come home to win it."

Both Fox and Dominion are incorporated in Delaware, though Fox News is headquartered in New York and Dominion is based in Denver.

Fox angered Davis this past week when the judge said the network's lawyers delayed producing evidence and were not forthcoming in revealing Murdoch's role at Fox News. A Fox lawyer, Blake Rohrbacher, sent a letter of apology to Davis on Friday, saying it was a misunderstanding and not an intention to deceive.

It's not clear whether that would affect a trial. But it's generally not wise to have a judge wonder at the outset of a trial whether your side is telling the truth, particularly when truth is the central point of the case, Jones said.

The lawsuit essentially comes down to whether Dominion can prove Fox acted with actual malice by putting something on the air knowing that it was false or acting with a "reckless disregard" for whether it was true. In most libel cases, that is the most difficult hurdle for plaintiffs to get past.

Dominion can point to many examples where Fox figures didn't believe the charges being made by Trump allies such as Sidney Powell and Rudolph Giuliani. But Fox says many of those disbelievers were not in a position to decide when to air those allegations.

"We think it's essential for them to connect those dots," Fox lawyer Erin Murphy said.

If the case goes to trial, the jury will determine whether a powerful figure like Murdoch — who testified in a deposition that he didn't believe the election-fraud charges — had the influence to keep the accusations off the air.

"Credibility is always important in any trial in any case. But it's going to be really important in this case," said Jane Kirtley, director of the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and the Law at the University of Minnesota.

Kirtley is concerned that the suit may eventually advance to the U.S. Supreme Court, which could use it as a pretext to weaken the actual malice standard that was set in a 1964 decision in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*. That, she feels, would be disastrous for journalists.

Dominion's lawsuit is being closely watched by another voting-technology company with a separate but similar case against Fox News. Florida-based Smartmatic has looked to some rulings and evidence in the Dominion case to try to enhance its own \$2.7 billion defamation lawsuit in New York. The Smartmatic case isn't yet ready for trial but has survived Fox News' effort to get it tossed out.

Many experts are surprised Fox and Dominion have not reached an out-of-court settlement, though they

can at any time. There's presumably a wide financial gulf. In court papers, Fox contends the \$1.6 billion damages claim is a wild overestimate.

Dominion's motivation may also be to inflict maximum embarrassment on Fox with the peek into the network's internal communications following the election. Text messages from January 2021 revealed Carlson telling a friend that he passionately hated Trump and couldn't wait to move on.

Dominion may also seek an apology.

The trial has had no apparent effect on Fox News' viewership; it remains the top-rated cable network. And there is little indication that the case has changed Fox's editorial direction. Fox has embraced Trump once again in recent weeks following the former president's indictment by a Manhattan grand jury, and Carlson presented an alternate history of Capitol riot, based on tapes given to him by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

Associated Press writers Randall Chase in Dover, Del., and Jennifer Peltz in New York contributed to this report.

Muslims around the world consider climate during Ramadan

By EDNA TARIGAN and MARIAM FAM Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — In the heart of Jakarta, the grand Istiqlal Mosque was built with a vision for it to stand for a thousand years.

The mosque was conceived by Soekarno, Indonesia's founding father, and was designed as an impressive symbol for the country's independence. Its seven gates — representing the seven heavens in Islam — welcome visitors from across the archipelago and the world into the mosque's lofty interior.

But they don't just see the light here. It fuels them.

A major renovation in 2019 installed upwards of 500 solar panels on the mosque's expansive roof, now a major and clean source of Istiqlal's electricity. And this Ramadan, the mosque has encouraged an energy waqf — a type of donation in Islam that continues to bear fruit over time — to grow its capacity to make renewable power.

Her Pramtama, deputy head of the Ri'ayah — or building management — division of Istiqlal Mosque, hopes that Islam's holiest month, when the faithful flock to mosques in greater numbers, can provide momentum to Istiqlal's solar project through donations.

The mosque's climate push is just one example of different "Green Ramadan" initiatives in Indonesia and around the world that promote an array of changes during the Muslim holy month, which has fasting and, in many cases, feasting elements as people gather to break their fasts.

In a month where restraint and charity are emphasized, recommendations can include using less water while performing the ritual washing before prayers, replacing plastic bottles and cutlery during community iftars with reusable ones and reducing food waste. Other suggestions include carpooling to mosques, using local produce, emphasizing recycling and using donations to fund clean energy projects.

For the world to limit the effects of climate change — which is already causing worsening droughts, floods and heat waves — the use of dirty fuels for electricity and transport, petrochemicals to make products like plastics and the emissions from food waste in landfills all need to be drastically slashed, scientists say. Though individual initiatives are just a small part of that transition, experts say growing momentum behind climate goals can have an effect.

Groups taking an Islamic-based approach often highlight environmental understandings of certain Quranic verses and sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad about the earth, water and against wastefulness.

Last year, at a meeting of the Muslim Congress for Sustainable Indonesia, the country's vice president Ma'ruf Amin called on clerics and community leaders "to play an active role in conveying issues related to environmental damage" and asked for concrete action on climate change including through donations to solar projects like those at Istiqlal Mosque.

Muhammad Ali Yusuf, a board member at the faith-based Nahdlatul Ulama's Institution for Disaster

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 43 of 64

Management and Climate Change in Indonesia, said spreading awareness about clean energy is a "shared responsibility" for Muslims, where mosques' own solar panel installations can be catalysts toward a greater transition.

In the United States and Canada, environmental groups that began springing up in Muslim communities in the mid-2000s independently from one another formed "green Muslim understandings" from within their religious traditions, according to Imam Saffet Catovic, a U.S. Muslim community environmental activist.

"In some cases, the mosques were receptive to it," he said. In others, mosque leaders, "didn't fully understand" the drive, he added.

Ramadan offers a "possibility for ecological training that's unique to the Muslim community," Catovic said. "Thirty days allow someone to change their habits."

The Islamic Society of North America website calls on Muslims to be "an eco-friendly community", saying looking after the environment is "based upon the premise that Islam has ordained us to be the stewards and protectors of this planet."

Some mosques and Muslims around the world are heeding such calls, one small step at a time.

Ahead of Ramadan this year, the mosque at Al Ma'hadul Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia received solar panels through Islamic donations, supplying enough energy for the mosque's entire needs. The electricity from the solar panels also lights up schools and roads in the vicinity.

The Nizamiye Mosque in Johannesburg, South Africa, with its towering minarets and spacious interior, has a roof dotted with domes and solar panels that help keep the power on at the mosque and its surrounding schools, clinic and bazaar.

The 143 panels cover over a third of the complex's energy use in a country that has struggled in recent years to provide enough electricity through its strained grid.

In Edison, New Jersey, Masjid Al-Wali, a mosque and community center, has been adopting changes such as selling reusable water bottles to members at cost and installing more water coolers to discourage the use of disposable plastic bottles, said board member Akil Mansuri.

"Preserving the environment is the Islamically right thing to do," Mansuri said. "People accept the message, but adoption is always slower."

Several years ago, Masjid Al-Wali, whose activities include an Islamic school and monthly community dinners, installed solar panels.

Meals this Ramadan for the mosque's community iftars come in plastic pre-packaged boxes for now, Mansuri said. But mosque leaders encourage members to take leftovers and reuse the boxes, instead of throwing them away, he said, adding he hopes alternatives can be found next Ramadan.

In the United Kingdom, Projects Against Plastic, a Bristol-based charity, is leading a plastic-free Ramadan campaign.

"I feel like, as a Muslim, that mosques are the hub of the communities and they should take a little bit more leading role for sustainability and toward recycling," PAP founder Naseem Talukdar said. "During the month of Ramadan is where I've really seen a ridiculous amount of plastic being used and thrown away."

Mosques are urged to raise awareness on plastic pollution and reduce reliance on single-use plastic. Seven Bristol mosques participated in a pilot project last year, with varying results, and a national campaign, with more than 20 participating mosques, was rolled out this year.

Besides education, another challenge is when mosques don't have enough funds to buy reusable cutlery, dishwashers and water fountains.

"We knew we were going to hit some hard walls and some pushbacks, but, to be honest, the engagement that we've seen so far, it was a little overwhelming," Talukdar said. "Even though the progress is slow, but there's a real appetite for this kind of initiative within the mosque."

Ummah for Earth, an alliance-led initiative that aims to empower Muslim communities facing climate change, is urging people to pledge to adopt one eco-friendly practice during Ramadan. Options include asking an imam to address environmental issues, donating to environmental charities and shopping sustainably.

"Many Muslims are not aware that there are environmental teachings in the Quran and the sayings of the prophet and that they have a role that they can play to protect the planet," said Nouhad Awwad, Beirut-based campaigner and global outreach coordinator for the Ummah for Earth project at Greenpeace MENA.

As they work to raise awareness, campaigners often encounter the argument that climate change is "destined" and that "you cannot change God's destiny," Awwad said.

"We're trying to change the narrative," she said. "We have things that we can do on an individual level, on a community level and on a political level."

Fam reported from Winter Park, Florida.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

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

Kings probe 'racial bias' claims after rapper E-40 ejected

By JOSH DUBOW AP Sports Writer

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The Sacramento Kings are investigating allegations from a Bay Area hip-hop star that "racial bias" led to him being kicked out of his seat during a playoff game against the Golden State Warriors.

