

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 1 of 80

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [2- Erdmann is 2023 Young Leader Scholarship Program Recipient](#)
- [3- The arts surround us every day in every way](#)
- [3- South Dakota Democratic Party Statement on the Passing of Chair Randy Seiler](#)
- [4- City Council Story](#)
- [6- Siren test today for severe weather awareness week](#)
- [7- SD Searchlight: 22,000 South Dakotans could lose Medicaid now, about half could get it back later, state says](#)
- [8- SD Searchlight: States were adding lessons about Native American history. Then came the anti-CRT movement](#)
- [11- SD Searchlight: U.S. House fails to override Biden veto of WOTUS legislation](#)
- [12- SD Searchlight: Anti-abortion organizations urge U.S. Supreme Court to keep limits on abortion pill](#)
- [14- SD Searchlight: One state already has voted to ban TikTok. For Congress, it's going to be much tougher.](#)
- [17- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [23- Subscription Form](#)
- [24- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

Groton Community Calendar

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.

Baseball: Howard at Canova, 6:30 p.m. (Varsity)

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.

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



Thursday, April 20

Senior Menu: Baked cod, macaroni and cheese, spinach salad, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.

Track: Sully Buttes (Onida) Charger Invite

United Methodist: Newsletter times due.

Friday, April 21

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, sauerkraut, 3 bean salad, chocolate pudding with bananas.

School Breakfast: Biscuits and jelly.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

Baseball: (Oldham/Ramona/Rutland)/Arlington at Ramona, 6 p.m. (V/JV)

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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Erdmann is 2023 Young Leader Scholarship Program Recipient

St. Louis, MO - The Mid America CropLife Association (MACA) Board of Directors selected nine college students to participate in the MACA Young Leader Scholarship Program (YLSP).

Tessa Erdmann, from Groton, South Dakota, is a student at South Dakota State University. Erdmann is majoring in Agricultural Communications with a minor in Marketing and Public Relations. She'll graduate in May 2024. This summer she is interning at South Dakota State University's College of Ag, Marketing and Communications department.

This is the 11th year for the program, which is designed to expose future agriculturalists to the crop protection industry and potential career opportunities. Recipients receive financial compensation, additional training for finding a job plus the opportunity to network with MACA members. MACA members benefit by developing a talent pool of future industry leaders and through the heightened awareness of MACA within the participating universities.

The recipients' educational focus is agriculture, enrolled at one of the land-grant universities in the MACA region and have secured a 2023 summer internship related to agriculture, preferably within the crop protection industry. Additionally, the selected recipients will attend the MACA Annual Meeting September 5-7, 2023, in Indianapolis, Indiana and speak about their internship experience and participate in the meeting with MACA members. After completing the summer internship, the scholarship recipients receive a \$2,000 scholarship to assist with their tuition expenses.



Tessa Erdmann
Young Leader Scholarship
Program Recipient

The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

- One worker was killed, and five others were injured after a parking garage collapsed in New York's lower Manhattan.
- Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin has been cleared to play again by doctors, four months after suffering a cardiac arrest on the field during an NFL game.
- A 34-year-old man has been charged with murder after four people were found shot dead in a house and three others were wounded in a shooting on a busy highway in Maine.
- India is set to overtake China to become the world's most populous country by mid-2023, data released by the U.N. shows. India is estimated to have nearly 3 million more people than its neighbor.
- The U.N. issued a rare rebuke of the U.S. after leaked classified documents revealed that the country eavesdropped on Secretary-General António Guterres and other senior officials.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Poland has reached an agreement to resume the transit of Ukrainian grain through its country beginning on April 21. Meanwhile, more than 7,000 Ukrainian servicemembers are considered missing, according to the commissioner for missing persons Oleh Kotenko, saying he hopes they are "indeed captured" and not dead.
- Andrew Lester, the 84-year-old man charged in the shooting of 16-year-old Ralph Yarl, surrendered to authorities but was freed on bond hours later.
- At least 29 people have died, and dozens of others were forced to evacuate from a hospital fire in Beijing. The incident is one of the deadliest in the capital in about two decades.
- North Dakota's House passed a bill that would ban abortion after six weeks of pregnancy, even in the cases of rape or incest. The only exception is if the mother's life is in danger.

The arts surround us every day in every way

By Jim Speirs, Executive Director, Arts South Dakota

You may not think of yourself as an “arts” person, but if you stop to think about it, you are. From the clothes you wear to the wallpaper on your computer and phone, you consciously make creative decisions about the colors, decor and images you surround yourself with daily. Not only are the arts everywhere, they are critical aspects of your life.

Too often the cultural touchstones of our world are shuffled off into convenient pigeonholes. Many of us only think of artistic expression as those experiences we have strolling through museums or after buying a ticket to the latest touring Broadway show. Creativity, some believe, is the province of musicians, artists and dancers. The truth is, your home, your car and your office are all filled with art—the colors, textures and patterns of your day, of your life, are your personal creative touches.

Your everyday arts decisions are the things you do to make your life better, more colorful or add beauty to mundane activities. People who think of themselves as sports fans—rather than “art lovers”—should consider how much of the game day fun is the creative framework of the sport, from uniforms to stadium seating and from rally music to the exploding scoreboard. Design and creativity make the sporting experience come alive—the art of every football game and hockey match.

You are an “arts person” in your environments, your hobbies and your entertainment options. Your artistic style shows in the car you drive, the shoes you wear and the team flag you fly on your front lawn. Creative choices and cultural decisions shape our days and add beauty to our lives. You are the arts in South Dakota!

Please visit www.ArtsSouthDakota.org to learn more about exploring your creativity in exciting new ways.



South Dakota Democratic Party Statement on the Passing of Chair Randy Seiler

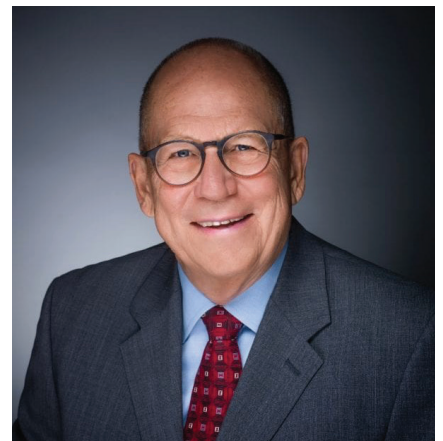
After a brief illness, South Dakota Democratic Party Chair Randy Seiler passed away last night surrounded by his family.

South Dakota Democratic Party acting Chair Jennifer Slaight-Hansen issued the following statement:

“I am in shock. We have lost one of the great leaders of our Party. I personally have lost a mentor and friend. I fall short of words to express my sadness on his sudden passing. I pray his soul rests in peace. I wish Wanda and his family immense strength as they move forward.”

At this time, final arrangements are pending.

Randy’s term as Chair was set to end on May 1, and Jennifer Slaight-Hansen will assume all responsibilities of Chair until her elected term begins on May 1.



Baseball Concession Stand facility project delayed

by Elizabeth Varin

The City of Groton may have to hit the brakes on a new concession stand at the city's baseball facility. The Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation has been pushing the city to apply for a Land and Water Conservation Grant to move the project forward. The hope was to move the current facility after the last game of this summer so a new one could be in place by next year.

However, the wheels of government seem to move slower than expected.

Applications for the grant are due at the end of this month, but the city won't find out if it gets the grant until spring of 2024, said Ted Dickey, program coordinator with Northeast Council of Government. Work can't begin until the grant is in place.

"They would assume you have enough funding in place (without the grant), so they would move it to something else," he said.

The city could move the existing facility, but any work on a new structure would have to wait for state and federal officials to sign off on the grant, he said. And there is no guarantee the city will even be awarded the grant.

Foundation board members had hoped to have a new concession stand built before the 2024 season as Groton is set to host the state junior legion tournament.

When asked if the facility could operate without a concession stand, baseball/softball foundation vice president Jarod Fliehs was quick to say "no."

Councilman Brian Bahr said the city couldn't afford to complete the project without the grant. He asked if the foundation would be able to wait.

"We don't have a choice," Fliehs said. "It's a city building. We're just looking to help fund it."

Even with an extended project timeline, there are other hurdles the city must overcome in order to receive grant funding.

Groton received a Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant a couple of years ago to transform the tennis courts into pickleball courts, which may make it harder to receive a grant again so soon, Dickey told the council. A concession stand is also not a priority project as it isn't the actual field the team will compete on or a playground kids will play on.

Dickey recommended the city apply for a grant totaling 35 percent of the project cost, as it will be scored higher by those deciding what to fund. That would make the grant total about \$77,000, with the city and foundation covering the remaining \$133,000.

Totals have not been finalized for the project, and prices could just keep going up.

"The grant needs numbers, but it's kind of like juggling because by the time the grant comes down, the prices have changed," said Councilwoman Karyn Babcock.

The council voted to move forward with the grant application for 35 percent of the cost.

Some positive news

City officials have been struggling to find a place for the current concession stand structure to go. Council members said the building could be reused as it is in OK condition, but finding a place for the building and a purpose for it has been a recurring concern.

While updating the council on the airport conditions, Darrell Hillestad said that building would work perfectly at the airport. He added he would even move the building himself, saving the city thousands in moving costs.

For now, though, Hillestad said he would move an old trailer out to the airport after they get the water drained and the road back in shape.

Pickleball problems

The city may be in a pickle with the old tennis courts near the city swimming pool.

The grant used to turn the tennis courts into pickleball courts finishes at the end of the year, Dickey told

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 5 of 80

the council. That means the project and associated bills need to be wrapped up prior to December 31.

However, Councilman Brian Bahr expressed concern about the condition of the facility.

"It looks worse than it did last year at this point," he said. "A lot of cracks. Lots of cracks."

It's an issue the city can't ignore, he said. The contractor needs to come back to see what needs to be done because there are hairline cracks all over the court.

"...To me, I think you're supposed to fill a crack before you go over it," he added. "But that's not my wheelhouse. I'm not a pickleball builder."

If the contractor plans to fix the court, they should get it done before November when the ground freezes, Bahr said.

Dickey replied they need to get it done sooner in order to get paperwork completed by the end of the year.

Councilman Kevin Nehls added it would be nice to get it done sooner so the court could get some use this year.

Bahr asked about a warranty on the work done, but city officials didn't sound positive on the matter.

"It's a warranty that was written the way it was because they knew they're product would fail," said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich.

From how the process worked, he added, the contractor came in and did the work. A couple of weeks went by before weather turned bad. After that, the court was ruined, Heinrich said.

City shop options discussed

Council members continued discussion about the city's shop building.

Northeast Council of Government's Dickey asked if the city had cost estimates for building a new, larger shop that would be able to hold the larger equipment the city has gotten.

Mayor Hanlon replied that the council had just been tossing ideas around to see what was possible.

Councilman Bahr asked if department heads could walk around the current shop to see if any of the equipment should be surplus.

"Maybe we don't need the room," he said.

However, a taller door can't be added to the current building, and the equipment just seems to keep getting bigger.

Police Department sign taking shape

The council looked at a bid to replace the sign on the Groton Police Department building at 209 North Main Street. At the council meeting April 11, Councilman Bahr brought in more than \$900 in donations from the community for new signage at the station, with concerns about visibility of the department building presented.

For a five foot by four foot sign on the building, Quality Quick Print in Aberdeen estimated the cost at \$3,589, Heinrich told the council. That would include creating the sign and installing, though the city would have to look into getting an electrician to light the sign.

If a new sign goes in on top of where the old one is, Mayor Hanlon requested the old plaque be removed and brought to City Hall.

Bahr emphasized that the sign needs to be lit at night, because "we have police presence 24/7," he said.

Councilman Nehls added he doesn't think the price is too bad, but he would like to see another quote just to be sure.

The board voted to table the issue until the city can get another quote.

In Other Action:

- City officials will apply for a housing needs study through SD Housing. A study through that agency costs between \$5,000 and \$7,500, which is much cheaper than a study produced by a private company. Those could cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000, City Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich said.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 6 of 80

- The city approved having a U18 softball team that would play in an Aberdeen league. There are currently 16 applicants who want to play on the team, Heinrich said. The city would use the \$1,000 it would have paid a coach to instead enter the league. The team will have a parent coach.
- Updates on the city park bathrooms will be discussed at the council's May meeting.
- The council approved Spring City Wide Clean Up dates. Residents can bring items they wish to dispose of to the city shop at 10 East Railroad Avenue starting April 29 and running through May 5. Pickups are available by appointment from May 1 through 5.
- The council tabled discussion about joining the PFAS Cost Recovery Program to allow city attorney Drew Johnson time to look into the issue.

Siren test today for severe weather awareness week

Brown County Emergency Management would like to remind Brown County residents that Brown County will be sounding the outdoor warning sirens as part of SD Severe Weather Awareness Week.

Outdoor sirens will be sounded at 10:30am on Wednesday April 19th.

Folks need to be reminded that these are "outdoor" warning sirens. These are not designed for you to hear them inside a building. For indoor warning alerts we suggest a NOAA all-hazard radio (weather radio).



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

22,000 South Dakotans could lose Medicaid now, about half could get it back later, state says

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 18, 2023 5:26 PM

Roughly 22,000 South Dakota Medicaid recipients are “likely to be ineligible” in the coming months as pandemic protections expire, but perhaps half of them could qualify again in July when a voter-approved expansion takes effect, Deputy Director of Medical Services Sarah Aker told the state Board of Social Services at its Tuesday meeting.

The decline in eligibility is because the state is clearing out its Medicaid rolls now that the coronavirus public health emergency has expired and continuous Medicaid enrollment ended in March. The provision, which temporarily prohibited states from purging their Medicaid enrollment lists, was funded in part through the first federal coronavirus relief package in 2020.

Medicaid is a federal-state health insurance program for low-income people. Between 5 million and 14 million people across the country are expected to lose Medicaid coverage during the “unwinding” of the continuous enrollment provision, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Since March 2020, the South Dakota Department of Social Services said average monthly Medicaid enrollment increased over 30 percent — from about 115,000 to nearly 152,000.

Aker said the state will focus first on reviewing cases of those most likely to be ineligible due to increased income or aging out of coverage. Roughly 64% of Medicaid recipients in South Dakota are children.

South Dakota was one of five states that announced it would start scrubbing Medicaid rolls as early as it could: April 1. The DSS started notifying Medicaid applicants in February about the change.

But, Aker also offered an impromptu estimate for the board that a significant number of those who lose coverage might be eligible under Medicaid expansion. In November, South Dakota voters approved an expansion to cover adults with an income up to 138% of the federal poverty level.

The DSS is budgeting \$578.9 million to fund the benefit and administrative costs for Medicaid expansion and adding 68 full-time staff to the department.

The expansion becomes law on July 1, and Aker estimates that 10,000 to 12,000 of those flagged as “ineligible” in the next few months could become eligible again this summer.

“It’s challenging because we don’t have up-to-date income data,” Aker said.

Aker told the board that DSS is working with providers to identify patients who could lose coverage and try to find them coverage elsewhere, even if they qualify for Medicaid expansion again in a few months.

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

States were adding lessons about Native American history. Then came the anti-CRT movement

In South Dakota, Oklahoma and elsewhere, educators worry new efforts to teach Native American studies could be undermined by legislation to restrict discussion of race and ethnicity

BY: LOURDES MEDRANO - APRIL 18, 2023 2:22 PM

When the debate over teaching race-related concepts in public schools reached Kimberly Tilsen-Brave Heart's home state of South Dakota, she decided she couldn't in good conscience send her youngest daughter to kindergarten at a local public school.

"I knew that the public school system would not benefit my child without the important and critical history and culture of Indigenous people being taught," said Tilsen-Brave Heart, a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation.

Tilsen-Brave Heart worried that her 5-year-old daughter, Pia, would be exposed to even fewer lessons taught through a cultural lens than her older siblings had been, robbing her of an educational experience that would foster a sense of belonging and self-identity. "I want my children to know who they are," said Tilsen-Brave Heart. "I want them to know their language, their culture, where they come from — to be proud of their ethnicity and their history and their culture."

When South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, a Republican, signed an executive order in April 2022 restricting how race and equity can be taught in the classroom, Tilsen-Brave Heart decided to enroll her daughter at Oceti Sakowin Community Academy, a newly opened private school in Rapid City. The school is centered on the culture and language of the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Council Fires. The term refers to the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people, also known as the Sioux.

South Dakota, home to nine tribes collectively known as the Great Sioux Nation, is one of dozens of states that have recently adopted or introduced laws or policies that take aim at critical race theory, commonly known as CRT. The concept is a decades-old framework in higher education that examines how racism is embedded in laws, policies and institutions. Its critics have argued that it sows divisions among young students and unfairly lays blame on white people for past and enduring inequities. Some Republican politicians have used the concept to stir backlash against efforts to promote equity and inclusion more broadly.

The anti-CRT efforts to restrict how race is taught have clashed with initiatives in several states, including South Dakota, Oklahoma and New Mexico, to teach Native American history — which has often been left out of instruction — more accurately and fully.

In 2018, after a decade-long consultation process, South Dakota adopted new standards designed to expand and improve instruction of Native American studies. In Oklahoma, collaborations such as one between the state Department of Education and the Oklahoma Advisory Council on Indian Education have led to more classes on Indigenous languages being offered to students. In New Mexico, the state Public Education Department recently adopted standards to improve the teaching of race and ethnicity, a subject that includes Indigenous history and culture.

About 644,000 Native students attend the nation's K-12 system, with the vast majority enrolled in public schools, according to the National Congress of American Indians. States with the largest share of the Indigenous student population include Alaska, Oklahoma, Montana, New Mexico and South Dakota.

In South Dakota, critics say the governor's executive order threatens to undo years-long attempts to enrich lessons about the history of Native Americans, whose culture is at risk of vanishing from the curriculum.

The order restricted "inherently divisive concepts" in K-12 schools and required the state Department of Education to review curriculum training materials for teachers and students to determine if they contain such concepts. In a June 2022 report, the department said it had deleted the term "equity" from the title of a report about equitable access to qualified teachers for low-income and minority students. The former School and Educator Equity Report is now called Rates of Access to Qualified Teachers.

The department also concluded that the 2018 Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings may be in violation of the executive order. The standards were developed by a diverse group of tribal educators, historians and cultural experts in collaboration with the department to provide guidance on Native American instruc-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 9 of 80

tion. "A few of the suggested approaches to instruction embedded into the standards may not align with the EO [executive order]," the department said in its report, citing as an example instruction to "simulate assimilation experiences, including: conversion of groups to individualism."

The report recommends that outside experts and stakeholders conduct a review of the standards. Ruth Raveling, a Department of Education spokeswoman, declined to answer specific questions about the report, saying it speaks for itself. In an email, she included an excerpt from the document: "The department is committed to ensuring that all students have educational opportunities that prepare them for college, careers, and life. In alignment with Executive Order 2022-02, the agency operates with the understanding that each South Dakota student is unique, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, and should not be subject to discrimination."

The state's executive order has caused confusion among teachers who taught Native American history and culture using the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings, said Roquel Gorneau, a South Dakota education specialist for the Lower Brule and Crow Creek Sioux Tribes. "A lot of it is social studies, among other subjects, and a lot of it is cultural teachings," she said. "It's knowledge about culture and history and traditions in language. But teachers now are unsure how we're allowed to continue to utilize that without violating the executive order by the South Dakota governor, who has banned speaking of any CRT-related topics. And topics are defined as those meant to make one race feel inferior or superior to another."

Like other educators, Gorneau emphasized that critical race theory is not being taught in South Dakota schools at the K-12 level. But she said the executive order means that students won't learn in the classroom about important events that have affected Indigenous communities, such as the Keepseagle settlement that in 2010 awarded \$680 million in damages to Native American farmers — like Gorneau's mother — who were denied low-interest government loans that white farmers were granted.

"We're basically not allowed to explain that these things have occurred," Gorneau said. Explanation is needed, she added, "in order to help our students grow into people who become contributing members of society who help prevent these things from occurring again."

The executive order, she added, "serves as a detriment to positive race relations, to mutual understanding, to reconciliation among Native and non-Native people."

This year, at least 22 bills introduced in state legislatures would bar any discussion of concepts related to race, ethnicity, color and national origin from a school's curriculum. The American Civil Liberties Union is fighting the GOP-led efforts, which it says amount to classroom censorship.

In Oklahoma, the ACLU filed a federal lawsuit against the state on behalf of students, educators and civil right groups over House Bill 1775, a law approved in 2021 that bans schools from teaching certain concepts related to race and gender. "We knew that this was an attempt to whitewash Oklahoma curricula and to ensure that the perspectives of marginalized communities that had only just started getting more of an emphasis in Oklahoma classrooms was erased from those very critical spaces," said Megan Lambert, ACLU legal director in the state.

The Oklahoma Department of Education did not respond to inquiries about HB 1775. Lambert said the law not only violates teachers' First Amendment right to free speech, but also students' right to information. "We also saw an equal protection violation because we know that not seeing yourself or your perspective reflected in your curriculum has detrimental outcomes for students," the attorney said, adding that the case is working its way through the court system.

Tribal educators say attacks on teaching race and culture hinder longtime efforts to help improve academic outcomes for Native students. Nationwide, high school graduation rates for Native students are lower than those of their white peers, and their dropout rates are higher. Research shows that students who are exposed to a supportive, culturally relevant environment perform better in school.

The current environment is yet another hurdle for Native students to overcome in the classroom, said Waquin Preston, a member of the Navajo Nation, the nation's largest tribe covering portions of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. "The curriculum needs to be relevant to our students," he said.

"When the Native history and the ability to engage culturally in the classroom, when a lot of that is lost, then students don't have the same interest in schooling because they're not seeing themselves reflected,"

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 10 of 80

Preston added. "They don't necessarily see the relevance of it in the community."

As a tribal state policy associate for the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), Preston provides support to tribes and student advocates collaborating on state education policy. He lives in Arizona, where three pending bills in the state legislature seek to restrict teaching concepts related to race and ethnicity in schools. One of the bills, House Bill 2458, would allow parents and students to file complaints against possible violators, who could be fined up to \$5,000.