The rapper E-40 said in a statement that he was heckled throughout the game Saturday night and addressed one heckler "in an assertive but polite manner" before security guards came and ordered him to leave the arena.

"Unfortunately, it was yet another reminder that — despite my success and accolades as a musician and entrepreneur — racial bias remains prevalent," he said in a statement. "Security saw a disagreement between a Black man and a white woman and immediately assumed that I was at fault."

The Kings said they are investigating the circumstances behind the ejection.

"The Sacramento Kings take these claims seriously and are investigating the facts and circumstances regarding the situation, as we do anytime an accusation like this is made," the team said in a statement.

A person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press that E-40, whose real name is Earl Stevens, was standing and blocking the view of fans behind him and was given a warning after several complaints. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because details of the situation weren't released publicly.

The person said E-40 refused to comply and that security officials for the Warriors and Kings escorted him from his seat.

A second person familiar with the situation, also speaking on condition of anonymity, said E-40 was never given a warning by security about "excessive standing."

E-40 is a prominent Warriors fan and was even part of the delegation that visited the White House earlier this season.

"It's unfortunate," Warriors guard Klay Thompson said. "I love 40. He's been our biggest supporter for years. I hope they right that ship because he deserves to be there by our bench. In my time knowing him, he's always been respectful. He's always been considerate of those around him. Very weird to see, and I hope it's resolved."

E-40 is known for his collaborations with other artists, including on songs such as "I Don't (Expletive) With You" with Big Sean, "Snap Yo Fingers" with Lil Jon and Sean Paul of YoungBloodZ, and "U And Dat" with T-Pain and Kandi Girl.

Jimmy Carter and Playboy: How 'the weirdo factor' rocked '76

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

PLAINS, Ga. (AP) — Jimmy Carter already had drawn months of media scrutiny as a devout Southern Baptist running for president. Then the 1976 Democratic nominee brought up sex and sin as he explained his religious faith to Playboy magazine.

Carter was not misquoted. But he was certainly misunderstood, as his thoughts in the wide-ranging interview were reduced in the popular imagination to utterances about "lust" and "adultery."

Nearly a half-century later, as the 98-year-old Carter receives hospice care in the same south-Georgia home where he once spoke with Playboy journalists, interviewer Robert Scheer still believes Carter was treated unfairly. He recalls the former president as a "real" and "serious" figure whose intent was smothered by the intensity of a campaign's closing stretch.

"Jimmy Carter was a thoughtful guy," Scheer, now 87, told The Associated Press. "But that got lost here. I've never seen a story like it. It was worldwide. ... It just never went away."

Political disaster ensued. Rosalynn Carter was suddenly being asked whether she trusted her husband. The fallout, in Carter's words, "nearly cost me the election."

Carter spent five-plus hours with Playboy across several months — "more time with you than with Time, Newsweek and all the others combined," the nominee told Scheer and Playboy editor Barry Golson.

The resulting Q&A spanned 12,000 words, and Scheer added thousands more in an accompanying story. Carter discussed military and foreign policy, racism and civil rights, political journalism and his reputation as a "vague" candidate.

"They weren't interested in sensationalized stuff," Scheer said of Playboy.

Hugh Hefner's iconic publication reached an estimated 20 million-plus readers each month with its pictorials of nude women. But the magazine chronicled American culture as well, with its branded "Playboy Interview" featuring such power players as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., John Lennon, Malcom X and leading newsman Walter Cronkite.

Carter, unafraid of nuance, proved he belonged among them, Scheer said.

The nominee's most-remembered comments came at the end of their final session. Standing outside Carter's front door, Golson pressed Carter on whether his piety would make him a "rigid, unbending president" unable to represent all Americans.

The Baptist deacon responded with an 823-word soliloquy on human imperfection, pride and God's forgiveness. He said he believed in "absolute and total separation of church and state" and explained his faith as rooted in humility, not judgment of others.

Quoting Matthew 5:27-28, Carter explained that Jesus Christ considered an offending thought equivalent to consummated adultery, and by that standard, he was in no position to judge a man who "shacks up" and "screws lots of women," because he had "looked on many women with lust" and, thus, "committed adultery many times in my heart."

Scheer called it a "sensible statement," reflecting Carter's Baptist tradition: "He was saying, look, I'm not going to be some fanatic. ... I'm not this perfect guy."

Playboy realized Carter provided explosive material — and not just about sex. Citing President Lyndon Johnson's handling of Vietnam, Carter included the last Democratic president alongside disgraced Republican Richard Nixon as guilty of "lying, cheating and distorting the truth."

The magazine decided to send the full Q&A text to about 1,000 media outlets in late September, ahead of the usual October publication date for the November edition.

The idea, Scheer explained, was to allow time for fair coverage rather than drop bombshells days before the election.

Headline writers, satirists and late-night television pounced anyway, labeling it Carter's "lust in my heart" interview. "Saturday Night Live," then a fledgling NBC sketch comedy show, had a field day. One political cartoonist depicted Carter lusting after the Statue of Liberty.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 46 of 64

He lamented to NPR in 1993 that the Playboy interview morphed into “the No. 1 story of the entire 1976 campaign.”

“I was explaining Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount,” Carter wrote wistfully in a 2015 memoir.

As a candidate, Carter’s faith had endeared him to many fellow white evangelicals and cultural conservatives. That made him a difficult foil for Republicans, who wanted to cast Democrats as out-of-step with most of America. The flip side, Scheer noted, was the many young voters and urban liberals — key Democratic constituencies — who “wondered if he was this Southern square.”

“Hamilton Jordan (Carter’s campaign manager) had always called Carter’s faith ‘the weirdo factor,’” said media historian Amber Roessner, a University of Tennessee professor who has written extensively on Carter. “Talking to Playboy was their way to prove he wasn’t some kind of prude.”

Scheer, who was with Carter as part of his traveling press corps, said Playboy’s early text release sparked a frenzy.

“Reporters were scrambling, asking me, ‘Bob, what is this?’” he recalled.

Traveling press focused initially on Carter’s criticism of Johnson, who had died in 1973. It was a juicy detail because Carter was headed Texas to campaign with Johnson’s widow.

Carter initially told reporters he was taken out of context. Scheer “ran back to the plane to get the tapes,” and effectively caught the nominee violating his pledge never to make a “misleading statement.”

Lady Bird Johnson skipped Carter’s Texas events, Scheer said. Carter apologized to her by telephone.

When his commentary on adultery ballooned, Carter insisted the exchange had been off-the-record, throwaway banter as Scheer and Golson prepared to leave.

“He was still wearing the mic!” Scheer told AP.

The way the story morphed “ended up making Carter seem like a creep,” Roessner said.

Rosalynn Carter fashioned a pat response: “Jimmy talks too much, but at least people know he’s honest and doesn’t mind answering questions.” And, no, she never worried about his fidelity.

“The only lust I worried about was that of the press,” she wrote in 1984, recounting how her discipline finally cracked when a reporter asked whether she ever committed adultery.

“If I had,” she replied, “I wouldn’t tell you.”

Ford, who had been gaining on Carter but still trailed badly, leveraged the story. The Republican president was an Episcopalian, soft-spoken about religion, but he invited leading evangelical pastors to the White House the day after the interview’s release, including the Rev. W.S. Criswell of Dallas First Baptist Church.

Criswell later declared from his pulpit that he had asked Ford: “Mr. President, if Playboy magazine were to ask you for an interview, what would you do?” Ford’s reply, according to Criswell: “I was asked by Playboy magazine for an interview — and I declined with an emphatic ‘No!’”

Thousands of his parishioners roared.

The Rev. Billy Graham, the nation’s top evangelist, and the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the rising leader of the so-called Religious Right, also blitzed Carter. National media, including The AP, highlighted criticism from Christian pastors from around the country.

Roessner, the daughter of a Protestant pastor, said Carter’s Playboy comments were clumsy, “but if anyone should have understood the context ... it should have been the ministers.”

She recalled Carter’s resentment during a 2014 interview she conducted with him. Decades of global humanitarian work had by that time afforded the former president a profile above politics, yet “almost 40 years later, it was clearly something he held on to,” she said. He was “still incredibly frustrated by what he felt was unfair coverage and response.”

The 1976 campaign was the first after Nixon’s resignation, driven by reporting from The Washington Post, and many journalists were demonstrating a new level of distrust of politicians, especially one Scheer described as “wearing his religion on his sleeve.”

Those same news organizations largely ignored what the soon-to-be president said about them, Roessner noted.

“The traveling press have zero interest in any issue unless it’s a matter of making a mistake,” Carter told

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 47 of 64

Playboy. "There's nobody in the back of this plane who would ask an issue question unless he thought he could trick me into some crazy statement."

Scheer, at least, asked plenty of policy questions, and, looking back, he pointed to Carter's narrow victory just weeks later.

"Whatever they said, I think it did exactly what they wanted to accomplish," Scheer said. "That doesn't mean they weren't nervous."

'Mario' tops charts again; 'Beau is Afraid' wins in limited

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

"The Super Mario Bros. Movie" scored the best second weekend ever for an animated movie in North American theaters with \$87 million in ticket sales, according to studio estimates Sunday. The family-friendly Universal release dropped a slim 41% from its record-making opening weekend.