Preston and his NIEA colleague in Oklahoma, Stephanie Hawk, said the anti-CRT measures have a deterrent effect on teachers, who are uncertain about what is safe to teach. In Oklahoma, which has the country's third-largest Indigenous population, Hawk said the downgraded accreditation of two school districts — Tulsa and Mustang — accused of violating HB 1775, has essentially halted instruction on the state's rich Indigenous heritage. In Tulsa Public Schools, a teacher complained about a staff training video on implicit bias, while the incident at Mustang Public Schools involved an anti-bullying activity that reportedly made students feel uncomfortable.

"Educators are very fearful on how to even start that discussion, much less continue to teach it in the classroom," Hawk said. "And so they just don't, so there is no Native history being taught."

Back in South Dakota, Tilsen-Brave Heart recalled that until the executive order, she had been encouraged by efforts of educators, parents and advocates to expand Indigenous teaching and hoped it would benefit her older children, Payton, 16, and Paloma, 11, who attend public schools.

Over the years, schools have provided limited instruction that at times has portrayed Indigenous people "as though we are like some ancient construct, like dinosaurs, rather than modern Native Indigenous people here who are thriving, owning businesses, becoming doctors, lawyers and being fully participatory in the community," said Tilsen-Brave Heart.

The businesswoman and chef who focuses on Indigenous foods, said she plans to keep her daughter at the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy. Pia is quickly absorbing the Lakota language, her mother said. "She can do a traditional prayer in Lakota. She knows all of her numbers to 20 in Lakota and she can count to 100 in English. She also knows all of her colors in Lakota, and she knows simple phrases."

Mary Bowman, a Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota who taught in South Dakota's public schools for 15 years, was the lead designer of the academy and is now at the helm. The first class of kindergarteners attends class tuition-free at the private school that, so far, has relied on donations, Bowman said. Plans are to seek accreditation and add a grade each year. Interest from families in enrolling their children is high, she said.

Bowman said the academy is culturally responsive, a place where students can feel they belong and where they see themselves represented in the curriculum. She points to research showing that connecting students' culture and language to their school experience helps them do better academically. "Our hope is that we eventually will help change the way that school districts educate Indigenous kids," she said.

Tilsen-Brave Heart said doing away with discussions on race and equity in schools is a leap backward. "We should be moving forward," she said, "and we should recognize everyone's history and the authentic history of the United States and all that it is."

— This story, "States were adding lessons about Native American history. Then came the anti-CRT movement," was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 11 of 80

U.S. House fails to override Biden veto of WOTUS legislation

SD's Johnson votes in favor of override

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 18, 2023 5:42 PM

The U.S. House on Tuesday failed to override a President Joe Biden veto, which means the administration's regulation stays in place expanding which waters and wetlands can be regulated under the federal Clean Water Act.

The House did not clear the two-thirds mark needed to overturn Biden's veto of a resolution that would have blocked the administration's recent Waters of the U.S., or WOTUS, regulation.

House members voted 227-196 to override the veto, including all but one of the Republicans present and 10 Democrats in favor. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted in favor of the override.

Tuesday's tally was similar to that in the March 9 vote to pass the resolution rolling back the Biden rule.

If the veto override had succeeded in both the House and Senate, a Congressional Review Act resolution would have taken effect to overturn the Biden definition of WOTUS, which claimed a broader jurisdiction than former President Donald Trump's administration had sought.

Biden veto

Biden on April 6 vetoed the resolution that the House and Senate each had passed, with bipartisan votes, to roll back the newest definition.

The margins in each chamber were well short of two-thirds in each chamber, meaning a veto override was never a serious possibility.

On the House floor Tuesday, Republicans hammered the Biden administration for continuing to support a rule that was unpopular with rural voters.

Biden's veto message said the administration's rule would provide more certainty to advance infrastructure projects and farming.

"This simply is not the case," House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Sam Graves, a Missouri Republican, said. "Instead, this costly, overreaching rule favors radical environmentalists at the expense of infrastructure, agriculture, and economic growth and those who depend on these activities."

Most Democrats voted not to override the veto and have consistently backed Biden's WOTUS rule, though some with ties to rural areas have joined Republicans.

Democrats generally view the rule as expanding the government's power to ensure natural waters remain clean.

House Transportation and Infrastructure ranking Democrat Rick Larsen of Washington said voting to strip the rule would only further confuse the regulatory landscape and offers no benefits for the environment, public health or the economy.

Shifting WOTUS definitions

The definition of what constitutes Waters of the United States has shifted several times in recent years as the past three presidential administrations have all sought to impose different interpretations and court challenges have at least partially invalidated each version.

After 24 Republican attorneys general sued to block the Biden definition, a federal judge in North Dakota last week provisionally nullified the Biden definition in those states while the suit is ongoing. The Biden standard is still in effect in the rest of the country.

Biden's rule, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed last year to include any waterway with a "significant nexus" to a navigable water, went into effect March 20.

The issue comes from amendments Congress added to the Clean Water Act in 1972 that said the statute covered "waters of the United States," while states were responsible for environmental protection of other waterways.

In the following decades, private landowners and businesses sometimes disagreed with federal authorities about what waters fell under the statute's jurisdiction.

The U.S. Supreme Court heard three disputes over the issue, most recently in 2006 resulting in a rare 4-1-4 decision. That split ruling created more confusion about what standard should hold.

In 2015, President Barack Obama's EPA issued a rule to standardize a "significant nexus" definition that allowed the federal government to enforce Clean Water Act regulations on wetlands that have an ecological connection to major waterways.

That definition was also challenged in courts. The U.S. Supreme Court this term heard a case brought by an Idaho couple during the Obama administration. The court is expected to rule this term, likely adding another chapter to the changing definition.

In the meantime, under Trump in 2020, the EPA issued a narrower definition that said only navigable waters could subject to federal regulation. But a federal judge threw that out as well.

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

Anti-abortion organizations urge U.S. Supreme Court to keep limits on abortion pill

Thune among top-ranking Republicans to sign GOP brief

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 18, 2023 4:02 PM

WASHINGTON — Anti-abortion medical organizations on Tuesday urged the U.S. Supreme Court to maintain a lower court ruling that would push prescribing and administration of the abortion pill back to pre-2016 instructions, ending mail orders, while an ongoing legal case works through the appeals process.

Meanwhile, more members of Congress lined up on either side of the ruling, with 23 Republican senators and 124 members of the House drafting a brief that supported anti-abortion organizations' efforts. Among Democrats, 50 senators and 203 House members backed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval more than two decades ago.

A decision is expected by midnight Wednesday by the high court.

Alliance Defending Freedom, leading the anti-abortion groups, argued in its 59-page brief against the federal government's request for the Supreme Court to keep access to mifepristone exactly as it is now while the case works through the judicial process.

ADF's legal team wrote that the federal government's request calls on the Supreme Court "to plunge prematurely into ongoing lower court proceedings that, at present, merely reinstate a status quo that governed without issue for 16 years."

Alliance Defending Freedom wrote the Department of Justice's request "comes with a heavy burden" and that "only 'rarely' is such extraordinary relief warranted."

Earlier, the U.S. solicitor general wrote in the Department of Justice appeal to the Supreme Court that allowing lower courts' rulings to take effect would "create significant chaos for patients, prescribers, and the health care delivery system."

The federal government, in its appeal, argued in support of the FDA's medical and scientific authority in approving pharmaceuticals as well as on the safety and efficacy of mifepristone.

Suit filed in 2022

ADF filed the lawsuit in mid-November on behalf of four anti-abortion medical organizations and four anti-abortion doctors.

The suit challenged mifepristone's safety, a claim rejected by numerous medical organizations, as well as the way the FDA approved the medication.

The case called on the judge to overturn the FDA's 2000 approval of the medication.

Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas did just that earlier this month and the federal government quickly appealed that decision to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans.

The Department of Justice then asked the 5th Circuit to put the Texas judge's ruling on hold while the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 13 of 80

case worked its way through the appeals process.

The 5th Circuit did place the Texas ruling on hold to a degree, but the three-judge panel ruled that the prescribing and administration of mifepristone should revert to how it was used before changes were made in 2016 and 2021.

The 2016 changes:

Increased when mifepristone could be used during a pregnancy from seven weeks to 10 weeks.

Allowed health care professionals with the authority to prescribe medication the ability to do that instead of only doctors.

Reduced the number of in-person visits from three to one.

Eliminated the requirement for all adverse events to be reported to the FDA.

The dosing and timing of the two-drug regimen that includes misoprostol as the second pharmaceutical also have changed since 2016.

The 2021 changes allowed for prescribing via telehealth and for mifepristone to be shipped through the mail.

Appeal to Supreme Court

The U.S. Department of Justice and Danco Laboratories, the manufacturer of the name-brand version of mifepristone, both appealed the 5th Circuit's partial stay of the Texas judge's ruling to the Supreme Court. They urged the justices to keep access to mifepristone as it is now while the appeals process plays out.

Justice Samuel Alito on Friday put a short-term stay in place, keeping access to mifepristone intact until Wednesday at midnight. Alito called for briefs in the case to be filed by noon Tuesday.

In Alliance Defending Freedom's brief to the Supreme Court, its legal team argued the 2016 and 2021 changes "removed critical safeguards on mifepristone's use" and urged the justices to keep the 5th Circuit's ruling intact throughout the appeals process.

That would eliminate the generic version of mifepristone from the market and require Danco Laboratories to update its labeling to comply with what was in place before 2016, according to briefs filed with the Supreme Court by Danco and GenBioPro, Inc., the manufacturer of the generic version.

Eastern District of Washington ruling

ADF's attorneys rejected the argument from the federal government that a ruling from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Washington state creates a conflict within the court system over access to mifepristone.

That federal district court judge ruled the FDA could not alter access to mifepristone in 17 states and Washington, D.C., just minutes after the Texas federal district court judge issued his nationwide order staying the FDA's 2000 approval of mifepristone.

While the federal government has appealed the Texas judge's ruling and asked the Supreme Court to intervene to alter the 5th Circuit's stay, ADF attorneys wrote, "it has not lifted a finger to relieve itself of the purported 'conflict'" from the Washington ruling.

"The agency no doubt has political preferences that motivate that decision, but it is hardly this Court's job to fix a conflict that has not yet manifested itself and before FDA has even tried to exhaust its lower-court remedies," ADF lawyers wrote.

ADF also rejected the federal government's claim that women seeking to end pregnancies with medication abortion would be harmed by the 5th Circuit's ruling, writing they were not applicants in the stay.

"More important, as noted above and below, the harm runs the opposite way — removing safety protections like in-person doctor visits (including the possibility of an ultrasound) and mandatory reporting of adverse events causes greater harm to women than alternatives," ADF wrote.

Members of Congress heard from

As members of Congress weighed in with the Supreme Court, Democrats urged the justices to keep access to mifepristone intact and Republicans argued the FDA erred when it approved the medication more than two decades ago.

The GOP brief, signed by 23 senators and 124 House members, included more than double the 69 law-

makers who backed the brief Republicans filed earlier with the 5th Circuit.

Top-ranking Republicans like Senate Republican Whip John Thune of South Dakota, Senate Republican Conference Chair John Barrasso of Wyoming, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana and House Republican Conference Chair Elise Stefanik of New York all joined in on the brief to the Supreme Court.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California were not included in the list of supporting lawmakers.

The Democrats' brief, supported by 50 senators and 203 House members, included 13 more supporters than the brief filed with the appeals court.

Democrats wrote in their brief that the Texas judge's ruling to stay the FDA's 2000 approval of mifepristone "has no basis in law, threatens the Congressionally mandated drug approval process, and poses a serious health risk to pregnant individuals by making abortion more difficult to access — when access has already been seriously eroded in the aftermath of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

The GOP lawmakers argued, "FDA's unlawful deregulation of chemical abortion drugs subverts Congress' public policy considerations and safeguards for patient safety."

Republicans expressed concern in their brief that "intimate partners, family members, and sex traffickers may be asserting reproductive control over the woman, which are actions that interfere with a woman's reproductive intentions."

"In the context of abortion, reproductive control not only produces coerced abortions or continued pregnancies, but it also affects whether the pregnancy was intended in the first place," they wrote. "Reproductive control is a prevalent issue for women."

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

One state already has voted to ban TikTok. For Congress, it's going to be much tougher. SD's Thune is a cosponsor of a leading bill in the Senate

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 18, 2023 11:38 AM

As TikTok has mushroomed to more than 150 million monthly U.S. users, so have warnings among both state legislators and members of Congress about its potential danger as a tool of the Chinese government.

Dozens of states and the federal government this year banned public employees from downloading the popular app on their government devices. But the Montana Legislature went further and on Friday passed the nation's first statewide ban, though GOP Gov. Greg Gianforte has not yet signed the measure and it's not clear how it would be enforced. If it becomes law, it would go into effect on Jan. 1.

Members of both parties in a U.S. House hearing in March told TikTok CEO Shou Chew they were considering a total, nationwide ban. That idea has raised a slew of objections, not the least of which is how banning an app that provides a platform for speech could be consistent with the First Amendment.

Below are answers to five common questions about the debate in the nation's capital.

Why does Congress want to ban TikTok?

Members of both parties have expressed concerns about TikTok's data collection practices and its ties to the Chinese Communist Party.

Chew said the data TikTok collects from users is no different from those of other platforms, including domestic products like Instagram. TikTok is based in Singapore and Los Angeles, Chew said. The product is not even available in China, whose ruling Communist Party does not offer the same guarantees of free speech as the U.S. Constitution.

But lawmakers say TikTok is unique because the Chinese government could compel the company to

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 15 of 80

provide its user data.

TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, is Chinese, and is beholden to laws that require private companies to provide information to Chinese authorities, lawmakers have said.

"The CCP's laws require Chinese companies like ByteDance to spy on their behalf," Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington, the chairwoman of the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee, told Chew during the March 23 hearing. "That means any Chinese company must grant the CCP access and manipulation capabilities as a design feature."

Attempts to ban TikTok are also part of a trend of lawmakers seeking to appear tough on China. U.S. House Republicans created a select committee this year to respond to China's rising power. And members of both parties have voiced support for restrictions on foreign ownership of farmland, mainly targeting China.

What proposals have the most support?

There are leading contenders from a host of options in each chamber of Congress.

In the Senate, 13 Democrats and 13 Republicans have signed on to support the RESTRICT Act, written by Virginia Democrat Mark Warner and South Dakota Republican John Thune. Jake Sullivan, a high-ranking national security official in President Joe Biden's White House, applauded the measure.

The bill would authorize the secretary of Commerce to ban applications from six adversarial countries, including China.

But key senators, including the chair and ranking member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and floor leaders of each party, have not signed on.

Civil libertarians on both the far left of the Democratic Party and the far right of the Republican Party have voiced their disapproval, Jenna Leventoff, senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union, said in an interview.

The bill also lacks support from some senators who favor TikTok bans.

Missouri Republican Josh Hawley, the sponsor of another bill to explicitly ban TikTok, said in a March 29 tweet that the Warner-Thune measure does not go far enough

"The problem with the RESTRICT Act is — it doesn't ban TikTok," he wrote. "It gives the President a whole bunch of new authority and does nothing to stop the CCP. Just ban TikTok."

In the House, the Foreign Affairs Committee approved a bill by its chairman, Texas Republican Michael McCaul. But no Democrats voted for the measure in committee. A party-line vote could send the measure through the House, but it would need bipartisan support to pass the Senate.

How would the bans work?

It's not entirely clear, but a ban would likely involve blocking companies like Apple and Google from offering TikTok in their app stores.

The two leading bills would take different regulatory approaches — the Senate version would go through the Commerce Department, while the House bill provides authorities to the Treasury Department, for example — but users would likely see similar effects under either.

Mobile device makers can approve or reject applications from appearing in app stores. Removing TikTok from those sources would keep users from downloading the app. Those who already have the app on their devices would see its usability decrease over time as updates could not be installed.

But the technical uncertainty about how exactly a ban would play out was among the Democratic criticisms of the House bill.

"We're being asked to rush this bill through committee with no input from sanction experts, technologists, the business community or even the regulatory agencies who would be in charge of enforcing a ban," Arizona Democrat Greg Stanton said at a March 1 markup of the bill.

Rhode Island Democrat David Cicilline said he was sympathetic to the national security concerns, but said the measure was "not well-written" and lacked "definitions about critical components."

"There is broad and maybe universal support on this committee to do exactly what this bill intends to

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 16 of 80

do, but this is incredibly important that it be done right," Cicilline said. "We all want very much to give the administration the tools that it needs, but in its current form — without a lot of amplification and a lot of definitions — it's difficult for me to support this."

Didn't Trump already try this?

Former President Donald Trump did issue an executive order in 2020 under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA, to ban TikTok, citing many of the same concerns members have recently brought.

A federal court struck down that order because under the law he cited, the president did not have authority to ban the app. Amendments to that law, enacted in 1988 and 1994, prevented presidents from regulating "information and informational materials," such as books, movies or digital media.

The judge did not rule on the First Amendment concerns.

The Thune-Warner bill was written specifically to make such an order compliant with the IEEPA.

"The RESTRICT Act responds to foreign-adversary technology threats of today by giving the force of law to former President Trump's nearly identical effort, and it prepares for the threats of the future so the United States isn't forced to play Whac-A-Mole every time a platform like TikTok rears its ugly head," Thune said in a statement.

Is any of this constitutional?

That will be the subject of debate.

In a March 29 response to Hawley's Senate floor speech, Kentucky Republican Rand Paul said proposals to ban an app that fostered free expression mirrored China's own TikTok ban.

The First Amendment protects even unpopular speech. Hawley's bill to ban the app would violate the free speech rights of both the owners of TikTok, some of whom are American, and the app's users, he said.

"Do we really want to emulate Chinese speech bans?" Paul said. "We don't ban things that are unpopular in this country."

Hawley responded that the First Amendment did not protect espionage, which he said TikTok enabled the Chinese government to conduct.

A complete ban can only be consistent with the First Amendment if it is a response to immediate and significant harm and there is no less restrictive way to respond, Leventoff said.

"That test is not going to be met," she said. "We don't have any evidence of an immediate and significant harm. And even if we did have that evidence, it's hard to argue that banning TikTok is the least restrictive solution."

While TikTok is sometimes described as a platform where young users share dance videos and other unserious content, political speech is also plentiful on the app, Leventoff said, making a nationwide ban even more dangerous from a free speech perspective.

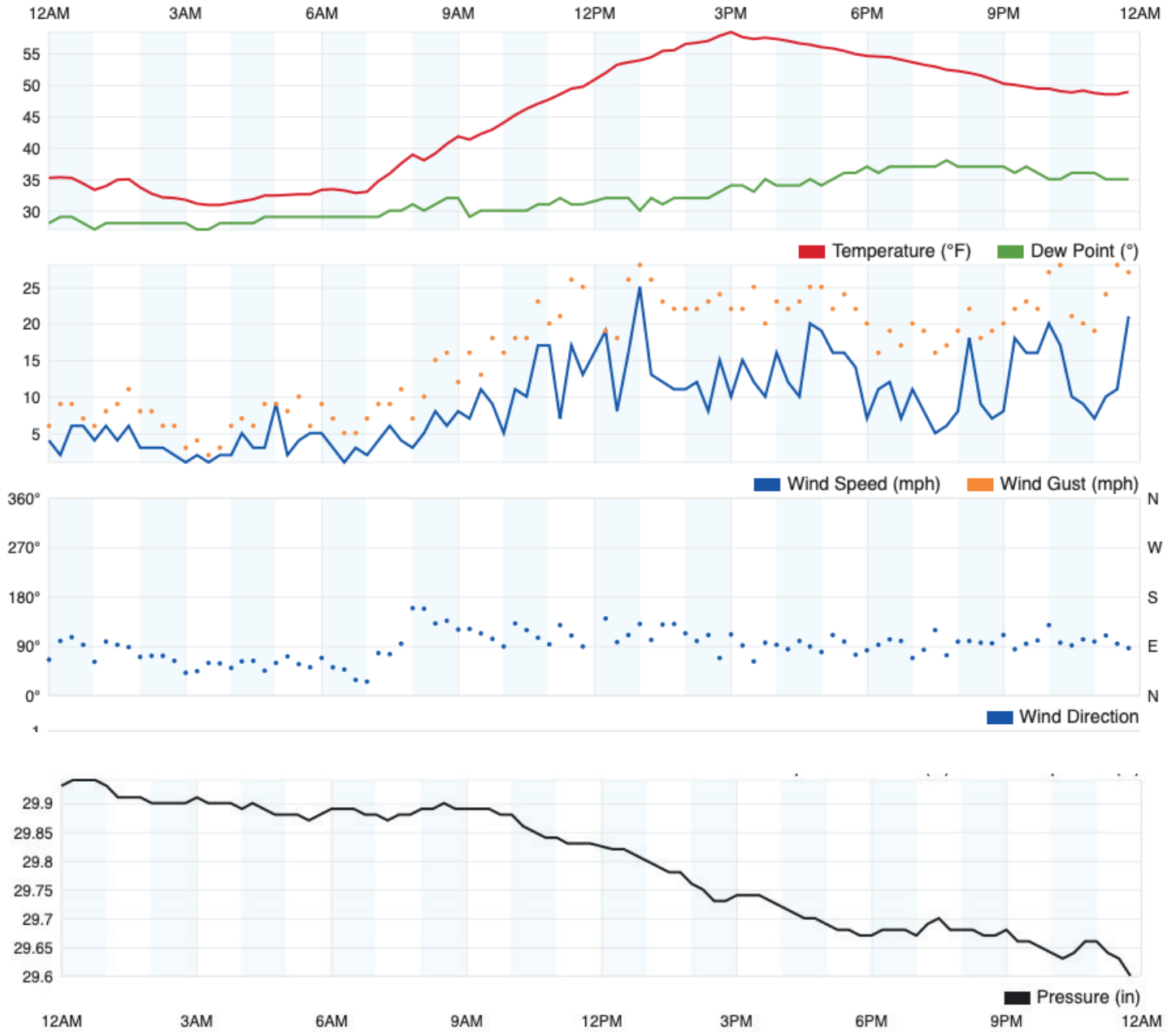
"We view this as an extremely important component of speech," she said.