With \$94 million from international showings, "Mario's" global total now stands at a staggering \$678 million, surpassing "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania" to become biggest film of 2023 in just two weekends.

"There are not enough adjectives to describe the enormity of this box office performance," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for Comscore.

For most blockbusters, second weekends are usually down by about 60%, making "Mario's" 41% drop especially noteworthy. According to Comscore, only a handful of films that opened over \$100 million have had less of a fall, including "Shrek 2," "Frozen 2," 2002's "Spider-Man," "The Force Awakens" and 2016's "The Jungle Book."

"To the casual observer that may not seem like a big deal, but that is an important metric," Dergarabedian said. "It's the greatest indicator of audience love for the movie."

"Mario" faced little major competition this weekend even with a slew of new national releases including "Renfield," "The Pope's Exorcist," "Mafia Mamma" and the animated "Suzume." It still has two weekends before "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3" flies into theaters to jumpstart the summer moviegoing season.

Sony and Screen Gem's R-rated "The Pope's Exorcist" starring Russell Crowe as the late Father Gabriele Amorth — the chief exorcist of the Diocese of Rome from 1986 to his death at 91 in 2016 — fared the best. It made an estimated \$9.2 million from 3,178 locations.

Third place went to "John Wick: Chapter 4" in its fourth weekend with \$7.9 million. The Lionsgate action pic has now made over \$160.1 million domestically.

Universal's "Renfield," the supernatural thriller starring Nicolas Cage as Dracula and Nicholas Hoult as the title character, opened in fourth place with \$7.8 million.

Some wondered if opening "Renfield" and "The Pope's Exorcist" the same weekend — both R-rated and of similar genres — hurt the films. But Dergarabedian said that while audiences may have been similar, "these films play for more than just one weekend."

Ben Affleck's Air Jordan origin story "Air" rounded out the top five, with \$7.7 million in its second weekend to bring its total domestic earnings to \$33.3 million.

Makoto Shinkai's PG-rated anime "Suzume," released domestically by Sony with both dubbed and subtitled versions available, opened in 2,170 theaters and grossed an estimated \$5 million in ticket sales.

A24 also debuted its new Ari Aster R-rated mind-bender "Beau is Afraid," starring Joaquin Phoenix, in four theaters in New York and Los Angeles where it made \$320,396 over the weekend, boasting many sold out showings. The 3-hour odyssey from the director of horror favorites "Hereditary" and "Midsommar" expands nationwide on Friday.

"Beau's" nearly \$81,000 per-screen average is as remarkable as the slim "Mario" drop, Dergarabedian said, and is playing out in a marketplace with options for every kind of moviegoer.

"It's one of the most diverse lineups of films I've seen on the marquee in years rivaling a streaming service in terms of the depth and breadth of content," Dergarabedian said.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Comscore. Final domestic figures will be released Monday.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 48 of 64

1. "The Super Mario Bros. Movie," \$87 million.
2. "The Pope's Exorcist," \$9.2 million.
3. "John Wick: Chapter 4," \$7.9 million.
4. "Renfield," \$7.8 million.
5. "Air," \$7.7 million.
6. "Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves," \$7.4 million.
7. "Suzume," \$5 million.
8. "Mafia Mamma," \$2 million.
9. "Scream VI," \$1.5 million.
10. "Nefarious," \$1.3 million.

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Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr: www.twitter.com/ldebahr.

New push on US-run free electronic tax-filing system for all

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's that time of year when throngs of taxpayers are buckling down to file their income tax returns before Tuesday's filing deadline. Many often pay to use software from private companies such as Intuit and H&R Block.

Almost one-quarter of Americans wait until the last minute to file their taxes.

There could be a new, free option in future years. The IRS has been tasked with looking into how to create a government-operated electronic free-file tax return system for all. But that doesn't sit well with the big tax-prep companies.

The idea has been batted around and hotly debated for a long time. Congress now has directed the IRS to report in on how such a system might work.

The order came as part of the \$80 billion infusion of money for the tax agency over the next 10 years under the Democrats' flagship climate and health care measure, known as the Inflation Reduction Act, that President Joe Biden signed last summer. It gave the IRS nine months and \$15 million to report in on how it might implement such a program and how much it would cost.

Next month, the IRS will release the first in a series of reports looking into how it might be done.

The possibility of an electronic free-file system operated by Washington is being celebrated by some taxpayer advocates who for years have said that would reflect good governance and well serve taxpayers. Critics voice skepticism about the IRS taking on the dual roles of both tax collector and tax preparer, arguing that the new service could create a power imbalance between taxpayers and the government.

Robert Marvin, an IRS spokesperson, said in an email that a key goal of the study is to "look for ways to make filing taxes as easy as possible."

"It's important that Americans have choices that work best for them when preparing their taxes, whether it's by using a tax professional, tax software or free options," he said.

But big tax preparation companies have millions of dollars to lose if the program comes to fruition. Last year, more than 60 million taxpayers were serviced between Intuit, the parent company of TurboTax, and H&R Block.

Tens of millions of dollars have been spent trying to influence policymakers on the issue, and lobbying data shows that the big tax companies in particular have spent heavily.

An analysis shows that Intuit, H&R Block, and other private companies and advocacy groups for large tax preparation businesses, as well as proponents in favor of electronic free file, have reported spending \$39.3 million since 2006 to lobby on "free-file" and other matters. Federal law doesn't require domestic lobbyists to itemize expenses by specific issue, so the sums are not limited to free-file.

Intuit has spent \$25.6 million since 2006 on lobbying, H&R Block about \$9.6 million and the conservative Americans for Tax Reform roughly \$3 million.

Derrick Plummer, a spokesman for Intuit, said taxpayers can already file their taxes for free and there

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 49 of 64

are online free-file programs available to some people. Individuals of all income levels can submit their returns for free via the mail.

A "direct-to-IRS e-file system is a solution in search of a problem, and that solution will unnecessarily cost taxpayers billions of dollars," he said. "We will continue unapologetically advocating for American taxpayers and against a direct-to-IRS e-file system because it's a bad idea."

Starting in 2006, an agreement between the IRS and some commercial tax preparation companies, known as the Free File Alliance, prevented the IRS from creating its own free tax return filing system. In exchange, tax preparation companies agreed to provide free services to taxpayers making \$73,000 or less.

The provision that barred the IRS from exploring a free-file system expired in 2019, but the Free File Alliance agreement to provide free services for low-income taxpayers remains in effect.

Ariel Jurow-Kleiman, a tax law professor at Loyola Law School, and the New America think tank have been selected by the IRS to conduct the congressionally mandated study for the agency. Jurow-Kleiman said their mandate is "evaluating the feasibility, approach, schedule, cost, organizational design, and IRS capacity to deliver a possible direct e-file system."

But she has faced pushback from Republicans who say she does not fit the law's requirement that an independent third party assess what it would take to deliver a direct file program.

Rep. Jason Smith, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, sent a letter to the IRS in March questioning Jurow-Kleiman's ability to be an independent reviewer, saying her work indicates "a clear preference for an expansive government-run system."

Smith, R-Mo., said the selection of Jurow-Kleiman and New America shows that "the Administration has already predetermined that a government-directed e-file system should exist regardless of what might be found in a truly nonpartisan, independent, third-party review."

Jurow-Kleiman said the GOP pushback to her selection was based on an unpublished draft of an article about tax compliance costs and that none of her writings have "addressed the questions that we are assessing in the feasibility study."

Molly Martin, director of strategy at New America, referred requests for comment to the IRS, saying the organization "is still working on its report."

David Williams, at the right-leaning, nonprofit Taxpayers Protection Alliance, says the "government preparing taxes is problematic."

"The taxpayer is looking for the biggest refund possible, but for the IRS that's not their job to look for the biggest refund for filers," he said. "We're concerned about that conflict of interest, but also really the ability of the IRS to do this."

To Gabriel Zucker, who helped create the tool to help families access the Advance Child Tax Credit during the pandemic, successfully setting up a free-file program is possible. "It is a really great way for government to better serve people," said Zucker, associate policy director for tax benefits at Code for America.

Associated Press Chief Elections Analyst Chad Day contributed to this report

He's been Mexico's voice abroad. Now he wants the presidency

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN and E. EDUARDO CASTILLO Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — He's been the face of Mexico internationally for nearly five years and often the country's leading voice in negotiations with top world leaders — including volatile ones, like former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Now Foreign Affairs Minister Marcelo Ebrard is testing whether his work on the world stage will translate into votes in Mexico as he competes for the leftist ruling party nomination for next year's presidential elections.

The 63-year-old is in the thick of a three-way race with other members of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's inner circle, including Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum and Interior Minister Adán Augusto López.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 50 of 64

López Obrador's Morena party, which he created as a vehicle to secure the presidency, remains an extension of the highly popular leader, so his words, actions and even body language are being closely watched for signs of a favorite.

Among the hurdles Ebrard must overcome are a perception he doesn't connect with the party's base like the folksy López Obrador, and criticism that the U.S. government imposed its immigration policy on Mexico, making it do its dirty work on Ebrard's watch.

Ebrard has responded with humorous TikTok videos aimed at connecting with voters, including one of himself in a designer suit eating tacos at a street stand with his wife or turning a stumble into a repeatedly played dance move to a Bad Bunny song. He recently published an autobiography that frames his immigration negotiations with the Trump administration as a diplomatic victory because Mexico avoided threatened tariffs — and it could have been worse.

In an interview with the AP, Ebrard described himself as a nationalist and a progressive who promises to maintain López Obrador's signature social programs "to create a society where inequality is shrinking."

In an administration that insists helping the poor is the priority — about 40% of Mexicans live in poverty — Ebrard says his objective as president would be to grow the relatively small middle class, if he wins the ruling party nomination later this year.

He has more middle-class support than other leading contenders, experts say, but swaying the party's low-income base — the voters most enamored of López Obrador — could be the deciding factor. Ebrard insists he has that support.

Ebrard narrowly lost his first attempt to be the left's presidential candidate to López Obrador in 2012. Before that he had various roles in López Obrador's Mexico City mayoral administration and later became mayor himself in 2006.

While some peg Ebrard as a centrist, he points to passage of legalized abortion and same-sex marriage while he was Mexico City mayor a decade ago as evidence of his support for progressive policies.

Still, there are doubts about the extent to which his achievements as the top diplomat for a president who prioritized all things domestic will be present in voters' minds.

Ebrard led Mexico's effort to obtain COVID-19 vaccines, working with vaccine producers and pushing multilateral initiatives, but Mexican governors and mayors like Sheinbaum were the ones present when the vaccines were given out.

"Mexicans aren't interested in foreign policy beyond when it has to do with the United States and is going to impact the price of the dollar," said Ana Vanessa Cárdenas, a Mexican international analyst now with Finis Terrae University in Chile.

On the country's pervasive violence — Mexicans' top priority according to polls — Ebrard has led so far unsuccessful efforts to sue U.S. gun manufacturers and gun shops for supplying weapons smuggled into Mexico. But as president, like López Obrador, Ebrard says he would rely on the military-controlled National Guard to secure communities rather than rebuilding civilian police capacity.

During Ebrard's tenure, Mexico successfully negotiated a new trade framework with the United States and Canada to replace the outdated North American Free Trade Agreement. The new accord is critical to his pledge to double Mexico's annual economic growth if he is elected president in June next year.

Mexico's proximity to the United States is its greatest advantage as the world emerges from the supply chain interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ebrard told the AP. Factories and assembly plants are already beginning to move from China to Mexico to be closer to the U.S. market, he said.

But that long shared border with the United States has also created some of Ebrard's greatest challenges.

Shortly after López Obrador took office in December 2018, the Trump administration implemented the so-called "Remain in Mexico" program that forced asylum seekers to wait out their U.S. asylum requests in Mexico. Asylum seekers were concentrated in northern border cities largely controlled by organized crime, exposing the migrants to endless kidnappings.

In May 2019, Trump threatened crippling tariffs on all Mexican imports if Mexico's government did not slow the flow of migrants to the U.S. border.

Ebrard immediately flew to Washington, heading off the tariffs and what he said was the Trump ad-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 51 of 64

ministration's real goal: a safe third-country agreement. Under such a deal, any asylum seekers crossing Mexico would first have to request asylum there rather than in the U.S.

Instead, Mexico offered to deploy its newly created National Guard in a strategy to contain migrants in southern Mexico, far from the U.S. border.

The number of migrants intercepted at the U.S. border dropped in the short term, but Mexico faced criticism from within and abroad that it had allowed the U.S. government to export its immigration policy south.

"The United States won the battle" over immigration policy, said Silvia Núñez García, a researcher specializing in the bilateral relationship at Mexico's National Autonomous University. The tariff threat "was when Mexico decided to accept and manage these irregular migrant flows inside our territory."

Ebrard said the U.S. returning asylum seekers to Mexico under a COVID-19 health rule known as Title 42, set to expire May 11, was a unilateral move that Mexico has never approved.

It leaves Mexico two options: deport the returnees to their countries or let them enter Mexico, he told the AP. "We usually do the second and the U.S. knows it."

The Biden administration scrapped Remain in Mexico, but in February announced that it would generally deny asylum to migrants who show up at the U.S. border without first seeking protection in a country they passed through — a policy critics say is different in name-only from the safe third country agreement.

If Ebrard "hasn't been able to stand out in foreign policy, which has been his portfolio, then I don't think his prospects are very favorable," said Núñez, noting that López Obrador's disinterest in foreign affairs limited Ebrard's room to maneuver.

Martha Bárcena, a career diplomat who served as Mexico's ambassador to the U.S. during the first two years of López Obrador's presidency, overlapping with Trump, believes Ebrard's priority was not foreign policy either.

"He's a politician and the only thing he has really dreamed of all his life is to become president," she said. "There were many areas in which he could have been much more creative and advanced an agenda that was even more linked to the priorities of the Mexican government, which was to fight poverty, to fight inequality."

Ebrard has accused Bárcena of "obsessive rancor" since she left the post. He says that he will fight poverty and inequality if he is elected president.

"For any leftist government, your objective has to be that the middle class is the majority of the population," Ebrard said. "In 10 years we need poverty to be much less than it is today. ... If not, what would be the point of everything we're doing?"

Deepfake porn could be a growing problem amid AI race

By HALELUYA HADERO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Artificial intelligence imaging can be used to create art, try on clothes in virtual fitting rooms or help design advertising campaigns.

But experts fear the darker side of the easily accessible tools could worsen something that primarily harms women: nonconsensual deepfake pornography.

Deepfakes are videos and images that have been digitally created or altered with artificial intelligence or machine learning. Porn created using the technology first began spreading across the internet several years ago when a Reddit user shared clips that placed the faces of female celebrities on the shoulders of porn actors.

Since then, deepfake creators have disseminated similar videos and images targeting online influencers, journalists and others with a public profile. Thousands of videos exist across a plethora of websites. And some have been offering users the opportunity to create their own images — essentially allowing anyone to turn whoever they wish into sexual fantasies without their consent, or use the technology to harm former partners.

The problem, experts say, grew as it became easier to make sophisticated and visually compelling deepfakes. And they say it could get worse with the development of generative AI tools that are trained

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 52 of 64

on billions of images from the internet and spit out novel content using existing data.

"The reality is that the technology will continue to proliferate, will continue to develop and will continue to become sort of as easy as pushing the button," said Adam Dodge, the founder of EndTAB, a group that provides trainings on technology-enabled abuse. "And as long as that happens, people will undoubtedly ... continue to misuse that technology to harm others, primarily through online sexual violence, deepfake pornography and fake nude images."

Noelle Martin, of Perth, Australia, has experienced that reality. The 28-year-old found deepfake porn of herself 10 years ago when out of curiosity one day she used Google to search an image of herself. To this day, Martin says she doesn't know who created the fake images, or videos of her engaging in sexual intercourse that she would later find. She suspects someone likely took a picture posted on her social media page or elsewhere and doctored it into porn.

Horrified, Martin contacted different websites for a number of years in an effort to get the images taken down. Some didn't respond. Others took it down but she soon found it up again.

"You cannot win," Martin said. "This is something that is always going to be out there. It's just like it's forever ruined you."

The more she spoke out, she said, the more the problem escalated. Some people even told her the way she dressed and posted images on social media contributed to the harassment — essentially blaming her for the images instead of the creators.

Eventually, Martin turned her attention towards legislation, advocating for a national law in Australia that would fine companies 555,000 Australian dollars (\$370,706) if they don't comply with removal notices for such content from online safety regulators.

But governing the internet is next to impossible when countries have their own laws for content that's sometimes made halfway around the world. Martin, currently an attorney and legal researcher at the University of Western Australia, says she believes the problem has to be controlled through some sort of global solution.

In the meantime, some AI models say they're already curbing access to explicit images.

OpenAI says it removed explicit content from data used to train the image generating tool DALL-E, which limits the ability of users to create those types of images. The company also filters requests and says it blocks users from creating AI images of celebrities and prominent politicians. Midjourney, another model, blocks the use of certain keywords and encourages users to flag problematic images to moderators.

Meanwhile, the startup Stability AI rolled out an update in November that removes the ability to create explicit images using its image generator Stable Diffusion. Those changes came following reports that some users were creating celebrity inspired nude pictures using the technology.

Stability AI spokesperson Motez Bishara said the filter uses a combination of keywords and other techniques like image recognition to detect nudity and returns a blurred image. But it's possible for users to manipulate the software and generate what they want since the company releases its code to the public. Bishara said Stability AI's license "extends to third-party applications built on Stable Diffusion" and strictly prohibits "any misuse for illegal or immoral purposes."

Some social media companies have also been tightening up their rules to better protect their platforms against harmful materials.

TikTok said last month all deepfakes or manipulated content that show realistic scenes must be labeled to indicate they're fake or altered in some way, and that deepfakes of private figures and young people are no longer allowed. Previously, the company had barred sexually explicit content and deepfakes that mislead viewers about real-world events and cause harm.

The gaming platform Twitch also recently updated its policies around explicit deepfake images after a popular streamer named AtrioC was discovered to have a deepfake porn website open on his browser during a livestream in late January. The site featured phony images of fellow Twitch streamers.

Twitch already prohibited explicit deepfakes, but now showing a glimpse of such content — even if it's intended to express outrage — "will be removed and will result in an enforcement," the company wrote in a blog post. And intentionally promoting, creating or sharing the material is grounds for an instant ban.