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

Groton Daily Independent


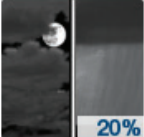





Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 17 of 80

Yesterdays Groton's Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 18 of 80

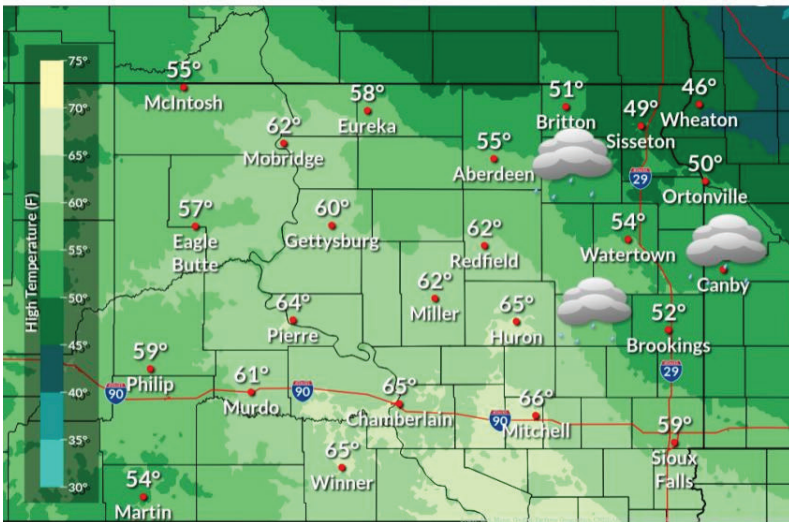
Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Slight Chance Showers	Chance Rain/Snow and Breezy	Chance Rain/Snow and Breezy	Chance Snow and Windy	Mostly Cloudy and Windy	Partly Sunny
High: 55 °F	Low: 34 °F	High: 44 °F	Low: 26 °F	High: 36 °F	Low: 23 °F	High: 42 °F



Today's Forecast

April 19, 2023
5:02 AM

High Temps/Chance of Rain This Afternoon



Elevated Grassland Fire Danger over central SD.



ELEVATED GRASSLAND FIRE DANGER

DRY CROPS/GRASS

STRONG WINDS

Avoid Burning

Use Caution with Farm Equipment

Don't Carelessly Discard Cigarettes



FIRE DANGER

Temps will range from the 40s to lower 60s across the forecast area. High to very high fire danger today across central and south central SD due to dry fuels and gusty winds.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 19 of 80

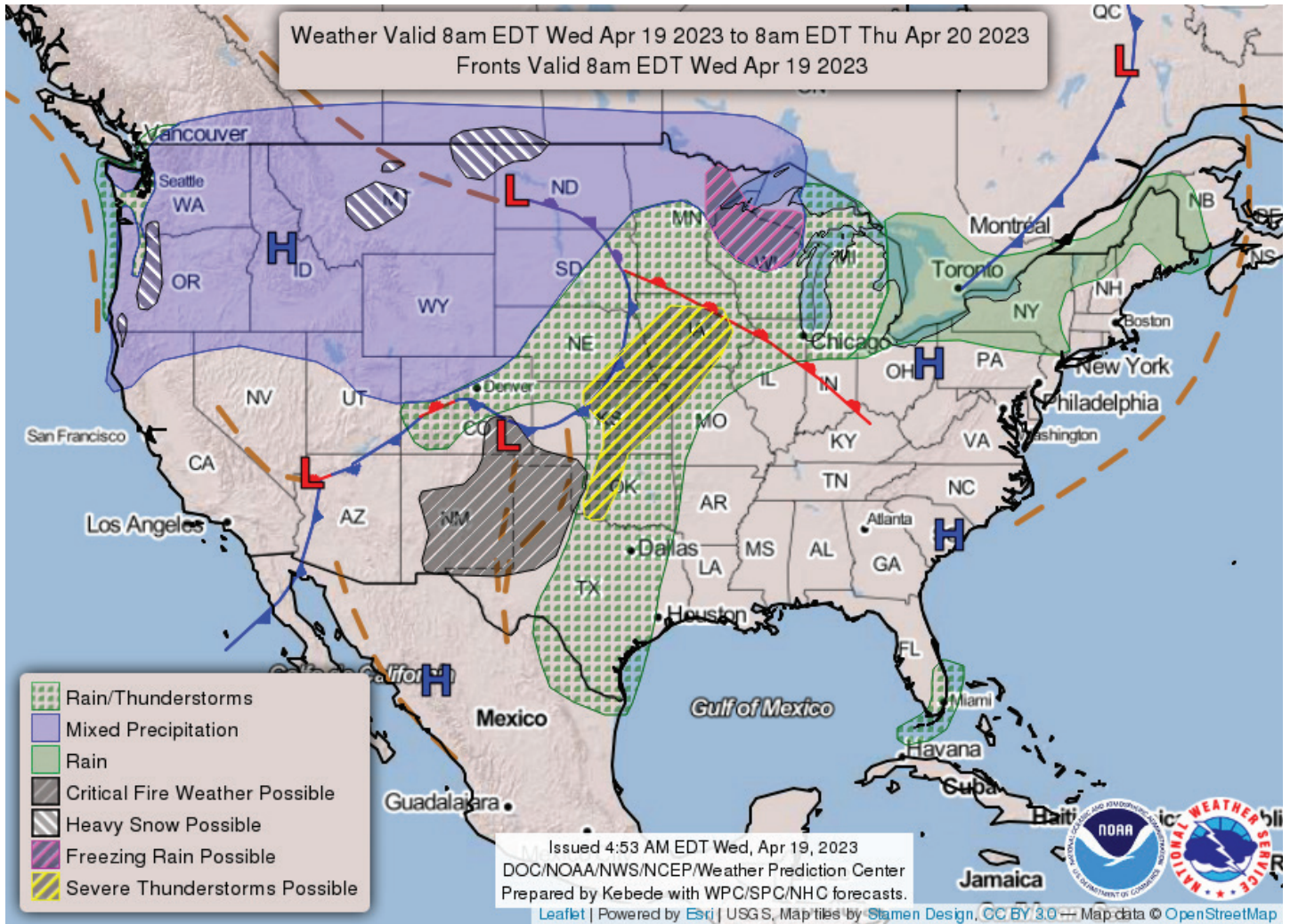
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 58 °F at 2:59 PM
Low Temp: 31 °F at 3:28 AM
Wind: 28 mph at 1:00 PM
Precip: : 0.00 (Since Midnight: 0.55)

Day length: 13 hours, 46 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1923
Record Low: 12 in 1988
Average High: 59
Average Low: 33
Average Precip in April.: 0.97
Precip to date in April.: 0.76
Average Precip to date: 3.03
Precip Year to Date: 4.69
Sunset Tonight: 8:24:48 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:36:31 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 20 of 80

Today in Weather History

April 19, 1955: An F2 tornado moved NNW from 16 miles Southwest of Aberdeen, in the Townships of Good Hope and Highland. Only the houses were left intact on the four farms that were torn apart. Also, an F2 tornado destroyed barns 8 miles Southeast of Gettysburg causing \$8,000 in damage. In Corson and Dewey Counties, two F0 tornadoes touched down, one after the other, causing over \$3,000 worth of damage and injuring two people. An additional F2 tornado moved NNW in Clear Lake and Richland Townships. Buildings were destroyed on five farms.

April 19, 1971: An unofficial rainfall amount of 6 inches in 24 hours was reported at White River. An official number of 4 plus inches was reported at Murdo, causing the washout of a railroad and derailment of a freight train. The Ghost Hawk Dam broke on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, and the flood waters damaged a trailer home and two cars. Flooding occurred along the Bad, White, and Little White Rivers and Pine Creek.

April 19, 2006: An intense spring snowstorm swept across the Dakotas, dumping up to 5 feet of snow. The heaviest snow fell in the Black Hills, with 59.4 inches at Lead, SD. Bowman, ND reported 18 inches. The storm closed highways including I-94 in North Dakota, cutting power to thousands and was responsible for at least four deaths. Further west, 1 to 3 feet of snow and 50 to 60 mph winds caused drifts up to 10 feet, widespread power outages, and livestock losses.

1775: The first engagement of the Revolutionary War took place under crisp, clear weather at Lexington-Concord.

1927: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred across the central part of Illinois, killing 21 people. The first tornado touched down near Hardin, traveling northeast through Carrollton, then skimmed the south side of Springfield. At Carrollton, a teacher was killed as she held the door of the school shut, saving the lives of her students. The second tornado, peaking at estimated F4 intensity, touched down on the southeast side of Springfield, then moved to affect the towns of Riverton, Buffalo Hart, Chestnut, and Cornland. In Buffalo Hart, only three houses were left standing, while the northern half of Cornland was leveled. The tornado track was 65 miles, ending in Ford County.

1986: A major storm system produced ten tornadoes in Texas. One of these tornadoes virtually annihilated the town of Sweetwater. The tornado struck at the unlikely time of 7:17 am. One person was killed, and 100 were injured.

1941 - The temperature at Sodus, NY, soared to 95 degrees. The next day Albany, NY, reported a record for April of 93 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1973 - Glenrock, WY, received 41 inches of snow in just 24 hours, and a storm total of 58 inches, to establish two state records. (18th-20th) (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1976 - The northeastern U.S. was in the midst of an early season heat wave, and the Boston Marathon took place in 90 degree heat. At Providence RI the mercury hit 98 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Forty cities in the central U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s and lower 90s for Easter Sunday. Fort Smith AR reported a record high of 95 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms over the southeastern U.S. early in the day spawned a strong (F-3) tornado which destroyed seventeen homes and severely damaged thirty houses near Madison FL killing four persons and injuring eighteen others. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A dozen cities in the southwestern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 98 degrees at Hanksville UT equalled their record for April. Tucson AZ reported their earliest 100 degree reading of record. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Five cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date as readings dipped into the 20s and upper teens. Elkins WV reported a record low of 20 degrees. Thunderstorms over the Southern Plains produced golf ball size hail at San Angelo TX, and up to four inches of rain in southwestern Oklahoma. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 21 of 80

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHOSE PICTURE IS THAT?

An art teacher asked her students to draw a picture of someone famous. Looking over the shoulder of one of her students, she asked, "And whose picture are you drawing?"

"God's," he answered confidently.

"God's?" asked the teacher. "No one knows what He looks like."

"They will when I get through!" he said.

Who was right: the teacher or the student?

Paul said that "Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God." The word Paul chose for the word "image" was a word his readers knew meant "a description of a person." In other words, what we see in the life of Jesus is a portrait, or a description, of Who God is and what He would look like. So, if we want to know Who God is and what He would look like, it is possible to see, know and understand God through His Son.

In Jesus, we see a Man filled with unending love that included the least, the last, the loneliest, and the lost. We see in Him One who healed, helped, and hurried to reach and redeem the unreached and unredeemed. This He did every day. Can we do less?