Other companies have also tried to ban deepfakes from their platforms, but keeping them off requires diligence.

Apple and Google said recently they removed an app from their app stores that was running sexually suggestive deepfake videos of actresses to market the product. Research into deepfake porn is not prevalent, but one report released in 2019 by the AI firm DeepTrace Labs found it was almost entirely weaponized against women and the most targeted individuals were western actresses, followed by South Korean K-pop singers.

The same app removed by Google and Apple had run ads on Meta's platform, which includes Facebook, Instagram and Messenger. Meta spokesperson Dani Lever said in a statement the company's policy restricts both AI-generated and non-AI adult content and it has restricted the app's page from advertising on its platforms.

In February, Meta, as well as adult sites like OnlyFans and Pornhub, began participating in an online tool, called Take It Down, that allows teens to report explicit images and videos of themselves from the internet. The reporting site works for regular images, and AI-generated content — which has become a growing concern for child safety groups.

"When people ask our senior leadership what are the boulders coming down the hill that we're worried about? The first is end-to-end encryption and what that means for child protection. And then second is AI and specifically deepfakes," said Gavin Portnoy, a spokesperson for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which operates the Take It Down tool.

"We have not ... been able to formulate a direct response yet to it," Portnoy said.

Dozens of POWs freed as Ukraine marks Orthodox Easter

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — More than 100 Ukrainian prisoners of war have been released as part of a major Easter exchange with Russia, a top official said Sunday, as Orthodox Ukrainians marked the holiday for a second time since Moscow unleashed its full-scale war more than a year ago.

While celebrations were subdued because of security risks, with a curfew barring the faithful from customary all-night services, Ukrainian authorities and ordinary people shared messages of hope, linking the story of Jesus' resurrection to their longing for peace and a Ukrainian victory.

Dozens of families had special reasons to rejoice, as presidential adviser Andriy Yermak announced that 130 soldiers, sailors, border guards and others captured by Moscow were on their way back home following a "big Easter prisoner exchange."

Yermak said in a Telegram post on Sunday that those released included troops who fought near Bakhmut, the eastern mining city which has for months been the focus of Russia's grinding offensive.

"The lives of our people are the highest value for us," Yermak said, adding that Kyiv's goal was to bring back all remaining POWs.

There was no immediate information on how many Russian prisoners were released, but the press service of the founder of the Wagner Group, the Kremlin-affiliated paramilitary force whose fighters are prominent in eastern Ukraine, also released a video Sunday showing Ukrainian prisoners of war being readied for an exchange.

In his Easter address released on Sunday morning, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the holiday as marking "the victory of good, the victory of truth, the victory of life," and he stressed what he said was Ukrainian unity in the face of Russian aggression.

"Belief in victory unites all of us always, and especially today. At Easter, which from time immemorial has been a family holiday for Ukrainians, a day of warmth, hope and great unity. We are one big family — Ukrainians. We have one big home — Ukraine. We have one big goal — victory for all," Zelenskyy said.

In central Kyiv, people gathered in the courtyard of the landmark St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery on Sunday morning to have their Easter eggs and baskets of food blessed by a priest. A curfew had prevented most from attending the traditional all-night service there hours earlier, with many tuning into a live stream instead.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 54 of 64

Ukrainian churches are usually crowded on Orthodox Easter Sunday. But this year, the wide courtyard was barely half full, and the line of people waiting for the priest to sprinkle holy water on their adorned baskets was moving briskly.

For a second year in a row, the war interrupted holiday routines. Ukraine's main security service this week issued a statement urging residents not to linger in churches on Sunday, in order to avoid crowding and minimize security risks.

Alla Voronina, one of the people who came to St. Michael's with baskets containing Easter cakes and multi-colored eggs, said that the restrictions were "very hard" on residents' morale.

"You constantly recall how it used to be before the war," she told The Associated Press. She said that she and her family would nevertheless follow the security recommendations and go straight home after receiving the blessing.

Another worshipper, Tetiana Voloshyna, said she was praying for Ukrainian troops "who defend us and make it possible for us to have this holiday." She added she had come to the monastery with her "personal pain and personal requests to God for victory, peace and life."

Russians also observed Easter, including President Vladimir Putin. He attended midnight services in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral that were led by Russian Orthodox Church head Patriarch Kirill, who has firmly supported the war.

In a statement, Putin commended Kirill for "tireless, selfless work aimed at preserving enduring historical, spiritual, moral and family values, the upbringing and education of the youth."

Kirill has repeatedly spoken out in support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In a video message broadcast on Russian state television late Saturday, before the start of the Easter service in Moscow, Kirill lamented "grave events taking place on our Russian historical land" in reference to the war, echoing the Kremlin's claim that an independent Ukraine is essentially a fiction.

Despite the shared Orthodox holiday, Russian shelling and missile attacks continued to sow destruction in Ukraine, according to Ukrainian regional officials. Officials in the country's south and east said that churches had not been spared. The governor of the eastern Dnipropetrovsk region, Serhii Lysak, said Russian forces stationed at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant shelled a church in a nearby town, wounding two civilians.

"The Russians have once again confirmed that they hold nothing sacred," Lysak said in his post.

Earlier on Sunday, the governor of the Zaporizhzhia province reported that Russian shelling overnight hit an Orthodox church in the town of Komyshevakha. Photos showed local residents rescuing icons from the church, its gutted frame visible in the background.

At least four civilians were killed and eight others were wounded on Saturday and overnight, Ukrainian officials reported on Sunday morning. The national emergencies service said the death toll in a Friday attack on the city of Sloviansk rose to 13 as more bodies were found in the rubble of an apartment building.

Across the front line, in Russian-occupied territory in Ukraine's industrial east, the Kremlin-appointed head of the Donetsk region claimed that a Ukrainian strike killed one civilian and wounded six others in the province's namesake capital. Denis Pushilin wrote in a Telegram post that shelling hit the center of the city, near its Holy Transfiguration cathedral.

The Russian defense ministry on Sunday announced that assault units from the Wagner group have captured two neighborhoods in the embattled city of Bakhmut. Bakhmut, a former mining hub now largely reduced to ruins, has been a key target of Russia's monthslong grinding campaign in eastern Ukraine.

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

G7 vows to step up moves to renewable energy, zero carbon

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

SAPPORO, Japan (AP) — Energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations vowed Sunday to work to hasten the shift toward cleaner, renewable energy, but set no timetable for phasing out coal-fired power plants as they wrapped up two days of talks in the northern Japanese city of Sapporo.

The officials issued a 36-page communique laying out their commitments ahead of a G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May.

Japan won endorsements from fellow G-7 countries for its own national strategy emphasizing so-called clean coal, hydrogen and nuclear energy to help ensure its energy security.

“Recognizing the current global energy crisis and economic disruptions, we reaffirm our commitment to accelerating the clean energy transition to net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 at the latest,” the communique says.

“We call on and will work with other countries to end new unabated coal-fired power generation projects globally as soon as possible to accelerate the clean energy transition in a just manner,” the document says.

The leaders reiterated the need to urgently reduce carbon emissions and achieve a “predominantly decarbonized power sector” by 2035. They also stressed the importance of ensuring supplies of critical minerals, used in many high-tech products, are stable and conform to high social and environmental standards.

“I believe that we were able to demonstrate to the international community that our commitment to climate change and environmental issues is unwavering, even in the context of the situation in Ukraine,” Akihiro Nishimura, Japan’s environment minister, said after the talks ended.

The stipulation that countries rely on “predominantly” clean energy by 2035 leaves room for continuation of fossil-fuel fired power. But the ministers agreed to prioritize steps toward phasing out “unabated” coal power generation — plants that do not employ mechanisms to capture emissions and prevent them from escaping into the atmosphere.

U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said the meetings were “really constructive.”

“I think the unity for the goal that was expressed of phasing out unabated fossil fuels is a very important statement,” Kerry said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The call to action comes as China and other developing countries step up demands for more help in phasing out fossil fuels and stabilizing energy prices and supplies amid disruptions from Russia’s war on Ukraine.

The issue of setting a timeline for phasing out coal-fired power plants is a longstanding sticking point. Japan relies on coal for nearly one-third of its power generation and is also promoting the use of so-called clean coal, using technology to capture carbon emissions, to produce hydrogen — which produces only water when used as fuel.

The G-7 nations account for 40% of the world’s economic activity and a quarter of global carbon emissions. Their actions are critical, but so is their support for less wealthy nations often suffering the worst effects of climate change while having the fewest resources for mitigating such impacts.

Emissions in advanced economies are falling, though historically they have been higher — the United States alone accounts for about a quarter of historic global carbon emissions — while emerging markets and developing economies now account for more than two-thirds of global carbon emissions.

The communique highlighted the need to cut carbon emission by around 43% by 2030, and 60% by 2035, relative to the 2019 level. It also reaffirmed the G-7 commitment to ending fossil fuel subsidies by 2025.

The president-designate for the next United Nations climate talks, the COP28, who was also attending the talks in Sapporo, issued a statement urging G-7 nations to increase financial support for developing countries’ transitions to clean energy.

“We must make a fairer deal for the Global South,” said Sultan Al Jaber of the United Arab Emirates “Not enough is getting to the people and places that need it most.”

He said developed countries must follow through on a \$100 billion pledge they made at the 2009 COP15 meeting. The next talks are to be held in Dubai in late November.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 56 of 64

Chinese President Xi Jinping and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who met in Beijing on Friday, issued a joint statement expressing concern that such funding “continues to fall short of the commitment of \$100 billion per year.”

Bhupender Yadav, India’s environment minister, urged G-7 countries to hasten their emissions reductions to allow space for developing countries to grow their economies. That is “the best defense against the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and pollution,” he said in a tweet.

The document crafted in Sapporo included significant amounts of nuance to allow for differences between the G-7 energy strategies, climate advocates said.

“They put out bold language on the urgency of addressing the climate crisis but the real test is what are they saying to the rest of the world about their commitments to scale up ambitions,” Alden Meyer, a senior associate at E3G, a climate change think tank, said in a Twitter spaces session just after the communique was released.

But while other G-7 countries prevented Japan from expanding loopholes to allow wider use of fossil fuels, the commitments “fall short of the clarion call to action that was needed,” Meyer said.

The Sapporo talks also yielded pledges to cooperate on wise and equitable environmental energy, water, farm and marine policies. The ministers committed to ending plastic pollution, aiming to take new plastic pollution to zero by 2040.

While the G-7 energy and environment ministers were wrapping up their meetings in Sapporo, farther south in the mountain city of Karuizawa G-7 foreign ministers were grappling with other shared concerns including regional security and the war in Ukraine.

The war, which Kerry called “insane and tragic,” has complicated the switch to renewable energy by disrupting trade in oil and gas and pushing prices sharply higher, but phasing out carbon emissions can and must continue.

“I think energy security is being exaggerated in some cases,” Kerry said, pointing to Germany’s progress in embracing renewable energy and even phasing out its nuclear power plants.

EU leaders beat a path to Xi’s door seeking China’s help

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — In the weeks since Chinese leader Xi Jinping won a third five-year term as president, setting him on course to remain in power for life, leaders and diplomats from around the world have beaten a path to his door. None more so than those from Europe.

French President Emmanuel Macron made a high-profile state visit to Beijing last week accompanied by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, just days after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock arrived in the northeast port city of Tianjin on Thursday, following a visit by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in November. The European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, would have been in China this week, too, but he tested positive for COVID-19.

For the 27-nation trading bloc, the reasons to head to China are clear.

As an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Xi could play a pivotal role in helping to end the war in Ukraine. The conflict has dragged on for over a year, driven up energy prices and inflicted more damage on economies struggling to rebound from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Europeans want Xi’s help. They want him to talk to Ukraine’s president as well as Russia’s, but they don’t see him as the key mediator. China’s proposed peace plan for Ukraine is mostly a list of its previously known positions and is unacceptable, EU officials say.

The EU also fears that Xi might supply weapons to Russia. They’ve been particularly disturbed by Putin’s plans to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. That announcement came just days after Xi and Putin met to cement their “no-limits friendship.”

Baerbock said the war is “top of my agenda.” Praising Beijing for easing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, she said that “its influence vis à vis Russia will have consequences for the whole of Europe and for our relationship with China.”

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 57 of 64

At the same time, the EU is deeply concerned about a military escalation in the Taiwan Strait. China launched war games just after Macron left. But unlike the U.S., with its military and strategic interest in Taiwan, the Europeans mostly see the island in economic and pro-democracy terms.

So the visits are meant to reassure Xi of respect for Beijing's control over all of Chinese territory and to urge calm. They also highlight the challenge the U.S. faces as it tries to build a coalition of countries to ramp up pressure on Beijing over its expansionist policies.

"The key is that we have every interest, both in Europe and in China, to maintain the status quo," a senior EU official said Wednesday, briefing reporters on plans for Borrell's sensitive trip on condition that he not be named. "It has worked well for all sides for decades."

Beyond the geopolitics lies business. The EU and China did more than 2.3 billion euros' (\$2.5 billion) worth of trade every day last year, and the Europeans don't want to endanger that. However, the EU's trade deficit has more than tripled over the past decade, and it wants to level the business playing field.

It's also desperate to limit its imports of critical resources from China, like rare earth minerals or hi-tech components, after painfully weaning itself off its biggest, and most unreliable, gas supplier, Russia.

It's a fine line to walk, and China is adept at divide-and-conquer politics.

Over the past two decades, the Chinese government has often used its economic heft to pry France, Germany and other allies away from the U.S. on issues ranging from military security and trade to human rights and Taiwan.

Beijing has called repeatedly for a "multi-polar world," a reference to Chinese frustration with U.S. dominance of global affairs and the ruling Communist Party's ambition to see the country become an international leader.

"There has been a serious deviation in U.S. understanding and positioning about China, treating China as the primary opponent and the biggest geopolitical challenge," the Chinese foreign minister, Qin Gang, told reporters last month.

"China-Europe relations are not targeted, dependent, or subject to third parties," he said.

Macron's visit appeared to illustrate that Qin's view isn't just wishful thinking. As tensions rise between Beijing and Washington, the French leader said, it is important for Europe to retain its "strategic autonomy."

"Being a friend doesn't mean that you have to be a vassal," Macron said Wednesday, repeating a remark from his trip that alarmed some European partners. "Just because we're allies, it doesn't mean (that) we no longer have the right to think for ourselves."

Such comments could strain ties with the U.S. and have also exposed divisions within the EU.

Without mentioning Macron, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki warned that some in Europe were too slow to heed the "wake-up call" on China.

"You could see this over the past couple of weeks as some European leaders went to Beijing," Morawiecki said, adding: "I do not quite understand the idea of strategic autonomy, if it means de-facto shooting into our own knee."

For its part, the White House has sought to downplay Macron's talk of Europe as "an independent pole in a multi-polar world."

It thinks European skepticism toward Beijing is growing. U.S. officials note a recent Dutch decision to restrict China's access to advanced computer chip components or Scholz publicly prodding Xi not to deliver weapons to Russia.

Despite the differences of national emphasis, the EU's strategy on China remains much as it was enshrined in 2019 — that the Asian giant is "a partner, a competitor and systemic rival." The aim of the recent visits fit that mold: to secure Xi's commitment to peace, keep trade flowing fairly and reduce Europe's reliance on China for critical resources.

Joe McDonald in Beijing, Aamer Madhani in Washington, Geir Moulson in Berlin, Vanessa Gera in Warsaw and Mike Corder in The Hague, Netherlands, contributed.

In Tennessee, expulsions echo a decades-old protest movement

By ADRIAN SAINZ, KIMBERLEE KRUESI and TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — Squint a little as you take in the scene, or just close your eyes and listen to the voice, and 2023 stumbles back into another era. Another Memphis.

“You can’t expel hope!” the young man cries in his powerful voice, his message aimed at the Tennessee state legislators who had expelled him and another Black lawmaker a week earlier. “You can’t expel justice! You can’t expel our voice.”

Justin Pearson wears a dark suit in the county meeting room, a carefully knotted blue tie and glasses that bring Malcolm X to mind. He speaks in the rolling cadence of generations of Black preachers.

He ends by quoting a Bible verse beloved by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., vowing to fight “until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Then he turns to his cheering supporters and thrusts his fist into the air.

The two Black Democratic legislators ousted by the overwhelmingly white, Republican-controlled state Legislature — then reinstated by local officials days later — have only a few months’ experience in political office.

But in barely two weeks, Pearson, 28, and Justin Jones, 27, have gone from neophyte politicians to national prominence, heralded as living echoes of the civil rights struggles of the 1960s, when leaders like King and John Lewis organized protests across the American South.

“Two young Black men” were forced from office, Vice President Kamala Harris said Friday at a convention in New York City of the civil rights group the National Action Network, calling the expulsions “an attempt to silence the voice of the people.”

But those expulsions, she added, simply set off more protests.

“Now, Justin Jones and Justin Pearson are back in their seats!” Harris said to cheers.

The two men — now widely known simply as “the Justins” — “are executing tactics modeled after people they’ve admired,” said Noelle Trent, an official at Memphis’ National Civil Rights Museum, located on the site of the Lorraine Motel, where King was assassinated in 1968 while supporting a sanitation workers’ strike. They “have actually studied the (Civil Rights) Movement.”

That movement strikes powerful chords in this part of America.

“The energy is there because both Memphis and Nashville are deeply rooted in the civil rights protest tradition,” said the Rev. Andre E. Johnson, a civil rights activist, senior pastor at Memphis’ Gifts of Life Ministries and a professor of communications who has studied Black oratory and rhetoric.

Pearson and Jones both came to the state Legislature steeped in activism.

Jones, who was born in Oakland, California, and raised in the East Bay area, moved to Nashville to attend Fisk University and is studying for a master’s degree in theology at Vanderbilt University, according to campaign material. One set of grandparents were Black Chicagoans, and his other grandparents immigrated from the Philippines.

His life has taken him from protest to protest: leading a campaign against the bust prominently displayed at the state Capitol of Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, which GOP leaders refused to remove; blocking Nashville traffic after the election of former President Donald Trump; and spending more than 60 days at the Capitol plaza in 2020 to protest police violence after the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. As a student, he worked to expand health care and repeal voter ID laws.

The protests have also led to a handful of clashes with authorities, from the time he threw a cup of liquid at the former House speaker during the bust protests to when he stood on a police cruiser during demonstrations after Floyd’s killing. A campaign website says he has been arrested more than a dozen times for nonviolent protest.