Prayer: Thank You, Father, for the picture we have of You in Your Son, our Lord, and Savior. Convict us to live as He lived and serve as He served. In His Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation. Colossians 1:15



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

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 22 of 80

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

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 23 of 80

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 24 of 80



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.18.23

7 9 15 19 25 4

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 1
Mins 3 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.17.23

10 13 21 23 30 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,350,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 1 Mins 3
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.18.23

15 19 22 23 34 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 31 Mins 2
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.15.23

2 5 16 18 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$29,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 1 Mins 2
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.17.23

5 34 35 58 67 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

04.17.23

23 25 35 63 64 25

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$251,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Judge to decide whether leak suspect should remain jailed

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A Massachusetts Air National Guardsman charged with leaking highly classified military documents is due back in court on Wednesday for a hearing to decide whether he should remain behind bars while he awaits trial.

Jack Teixeira, 21, was arrested by heavily armed tactical agents at his Massachusetts home last week and charged, under the Espionage Act, with unauthorized retention and transmission of classified national defense information. During his first court appearance in Boston's federal court Friday, a magistrate judge ordered him to remain in custody until Wednesday's detention hearing.

Teixeira is accused of sharing highly classified military documents about the Ukraine war and other top national security issues in a chat room on Discord, a social media platform that started as a hangout for gamers. The stunning breach exposing closely held intelligence has sparked international uproar and raised fresh questions about America's ability to safeguard its secrets.

Air Force leaders said Tuesday that they were investigating how a lone airman could access and distribute possibly hundreds of highly classified documents. The Air Force has also taken away the intelligence mission from the Air National Guard 102nd Intelligence Wing based in Cape Cod — where Teixeira served — pending further review.

Court records unsealed last week revealed how billing records the FBI obtained from Discord and interviews with social media comrades led authorities to Teixeira.

Investigators believe he was the leader of an online private chat group on Discord called Thug Shaker Central, which drew roughly two dozen enthusiasts who talked about their favorite types of guns and shared memes and jokes, some of them racist. The group also held a running discussion on wars that included talk of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A Discord user familiar with Teixeira's online posts told the FBI that a username linked to Teixeira began posting what appeared to be classified information roughly in December. The person provided the FBI with basic identifying information about Teixeira, including that he called himself "Jack," claimed to be part of the Air National Guard and appeared to live in Massachusetts, according to the affidavit.

The person also told the FBI that Teixeira switched from typing out documents in his possession to taking them home and photographing them because he "had become concerned that he may be discovered making the transcriptions of text in the workplace."

That's different from what posters have told The Associated Press and other media outlets, saying the user they would call "the O.G." started posting images of documents because he was annoyed other users weren't taking him seriously.

The affidavit alleges Teixeira was detected on April 6 — the day The New York Times first published a story about the breach of documents — searching for the word "leak" in a classified system. The FBI says that was reason to believe Teixeira was trying to find information about the investigation into who was responsible for the leaks.

The classified documents range from briefing slides mapping out Ukrainian military positions to assessments of international support for Ukraine and other sensitive topics, including under what circumstances Russian President Vladimir Putin might use nuclear weapons.

Authorities have not revealed an alleged motive. But members of the Discord group described Teixeira as someone looking to show off, rather than being motivated by a desire to inform the public about U.S. military operations or to influence American policy.

The Biden administration has scrambled to contain the potential diplomatic and military fallout from the leaks since they were first reported, moving to reassure allies and assess the scope of damage. There has been no clear answer on how many documents were leaked. The Associated Press has viewed ap-

proximately 50 documents; some estimates put the total number in the hundreds.

Suspect in Japan PM attack may have had election grudge

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — An unemployed 24-year-old man who allegedly threw a pipe bomb at Prime Minister Fumio Kishida wanted to be a politician and believed that he was unfairly blocked from running for Japan's parliament by an age requirement, according to media reports and social media posts that appeared to be his.

The suspect, Ryuji Kimura, was wrestled to the ground and arrested Saturday at a campaign event in the fishing port of Saikazaki, in the western Japanese city of Wakayama. The explosive, believed to be a pipe bomb, landed near Kishida, who escaped unhurt.

Kimura has refused to talk to police, but reports that he became angry after failing to register for an election and had sued the government might shed light on his motives.

In June last year he filed a lawsuit with the Kobe District Court claiming that he should have been allowed to register for the July 2022 Upper House election. A candidate must be aged 30 years or older and present a 3 million yen (\$22,260) deposit to run for the upper house, the less powerful of Japan's two-chamber parliament. He was 23 at the time.

He demanded the government pay 100,000 yen (\$740) in compensation for his psychological anguish, according to Japanese media reports, including NHK public television and Kyodo News.

Violent crimes are rare in Japan. With its strict gun control laws, the country has only a handful of gun-related crimes annually, most of them gang related. But in recent years Japanese police have worried about "lone offender" attacks with homemade guns and explosives. Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated with a homemade gun at a campaign event on July 8, just two days before the upper house election.

Kimura, reportedly unemployed, might have blamed society for his circumstances, an expert said.

"Some people already see themselves as dropouts with no future, and they blame society for making their lives difficult," says Nobuo Komiya, a Rissho University criminologist. "There may have been some kind of a trigger."

In a document he submitted to the court, Kimura argued that the election system that blocked his candidacy was unconstitutional, the reports said.

Kimura argued that the election law violates constitutional guarantees of equality and other rights, according to media reports. The court dismissed his claim in a November 2022 ruling, and Kimura appealed the decision to the Osaka High Court, whose decision is expected in May, reports say.

Tweets posted to an account cited by local media as his and seen by the Associated Press describe court proceedings matching those reported from his case, and complained about Japan's political dynasties. The account had only 23 posts since it began late June.

An Aug. 11, 2022 tweet said the deck is stacked against ordinary people who quit their job and pay the deposit to run in national elections. "Your rivals are religious groups who vote in blocs and incumbent politicians who enjoy free election volunteers. There is an established system where ordinary people can never become politicians."

An Aug. 12 tweet criticized "the imposition of mourning for a dictator who was elected in a discriminatory election that requires age limits and deposits," apparently criticizing Kishida's decision to hold a state funeral for Abe, whose leadership was often criticized as high-handed and autocratic. "The level of democracy in Japan is comparable to North Korea and China."

Abe's alleged assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, who has been charged with murder and several other crimes including violating gun-control laws, told authorities soon after his arrest that 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 posts attributed to him, Yamagami said his mother's donations to the Unification Church bankrupted his family and ruined his life.

1 city, 2 people — and India's widening religious divide

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

AYODHYA, India (AP) — Syed Mohammad Munir Abidi says India is a changed country, one he doesn't recognize anymore.

It's a country, the 68-year-old says, where Muslims are ignored, where rising attacks against them are encouraged, and where an emboldened Hindu majoritarian government is seizing its chance to put the minority community in its place.

Swami Ram Das thinks otherwise, echoing a belief system central to Hindu nationalism.

The 48-year-old Hindu priest says India is on a quest to redeem its religious past and that the country is fundamentally a Hindu nation where minorities, especially Muslims, must subscribe to Hindu primacy.

Abidi and Das are two ordinary citizens living in one city in a country of more than 1.4 billion people that is on the cusp of becoming the world's most populated nation. Together they embody the opposing sides of a deeply entrenched religious divide that presents India with one of its biggest challenges: to safeguard freedoms for its Muslim minority at a time when a rising tide of Hindu nationalism is eroding the country's secular underpinnings.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an ongoing series exploring what it means for the 1.4 billion inhabitants of India to live in what will be the world's most populated country.

India is home to some 200 million Muslims who make up the predominantly Hindu country's largest minority group. They are scattered across almost every part of India, where a systemic anti-Muslim fury has descended since Prime Minister Narendra Modi first assumed power in 2014.

Though India's communal fractures date back to its bloody partition in 1947, most Indians trace the roots of the latest religious fault lines to a small temple city in northern India, where the Hindu nationalist movement was galvanized in 1992 after Hindu mobs demolished a historic mosque to make way for a temple.

Since then, the city of Ayodhya has, in many ways, become a religious microcosm of India, where a diverse, multicultural past has gradually been overrun by ruptured relationships between Hindus and Muslims.

It's also a city Abidi and Das call home.

They have meandered through its narrow, winding streets overrun by temple monkeys and Hindu monks who ask passersby for alms in exchange for blessings. They have walked past its brimming bazaars where miniature idols of Ram are sold to pilgrims visiting from India's vast hinterlands. They have begun their mornings with calls for prayers spilling out of mosque loudspeakers and Vedic hymns chant in the temples.

Beyond these shared experiences lie stark differences.

For Das, a broad-shouldered man with a stout frame, Ayodhya is the birthplace of Ram, Hinduism's most revered deity. The city also hosts one of Hinduism's most sacred sites — Ram's grand temple — which will open to pilgrims next year. It is imperative that the city clings to its Hindu character, Das says.

"Our forefathers have fought for this temple and sacrificed lives for it. Today their dream is getting fulfilled," he says, circled by a group of devotees.

The temple is being constructed where the 16th-century Babri mosque was demolished by Hindu hardliners who claim Muslim rulers built it at the exact spot where Ram was born. When it was razed on Dec. 6, 1992, Das was there, watching a frenzied Hindu mob climb its rounded domes and tear it down with pickaxes and crowbars.

"There was so much excitement to destroy that disgraced structure that no one cared about the falling debris," he recounts, prompting his disciples to chant "Jai Sri Ram," or "Hail Lord Ram," a slogan that has become a battle cry for Hindu nationalists.

The 30-year campaign to build the temple saw subsequent religious violence and a bitter legal battle over the site that Hindus won in 2019. Muslims were given alternate land on the city outskirts to build a new mosque. A year later, Modi attended the temple's groundbreaking ceremony.

For Abidi, a tall man in clothes that hang off his frame, it marked a sad chapter for India's Muslims.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 28 of 80

"The hearts of Muslims are broken. No Muslim opposes the construction of Ram temple, but such unilateral changes are impacting India's culture," he says, arguing the former mosque was essential to the city's Muslim identity.

As for his city, it has already gone through major changes.

For decades Ayodhya city was part of Uttar Pradesh state's Faizabad district. But in 2018, authorities changed the entire district's name from Faizabad to Ayodhya, a move that reflected the Modi government's pattern of replacing prominent Muslim geographic names with Hindu ones.

For Abidi it indicates a worrying trend: "To erase everything that remotely reflects Muslim culture."

Today, Ayodhya is taken over by frenetic construction of hotels, bringing in tens of thousands of Hindu pilgrims. Construction workers are busy making way for wider highways. All that is expected to boost the city's economy. But at what cost, Abidi reckons.

"The relationship Hindus and Muslims used to share is barely visible anymore," he says.

India's religious fault lines have become pronounced under Modi. Scores of Muslims have been lynched by Hindu mobs over allegations of eating beef or smuggling cow, an animal considered holy to Hindus. Muslim businesses have been boycotted, their localities have been bulldozed and places of worship set on fire. Sometimes open calls have been made for their genocide.

Critics say Modi's conspicuous silence over such attacks has emboldened some of his most extreme supporters and enabled more hate speech against Muslims.

Muslims have been falsely accused of manipulating Hindu women into marriages and producing more children to establish domination. The government data shows otherwise: India's religious composition has been largely stable since 1947 and the fertility rate of Muslims has declined from 4.4 in 1992 to 2.3 in 2020.

"It is never going to be possible if you look at the data. We should forget and ignore this rhetoric," says Poonam Muttreja, director at the Population Foundation of India.

Muslims also have the lowest literacy among all major Indian religious communities. They have faced discrimination in employment and housing and hold a little less than 5% of seats in the parliament, their lowest share ever.

For Abidi, all this represents a grim future, one where India's secular character lives only in people's memories.

"Every Muslim in today's India finds himself unsafe," he says.

Das disagrees, arguing that Muslims are still free to pray and practice their religion. "But we will correct the mistakes made by your ancestors."

Das is referring to the Mughals who ruled India before the British made it their colony.

Scorn for Mughal rulers, who are not ancestors of Indian Muslims and only shared a similar faith, is distinctive to India's Hindu nationalists, who claim Mughals destroyed Hindu culture. It has prompted Hindu nationalists to seek ownership of hundreds of historic mosques they say are built over demolished temples.

In Ayodhya, longtime Muslim locals have made compromises to avoid tension with Hindu neighbors.

Last year when the Muharram procession overlapped with a Hindu festival, Muslim leaders changed the timing of their march to avoid confrontation. This year, Muslims in the city had to forgo selling and consumption of meat during another Hindu festival that coincided with the beginning days of Ramadan.

In such an atmosphere, Abidi says, only religious tolerance can stop India's communal fractures from worsening.

"India will only survive if we mend hearts and not break them," he says.

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.

No respite in Sudan as truce falls apart, rivals battle

By JACK JEFFERY and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Explosions and heavy gunfire rattled the Sudanese capital in a fifth day of fighting Wednesday after an internationally brokered truce quickly fell apart. The cease-fire failure suggested the two rival generals fighting for control of the country were determined to crush each other in a potentially prolonged conflict.

With no sign of respite, desperate and terrified Sudanese who have been trapped for days in their homes by the violence raging on their doorsteps began to flee their homes, witnesses said. Residents of multiple neighborhoods of Khartoum told The Associated Press they could see hundreds, including women and children, carrying luggage, some leaving by foot, others crowding into vehicles.

"Khartoum has become a ghost city," said Atiya Abdalla Atiya, secretary of the Doctors' Syndicate, who is still in the capital.

The generals' fight for power has caught millions of Sudanese in the crossfire, as their forces have battled it out since Saturday with heavy machine guns, artillery and airstrikes in residential neighborhoods of Khartoum, its neighboring city Omdurman and other major towns of the country.

At least 270 people have been killed the past five days, the U.N. said, but the toll is likely higher, since many bodies have been left in the streets, unreachable because of clashes.

A 24-hour cease-fire was to have been in effect from sundown Tuesday to sundown Wednesday. It was the most concrete attempt yet to bring a pause that it was hoped could be expanded into a longer truce.

It came after U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke separately by phone with the two rivals — the leader of the armed forces, Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the head of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo. Egypt, which backs the Sudanese military, and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have close ties to the RSF, have also been calling on all sides to stand down.

But fighting continued after the intended start of the truce and through the night. Each side blamed the other for the failure.

Fierce clashes between the army and RSF were reported Wednesday morning around the military's headquarters in central Khartoum and the nearby airport, as well as around the state television building across the river in Omdurman. Bombs and artillery could be heard around the city.

A high-rise in the city center was on fire with burning debris falling from its top floors, according to footage by the Al Arabiya news network.

"The battles intensified in the morning after sporadic gunfire over the night," said Tahani Abass, a prominent rights advocate who lives close to the military headquarters. "Bombing and explosions are shaking our houses."

Mahasen Ali, a tea vendor, said many in her south Khartoum neighborhood have left their homes to take refuge in open areas, hoping to be safe from shelling hitting buildings. Others fled the city to stay with relatives elsewhere, she said.

Armed men were roaming the streets, storming shops and houses. "They take whatever they can, and if you resist, they kill you," she said.

The battles, with heavy machine guns, artillery and airstrikes, have wreaked extensive damage, playing out in the streets of Khartoum and the city of Omdurman on the opposite bank of the Nile River, as well as in other key towns around Sudan.

Dozens of health care facilities in Khartoum and around the country have stopped functioning because they are close to clashes, the Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate said Wednesday. At least nine hospitals were bombed and 16 were forcefully evacuated, it said.

The director-general of the U.N.'s World Health Organization, Tedros Ghebreyesus, said Wednesday that at least 270 people have been killed and more than 2,600 wounded since fighting began, without offering a breakdown of civilians and combatants killed. The Doctors' Syndicate, which monitors casualties, said Tuesday that at least 174 civilians have been killed and hundreds wounded.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 30 of 80

Blinken had described the proposed one-day humanitarian cease-fire as a building block for a longer truce and a return to eventual negotiations. Their failure to pause fighting for even a day, despite high-level diplomatic pressure, suggests the generals remain bent on pursuing a military victory.

The conflict between the military and the RSF has once again derailed Sudan's transition to democratic rule after decades of dictatorship and civil war.

A popular uprising four years ago helped depose long-time autocrat Omar al-Bashir, but Burhan and Dagalo allied to carry out a 2021 coup. Both generals have a long history of human rights abuses, and their forces have cracked down on pro-democracy activists.

Under international pressure, Burhan and Dagalo recently agreed to a framework agreement with political parties and pro-democracy groups. But the signing was repeatedly delayed as tensions rose over the integration of the RSF into the armed forces and the future chain of command — tensions that exploded into violence Saturday. ____ Magdy reported from Cairo.

Kim says North Korea's 1st spy satellite is ready for launch

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

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his country has built its first-ever military spy satellite and that he planned to launch it on an undisclosed date, state media reported Wednesday.

Previous missile and rocket tests have demonstrated that North Korea can send satellites into space, but many experts question whether it has cameras sophisticated enough to use for spying from a satellite because only low-resolution images were released after past test launches.

During his visit to the country's aerospace agency Tuesday, Kim said that having an operational military reconnaissance satellite is crucial for North Korea to effectively use its nuclear-capable missiles. Kim cited what he described as serious security threats posed by "the most hostile rhetoric and explicit action" by the United States and South Korea this year, according to the official Korean Central News Agency. He likely hopes to pressure his rivals on issues including joint military drills and international economic sanctions on North Korea.

Kim said "the military reconnaissance satellite No. 1" had already been built and ordered officials to speed up preparations for its launch. He said North Korea must launch several satellites to establish an intelligence-gathering capability, KCNA said.

North Korea has said its ongoing run of weapons tests, including its first test-launch of a solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the U.S. mainland last week, are a response to joint military exercises between the United States and its regional allies South Korea and Japan. North Korea has carried out about 100 missile tests since the start of last year, including about 30 this year.

The U.S. and South Korean militaries have been expanding combined drills in response to North Korea's growing nuclear threats. This week, the allies launched a 12-day aerial exercise involving some 110 warplanes and staged a one-day naval missile defense exercise with Japan.

Spy satellites are among an array of major weapons systems that Kim publicly vowed to develop during a major ruling Workers' Party conference in January 2021. Kim also pledged to build solid-propellant ICBMs, nuclear-powered submarines, hypersonic missiles and multi-warhead missiles. North Korea has since conducted tests of such weapons, but observers say those high-tech weapons are still in development stages.

After North Korea launched a test satellite last December, it publicized black-and-white photos showing a space view of South Korean cities. Some civilian experts in South Korea said at the time the photos were too crude for a surveillance purpose and that they were likely capable of only recognizing big targets like warships at sea or military installations on the ground.

Kim's sister and senior North Korean official Kim Yo Jong said the test satellite carried a commercial camera because there was no reason to use an expensive, high-resolution camera for a single-shot test.

Kim Jong Un said one of the objectives for its spy satellite is acquiring an ability to "use pre-emptive military force when the situation demands."

Tuesday's KCNA dispatch focused on U.S. military assets like aircraft carriers and long-range bombers

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 31 of 80

that have been deployed in South Korea in recent months, but made no mention of possible targets in the mainland U.S. That could imply that North Korea intends to use its reconnaissance satellites to identify key targets in South Korea, including U.S. military bases, in order to attack them with short-range missiles.

Putting a reconnaissance satellite into orbit would require a long-range rocket. The U.N. bans such launches by North Korea because it views them as cover for testing its long-range ballistic missile technology.

In response to a question posed by The Associated Press, South Korea's Foreign Ministry said North Korea's launch of a spy satellite would threaten regional peace and violate multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions banning any ballistic launches by the North. It said South Korea will work closely with the international community to get North Korea to face consequences when it commits provocations.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said North Korea will likely inform international maritime and telecommunication authorities of its launch plans, likely sometime between May and September.

North Korea placed its first and second Earth observation satellites into orbit in 2012 and 2016, but foreign experts say neither transmitted imagery back to North Korea. The U.N. issued sanctions over those launches.

North Korea has avoided fresh U.N. sanctions for its recent ballistic missile tests in 2022 and this year because U.N. Security Council permanent members Russia and China didn't support U.S. and others' attempts to toughen sanctions on the North. ____

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Beijing hospital fire deaths rise to 29, mostly patients

BEIJING (AP) — The death toll from a fire at a Beijing hospital rose to 29, including 26 patients, authorities said Wednesday, and a dozen people had been detained including the hospital's head and her deputy.

The fire broke out at the private Changfeng Hospital on Tuesday afternoon and forced dozens of people to evacuate. Some who were trapped had to escape from windows using bedsheets tied together.

A nurse, a medical assistant and a family member also died in the incident, said Li Zongrong, deputy head of Fengtai district.

The cause of the fire is under investigation but officials say they believe it originated from welding sparks from work being done in the hospital's inpatient wing. Among the 12 people who were detained was the head of the construction crew.

A total of 39 people are being treated for injuries, three of them in critical condition, officials said. Rescue crews and medical staff from around the city were mobilized, with squads plucking some of the 142 people who were evacuated from air conditioning units on the building's exterior.

Safety rules are frequently ignored in China, but accidents on the level of the Changfeng fire are treated with a much higher level of scrutiny. Construction accidents sometimes result from corners being cut on work hours and safety conditions, while local officials are bribed to ignore violations.

The central government has pledged stronger safety measures since an explosion in 2015 at a chemical warehouse in the northern port city of Tianjin killed 173 people, most of them firefighters and police officers.

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorated on 80th anniversary

By VANESSA GERA Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Presidents and Holocaust survivors and their descendants are commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on Wednesday with a poignant sense that the responsibility for carrying on the memory of the Holocaust is passing from the witnesses to younger generations.

The anniversary honors the hundreds of young Jews who took up arms in Warsaw in 1943 against the overwhelming might of the Nazi German army.

There are no surviving fighters still alive. Marek Edelman, the last surviving commander, died in 2009. He remained in Poland and helped keep alive the memory of the revolt in his homeland. Simcha Rotem, a fighter who smuggled others out of the burning ghetto through sewage tunnels, died in 2018 in Israel,

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 32 of 80

where he settled.

The small number of surviving witnesses today were mostly children at the time of the revolt.