He has no regrets about the protest that got him expelled, when he, Pearson and a white colleague, 60-year-old legislator Gloria Johnson, walked to the speaker’s podium while the Legislature was in session and led chants calling for gun control.

The protest unfolded in the aftermath of a shooting at a Nashville Christian school where six people,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 59 of 64

including three young students, were slain. While the protest also angered some Democrats — video captured some older Black, Democratic legislators berating the trio at the podium — the symbolism of expelling the two Black lawmakers while sparing their white colleague shifted the attention from guns to race.

But with only days left in the session, Jones, who was elected in 2022 and represents part of Nashville, said his focus was still on gun control legislation.

"This is about saving Tennessee, saving our nation, saving the future for our children," he said in a brief interview Thursday at the Capitol.

He sees himself in the young protesters who flooded the capital to call for gun control, even though he calls himself "an elder now in the movement."

Pearson grew up in Memphis and went to high school in the same district he was elected to represent after longtime state Rep. Barbara Cooper, a Black Democrat, died in office. The sprawling district sits on the Mississippi River, winding along neighborhoods, forests and wetlands of south Memphis, through parts of downtown and then north into a series of semi-rural communities.

One of five children — his mother is a teacher and his father is a minister and pastor — Pearson has said his family struggled financially as he was growing up.

His activism reaches back at least to high school, when he complained to the school board about a lack of textbooks. Later, he attended Bowdoin College in Maine, where he was class president and recipient of the President's Award, given for "exceptional personal achievements and uncommon contributions to the college."

He returned to Memphis and helped lead the fight against a planned oil pipeline that would have run through wetlands and under poor, predominantly Black neighborhoods in the city's south. The project was canceled in 2021.

Pearson won his legislative seat in a special election in late January.

"I'm very proud of him," said Kevin Webb, a teacher and band director at Mitchell High School who knew Pearson when he was a student there. "He's standing up for what he believes is right."

"Sometimes doing the right thing isn't always going to look good," Webb continued. "That's how life is."

Pearson and Jones' sudden rise to prominence also raises powerful questions about America's continuing need for a civil rights movement.

The two men's return to office is not "resurrecting democracy," said the Rev. Earle Fisher, a Memphis civil rights activist and senior pastor of Gifts of Abyssinian Baptist Church.

"There's a difference between getting our lick back, and actually winning the fight," he said.

"The fight is far from over."

Kreusi reported from Nashville and Sullivan reported from Minneapolis. Associated Press writers Aaron Morrison in New York and Jonathan Mattise in Nashville contributed to this report.

Climate envoy Kerry: No rolling back clean energy transition

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

SAPPORO, Japan (AP) — So much has been invested in clean energy that there can be no rolling back of moves to end carbon emissions, U.S. climate envoy John Kerry said Sunday.

Kerry noted that if countries deliver on promises to phase out polluting fossil fuels, the world can limit average global warming to 1.7 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), better than the worst case scenarios but still above the current limit of 1.5 C global warming above pre-industrial levels.

"We're in a very different place than where we were a year ago, let alone two and three years ago," Kerry said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"But we're not doing everything we said we'd do," he said, after attending a meeting of energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations. "A lot of countries need to step up including ours to reduce emissions faster, deploy renewables faster, bring new technologies online faster all of that has to happen."

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 60 of 64

Kerry said the G-7 talks in northeastern Japan's Sapporo were "really constructive" in yielding a show of unity for phasing out use of unabated fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases.

A meeting Thursday of President Joe Biden's Major Economies Forum, which includes leaders of 20 nations that account for more than three-quarters of global carbon emissions, offers another opportunity for committing resources to the goal of reaching zero emissions by 2050, Kerry said.

"The United States and all the developed world has the responsibility to help the developing world through this crisis," he said. "Those countries will really determine what happens. If they will reduce, if they will take the lead, if they will start deploying the new technologies, if they will stop using unabated fossil fuels, we'll up the chance of winning this battle."

Kerry held out hope for cooperation with China on climate despite friction over Taiwan, human rights, technology and other issues, saying he had a "very good conversation" with his Chinese counterpart, Xie Zhenhua, just days earlier.

"We agreed that we need to get back together personally, visit and try to see what we can find to work on together to accelerate the process. Is that doable? I hope so," Kerry said.

The Biden administration has moved aggressively to entice companies to invest in electric vehicles and other cleaner energy technologies. While the U.S. still lags some other countries in use of EVs, the market is changing as consumer preferences evolve and manufacturers invest billions.

No one person can roll back what's happening in the climate sector, Kerry said, "because private companies have made major bets on the future and they're not going to reverse them."

One area where much more needs to be done is in climate financing, Kerry said, even though developed countries were close to their \$100 billion goal in annual support for developing nations. In 2020, \$83 billion was committed.

The annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund last week in Washington were a start, "but they're not enough. They didn't produce enough of a change, in our judgement, to really unleash the kind of finance support that's necessary.

"Our hope ... is that over the course over the next weeks and months more will be put on the table, more will be agreed upon and we can move faster," he said.

The hope is to reform the structure of finance to get such multilateral development banks to lend more and at better rates.

"Anyone is going to look pretty critically at what's going to happen with their money," Kerry said, noting that "there's a lot of money and it's looking for these deals right now."

The Inflation Reduction Act is a major step toward incentivizing climate-friendly investments, "sending a signal to the market place that there's money to be made by transitioning and moving in the direction of clean energy technologies," he said.

In the U.S., money will not be invested in new coal-fired power plants, because "there's no such thing as clean coal," Kerry said. "The marketplace is not supporting that. Investors are not supporting that."

Some countries, including Japan, have balked at setting a clear timeline for phasing out coal-fired plants, citing energy security. And for some countries, it's a valid concern, Kerry said, though he added, "I think energy security is being exaggerated in some cases."

The greater imperative is to do whatever is possible to draw down carbon emissions, given the millions of people who die each year due to unclean air, extreme heat and other dire consequences of climate change.

"If we're going to be responsible, we have to turn around and figure out how we are going to more rapidly terminate the emissions. We have to cut the emissions that are warming the planet and heading us inexorably toward several tipping points beyond which there is no reverse," Kerry said.

Inmate stuck on US death row despite vacated death sentence

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — When the U.S. prisons director visited the penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana, this past week, she stopped by the federal death row where Bruce Webster is in a solitary, 12-by-7 foot cell, 23 hours a day.

Webster's not supposed to be there. A federal judge in Indiana ruled in 2019 that the 49-year-old has an IQ in the range of severe intellectual disability and so cannot be put to death.

But four years on, the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Prisons haven't moved him to a less restrictive unit or different prison.

Why? His own lawyer, who secured a rare legal win in persuading a court to vacate Webster's 1996 death sentence in the kidnapping, rape and killing of a 16-year-old Texas girl, says she's baffled.

"How can I not get this guy off death row?," an exasperated Monica Foster said in a recent interview. "Well, I did get him off death row. But why can't I physically get him off death row?"

Asked about Webster's continued placement on death row, a Justice Department official said only that "the Bureau of Prisons is considering Mr. Webster's designation determination."

Webster's case illustrates chronic bureaucracy in the prisons system and the difficulties in getting anyone off death row. There's sometimes additional reluctance to act in death row cases given the nature of inmates' crimes.

In Webster's case, he and three accomplices kidnapped a sister of a rival drug trafficker in 1994, kicking their way into an Arlington, Texas, apartment as Lisa Rene frantically dialed 911. They raped her over two days, then stripped her, bludgeoned her with a shovel and buried her alive.

Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters has said she's committed to reforms. Her visit to Terre Haute was part of regular inspections of U.S. prisons. It came months after a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana seeking to end the solitary confinement of federal death row inmates, saying that practice results in severe psychological damage.

Several death row inmates told The Associated Press by email that Peters came through their unit on Tuesday and spoke to some prisoners. It's not known whether she saw Webster or discussed his case.

The Biden administration should see moving Webster as an uncontroversial if modest step toward fulfilling President Joe Biden's campaign pledge to stop federal executions for good, Foster argued.

"This case is a no brainer," the Indianapolis-based federal defender said. "There is zero political liability for doing the right thing here and moving him off death row."

Webster, who wants to be transferred to a prison near his hometown of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, must be resentenced. It's supposed to be a formality because life in prison is the only available sentence.

When his lawyers and the Justice Department asked in joint 2021 motion for U.S. judge in Texas where Webster was tried in 1996 to resentence him, the judge refused, saying he lacked jurisdiction.

Judge Terry Means also chided his Indiana counterpart, Judge William Lawrence, for tossing Webster's death sentence, saying Lawrence had "brushed aside" jurors' finding, including that most rejected Webster's intellectual disability claims.

"That judgment is final," the government said about Means' ruling, adding that it is the department's position "that Mr. Webster is not currently subject to a valid death sentence."

Responsibility to get Webster off death row lies squarely with the Justice Department, Foster said.

The Justice Department executed 13 U.S. death row inmates, some of them Webster's friends, in the last months of Donald Trump's presidency. While Biden's Justice Department paused the executions and reversed decisions to seek death sentences in some cases, it continues to seek them in others.

Lawrence based his Webster ruling on *Atkins v. Virginia*, a landmark Supreme Court decision in 2002 ruling that executing those with intellectual disabilities violated Eighth Amendment protections against "cruel and unusual" punishment.

That decision hasn't prevented some inmates with such disabilities from being executed, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. It identifies 25 cases where that's happened since that ruling, including two federal inmates executed under Trump, Alfred Bourgeois and Corey Johnson.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 62 of 64

Whether Webster qualified as intellectually disabled centered on three questions: Was his IQ significantly below average, did he show an inability to learn basic skills and was the onset of the disability apparent before age 18?

In his ruling, Lawrence cited tests putting Webster's IQ between 50 and 65, below the benchmark score for intellectual disability of 70. The average is 100.

During arguments, Webster's lawyers said he relied on others to tie his shoes late into childhood, and, as a teenager, had trouble playing card games because he couldn't distinguish between clubs and spades.

Prosecutors accused Webster of playing dumb. They said he intentionally answered IQ questions incorrectly to avoid the death penalty. They said proof of his aptitude included how, during a jail stint, he figured out how to pick locks on a food chute to slip into a women's section.

"Webster also has been able to hold a job, albeit it criminal in nature," a government filing added. "Being a successful drug dealer is no less demanding than holding any number of legitimate jobs."

The decisive evidence, however, were newly obtained Social Security records from before the killing indicating Webster's IQ was within the intellectually disabled range. That evidence, despite requests for it, wasn't made available at his trial.

Foster worries what could happen if Webster doesn't get off death row soon. Even though past rulings should prevent it, she fears that if Trump wins the presidency, his administration could seek to restore the death sentence.

If that happens, she said, "I'm concerned it could be carried out."

Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at @mtarm.

Pope slams 'insinuations' against John Paul II as baseless

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis on Sunday publicly defended St. John Paul II, condemning as "offensive and baseless" insinuations that recently surfaced about the late pontiff.

In remarks to tourists and pilgrims in St. Peter's Square, Francis said he was aiming to interpret the feelings of the faithful worldwide by expressing gratitude to the Polish pontiff's memory.

Days earlier, the Vatican's media apparatus had described as "slanderous" an audiotape from a purported Roman mobster who insinuated that John Paul would go out looking for underage girls to molest.

The tape was played on an Italian TV program by Pietro Orlandi, brother of Emanuela Orlandi, the teenage daughter of a Vatican employee who lived at the Vatican. The disappearance of the 15-year-old in 1983 is an enduring mystery that has spawned countless theories and so far fruitless investigations in the decades since.

Francis noted that in Sunday's crowd in the square were pilgrims and other faithful in town to pray at a sanctuary for divine mercy, a quality John Paul stressed often in his papacy, which spanned from 1978 to 2005.

"Confident of interpreting the sentiment of all the faithful of the entire world, I direct a grateful thought to the memory of St. John Paul II, in these days the object of offensive and baseless insinuations," Francis said, his voice turning stern and his words drawing applause.

Last week, Pietro Orlandi met for hours with Vatican prosecutors who earlier this year reopened the investigation into his sister's disappearance. Italy's Parliament has also begun a commission of inquest into the case.

Emanuela vanished on June 22, 1983, after leaving her family's Vatican City apartment to go to a music lesson in Rome. Her father was a lay employee of the Holy See.

Among the theories about what happened to her have been ones linking the disappearance to the aftermath of the failed assassination attempt against John Paul in 1981 in St. Peter's Square or to the international financial scandal over the Vatican bank. Still other theories envision a role played by Rome's criminal underworld.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 63 of 64

The recent four-part Netflix documentary "Vatican Girl" explored those possible scenarios and provided new testimony from a friend who said Emanuela had told her a week before she disappeared that a high-ranking Vatican cleric had made sexual advances toward her.

Her brother has long insisted the Vatican knows more than it has said. The Vatican prosecutor in charge of the probe says the pontiff has given him free rein to try to find the truth.

While at the Vatican last week, Pietro Orlandi provided Vatican prosecutors with an audiotape from a purported Roman mobster insinuating that John Paul would go out looking for underage girls to molest. The Vatican's editorial director in a scathing editorial noted the insinuation lacked any "evidence, clues, testimonies or corroboration."

Writing in the Vatican's newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, Andrea Tornielli said "no one deserves to be vilified in this way, without even a shred of a clue, on the basis of the 'rumors' of some unknown figure in the criminal underworld or some sleazy anonymous comment produced on live TV."

John Paul's longtime secretary, Polish Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, also criticized the insinuations as "unreal, false and laughable if they weren't tragic and even criminal."

Pietro Orlandi's lawyer, Laura Sgro, has insisted her client wasn't accusing anyone.

Today in History: April 17, Bay of Pigs invasion launched

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 17, the 107th day of 2023. There are 258 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 17, 1961, some 1,500 CIA-trained Cuban exiles launched the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in an attempt to topple Fidel Castro, whose forces crushed the incursion by the third day.

On this date:

In 1521, Martin Luther went before the Diet of Worms (vohrms) to face charges stemming from his religious writings. (Luther was later declared an outlaw by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.)

In 1961, "The Apartment" won the Academy Award for best picture of 1960; Burt Lancaster was named best actor for "Elmer Gantry," while the best actress award went to Elizabeth Taylor for "Butterfield 8."

In 1964, Ford Motor Co. unveiled the Mustang at the New York World's Fair.

In 1969, a jury in Los Angeles convicted Sirhan Sirhan of assassinating Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

In 1970, Apollo 13 astronauts James A. Lovell, Fred W. Haise and Jack Swigert splashed down safely in the Pacific, four days after a ruptured oxygen tank crippled their spacecraft while en route to the moon.

In 1972, the Boston Marathon allowed women to compete for the first time; Nina Kuscsik was the first officially recognized women's champion, with a time of 3:10:26.

In 1973, Federal Express (later FedEx) began operations as 14 planes carrying 186 packages took off from Memphis International Airport, bound for 25 U.S. cities.

In 1975, Cambodia's five-year war ended as the capital Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, which instituted brutal, radical policies that claimed an estimated 1.7 million lives until the regime was overthrown in 1979.

In 1986, at London's Heathrow Airport, a bomb was discovered in the bag of Anne-Marie Murphy, a pregnant Irishwoman about to board an El Al jetliner to Israel; she'd been tricked into carrying the bomb by her Jordanian fiance, Nezar Hindawi.

In 1991, the Dow Jones industrial average closed above 3,000 for the first time, ending the day at 3,004.46, up 17.58.

In 1993, a federal jury in Los Angeles convicted two former police officers of violating the civil rights of beaten motorist Rodney King; two other officers were acquitted. Turkish President Turgut Ozal died at age 66.

In 2020, President Donald Trump urged supporters to "LIBERATE" three states led by Democratic governors, apparently encouraging protests against stay-at-home mandates aimed at stopping the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Fifteen people were killed when a fertilizer plant exploded in West, Texas. Sports returned

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, April 17, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 283 ~ 64 of 64

to Boston two days after the deadly Marathon bombing as the Buffalo Sabres defeated the Bruins in a 3-2 shootout (players on both teams wore "Boston Strong" decals on their helmets). Senate Republicans backed by a small band of rural-state Democrats scuttled the most far-reaching gun control legislation in two decades, rejecting tighter background checks for buyers and a ban on assault weapons.

Five years ago: Barbara Bush, who was both a first lady and the mother of a president, died in Houston at the age of 92; she was survived by her husband, George H.W. Bush, with whom she had the longest marriage of any presidential couple in American history - a marriage of more than 73 years. A Southwest Airlines jet made an emergency landing in Philadelphia after the jet apparently blew an engine, got hit by debris and lost a window; a woman sitting near the window was pulled partially out of the plane and later died. Americans were given an extra day to file their taxes after key elements of the IRS website crashed on deadline day.

One year ago: Ukrainian fighters holed up in a steel plant in the last known pocket of resistance inside the shattered city of Mariupol ignored a surrender-or-die ultimatum from the Russians and continued to hold out against the capture of the strategically vital port. A container ship the length of more than three football fields was pried from the muddy bottom of the Chesapeake Bay more than a month after it ran aground. China announced it would launch three more astronauts to its newest space station after the latest crew returned following a six-month stay in orbit.

Today's Birthdays: Actor David Bradley is 81. Composer-musician Jan Hammer (yahn HAH'-mur) is 75. Actor Olivia Hussey is 72. Actor Clarke Peters is 71. Rapper Afrika Bambaataa is 66. Actor Sean Bean is 64. Former NFL quarterback Boomer Esiason is 62. Actor Joel Murray is 61. Rock singer Maynard James Keenan (Tool) is 59. Actor Lela Rochon is 59. Actor William Mapother is 58. Actor Leslie Bega is 56. Actor Henry Ian Cusick is 56. Actor Kimberly Elise is 56. Singer Liz Phair is 56. Director/producer Adam McKay is 55. Rapper-actor Redman is 53. Actor Jennifer Garner is 51. Singer Victoria Beckham is 49. Actor-singer Lindsay Korman is 45. Actor Tate Ellington is 44. Actor Nicholas D'Agosto is 43. Actor Charlie Hofheimer is 42. Actor Rooney Mara is 38. Actor Jacqueline MacInnes Wood is 36. Actor Paulie Litt is 28. Actor Dee Dee Davis is 27.