Official commemorations will be attended by presidents Isaac Herzog of Israel, Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany and Andrzej Duda of Poland. The main event will take place in front of the Memorial to the Ghetto Heroes on the hallowed ground where the fighting erupted, with a visit later to Warsaw's Nozyk synagogue and an evening concert by the Polish-Israeli Youth Symphony Orchestra.

The three leaders represent nations forever shaped by World War II.

Israel was founded after the war to give Jews a home where they could finally be safe after centuries of persecution in Europe.

Germany, which inflicted death and destruction across the vast areas that it occupied, is the perpetrator nation that for decades has acknowledged its crimes and expressed remorse.

And Poland, where Europe's largest prewar Jewish population lived and which was invaded and subjected to mass death and destruction, carries out its responsibility of preserving sites like the ghetto and the Auschwitz death camp, while also honoring the massive losses inflicted on the entire nation. Some 6 million Polish citizens were killed during the war, about 3 million of them Jews and the others mostly Christian Poles.

Avi Valevski, a professor of psychiatry from Israel whose father, Ryszard Walewski, a doctor who led a group of some 150 warriors in the revolt, visited Warsaw with his wife, describing it as "more than an emotional moment."

Valevski, 72, is working to carry on a history that his father rarely spoke to him about but also carries an emotional burden. He was young when his father became ill and died 1971, but today pores through the documentation his father left behind, and is trying to get one of his stories translated into English and published.

"He was quite proud of his fight against the 'Nazi beast' — his words — but I suppose that the feeling of apprehension entered my soul until now," Valevski said.

The Germans invaded Poland in 1939 and set up the ghetto in 1940. It was the largest of many ghettos across occupied Poland.

The ghetto initially held some 380,000 Jews who were cramped into tight living spaces, and at its peak housed about a half-million souls. Life in the ghetto included random raids, confiscations and abductions by Nazi soldiers. Disease and starvation were rampant, and bodies often appeared on the streets.

The Jewish resistance movement in the Warsaw ghetto grew after 265,000 men, women and children were rounded up in the summer of 1942 and killed at the Treblinka death camp. As word of the Nazi genocide spread, those who remained behind no longer believed German promises that they would be sent to forced labor camps.

A small group of rebels began to spread calls for resistance, carrying out isolated acts of sabotage and attacks. Some Jews began defying German orders to report for deportation.

The uprising began when the Nazis entered the ghetto on April 19, 1943, the eve of the Passover holiday. Three days later, the Nazis set the ghetto ablaze, turning it into a fiery death trap, but the Jewish fighters kept up their struggle for nearly a month before they were brutally vanquished. That was longer than some countries held out.

Some of those participating in Wednesday's observances traveled from as far as Australia and the United States to honor those who perished, but also the rich Jewish civilization that is their heritage. Many hold their own private ceremonies, paying tribute to those departed at the Jewish cemetery or at various memorials on the former grounds of the ghetto.

There are various events, museum openings and other ceremonies, marking the anniversary throughout the week.

"I'm a New Yorker but there is something that keeps drawing me back here," said Barbara Jolson Blumenthal, whose parents survived the Warsaw Ghetto after a Pole helped them to escape and hide on the "Aryan" side of the city, while many other members of their families were murdered.

"And although such horrible things happened here, I remember my parents saying that they loved it

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 33 of 80

here, that it was so wonderful here, and I walk the streets and I wonder if this is where my family was and where they walked," Blumenthal said.

She returns often to Poland to work to preserve the memory of her family and her people, She spoke from a cafe of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, a monument to the 1,000 years of Jewish life on Polish lands.

Blumenthal is on the board of a new Warsaw Ghetto Museum now being created, and is seeking to have a tiny closet where her parents hid made into an exhibit. A decade ago she reburied her grandmother, who died during the war while hiding as a Catholic, in the Jewish cemetery.

What to know about KC shooting of Black teen Ralph Yarl

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Black teen Ralph Yarl was shot twice, in the head and arm, after going to the wrong home in Kansas City, Missouri, to pick up his younger brothers.

Andrew Lester, an 84-year-old white man, told police he fired at honors student Yarl, 16, out of fear last week. But whether Lester will ultimately claim self-defense in court has yet to be seen. The case raises anew questions about race relations in the United States.

Here's a look at what happened, where the criminal case stands, how the teen is faring and the role gun laws in Missouri could play in the case.

WHAT LED UP TO THE SHOOTING?

Yarl mixed up an address. Instead of going to 115th Terrace to pick up his twin brothers Thursday night, Yarl showed up at Lester's home on 115th Street, at 10 p.m.

Lester told police he had just gotten in bed when he heard the doorbell. Before answering, he grabbed his revolver. Lester said he then saw Yarl pulling on the storm door handle, something Yarl disputes, according to the probable cause statement.

Lester told police he thought the teen was attempting to break into the home and he was "scared to death," the statement said. Without saying a word, Lester fired twice.

Yarl said the first shot struck him in the head, knocking him to the ground. As he lay there, the second bullet pierced his arm. Yarl told police he fled as the homeowner yelled, "Don't come around here," the statement said.

Yarl said he went to "multiple" homes asking for help. A neighbor ultimately used towels to stem the bleeding until paramedics arrived.

WHERE DOES THE CRIMINAL CASE STAND?

Lester was charged with first-degree assault Monday and turned himself in Tuesday.

Some civil rights leaders have called for a hate crime charge, but Zachary Thompson, Clay County prosecuting attorney, said first-degree assault is a higher-level crime with a longer sentence — up to life in prison.

Lester also was charged with armed criminal action, which has a penalty range of three to 15 years.

Lester was to be arraigned Wednesday afternoon. An attorney was not yet listed for him.

WHERE IS YARL NOW?

The wounded teen is recovering at home, but his mother, Cleo Nagbe, said the trauma is evident.

She told "CBS Mornings" co-host Gayle King that her son is "able to communicate mostly when he feels like it, but mostly he just sits there and stares and the buckets of tears just rolls down his eyes."

"You can see that he is just replaying the situation over and over again, and that just doesn't stop my tears either," she said.

Yarl's classmates rallied for him Tuesday, holding signs that read, "We Walk For RALPH," "Stop The Hate" and "Justice 4 RALPH."

WHAT ARE THE RACIAL ELEMENTS OF THE CASE?

The shooting outraged many in Kansas City and across the country. Civic and political leaders including President Joe Biden demanded justice. Biden also invited Yarl to the White House.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 34 of 80

Thompson said Monday that there was a "racial component" to the shooting, without elaborating. But Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Alexander Higginbotham clarified in an email to The Associated Press on Tuesday that "there is not a racial element to the legal charges that were filed."

Still, some — including lawyers for Yarl's family — pressed the racial dimension of the case.

Missouri NAACP President Nimrod Chapel Jr. said in a statement that a Black suspect would have been in jail from the start.

HOW COULD GUN LAWS PLAY A ROLE?

Legal experts believe Lester's lawyers will claim self-defense under Missouri's "stand your ground" law, which allows for the use of deadly force if a person fears for his or her life. Missouri is one of roughly 30 states with such statutes.

Robert Spitzer, a professor emeritus of political science at the State University of New York, Cortland, whose research focuses on gun policy and politics, said the Missouri law provides "wide latitude for people to use lethal force."

St. Louis defense attorney Nina McDonnell agreed. She said prosecutors have a strong case but the "stand your ground" defense is a "huge hurdle" to overcome.

In grim drought, Tunisians ration water in state-ordered ban

By BOUAZZA BEN BOUAZZA and MEHDI EL AREM Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia (AP) — It's a feeble drip, drip, drip from the taps every night in Tunisia for six months. Spigots are cut off for seven hours from 9 p.m. to 4 a.m. in a state-ordered water rationing in most regions across the country, including Tunis, the capital city.

Tunisians are on the front lines of a battle against an increasingly severe drought, now in its fifth year in the north African country, with the government issuing a sudden order to its population to ration their water usage from April to September — or risk fines or jail.

Households now need a supply of bottled water to wash, use toilets and prepare meals during late night hours. Authorities have also forbidden the use of potable water for irrigation of farmlands, watering green areas in cities and for cleaning streets and cars.

Water levels at almost all of Tunisia's 30-plus dams have fallen drastically, some as low as 17% of their storage capacity.

The Sidi Salem dam in northwest Tunisia provides tap water to Tunis and along the Tunisian Sahel, including cities like Sfax, as well as water for irrigation around Tunis. But water stored there is at its lowest level since its construction in 1981, the newspaper La Presse reported, quoting Faycel Khemiri, the No. 2 official for dams and hydraulic works at the Agricultural Ministry.

Human-caused climate change, which is burning up the planet, has made droughts worldwide more likely, with higher-than-average temperatures drying up land and altering rainfall patterns. Drought has also plagued Tunisia in the past, historically devastating farmland and olive groves.

"Currently, we have reached the red line, the danger line in terms of water scarcity," said Aymen Hmem, a member of an environmental group in the northeastern coastal town of Menzel Temime, which has a large dam on its outskirts.

There's also concern over a potentially scorching summer in Tunisia — where temperatures can top 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) — ramping up water demand and causing eventual protests over the cuts.

The country is already in the midst of an economic crisis. Talks with the International Monetary Fund for a \$1.9 billion loan agreement to help finance the state stalled late last year amid Tunisia's political tensions.

Tunisia is experiencing its worst crisis in a generation as inflation hovers around 11% and food supplies are increasingly scarce, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Then came the water rationing order, a baptism by fire for many citizens, which coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan where people gather to break their fasts with large feasts and gatherings and water use is normally intense.

Ramadan is nearly over, but summer and the start of tourist season will turn up the heat. Tourism is a major source of income for Tunisia, with the country of about 12 million people boasting around 850 hotels.

To underline the seriousness of the water problem, the agriculture ministry has resorted to a punitive approach: Those who use tap water to wash their cars or other banned uses risk fines of 60 to 1,000 dinars (\$20 to \$320) or even prison sentences ranging from six days to nine months in the most serious cases. They can also be struck from the distribution list of the country's state-owned water company, Sonede, cutting off their supply.

Radhia Essamin, from the Tunisian Water Observatory, said the decision to cut the water supply was not surprising, given the country's worrisome water shortage. But it should have been handled differently, she said, notably with a campaign so people could prepare themselves ahead of time.

"That is why we consider these measures incomplete. Before taking any measures, the citizen must be ... made aware of the importance of water rationing," she said. "A booklet should have been published (explaining) water consumption, storage, timing and the quantity allowed to be stored."

Abdelkader Hmissi, who lives outside Tunis, said that although many people were caught by surprise by both the extent of the drought and measures to counter its effects, he was not.

Hmissi said he built a water tank two years ago in anticipation of a prolonged drought, and now shares his supply.

"We found the solution in this tank. And my brothers and neighbors use it, too," Hmissi said.

Elaine Ganley in Paris contributed.

Wreckage of submarine found by divers in Long Island Sound

By PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Connecticut divers have discovered the wreckage of an experimental submarine that was built in 1907 and later scuttled in Long Island Sound.

The Defender, a 92-foot-long (28-meter-long) boat, was found Sunday by a team led by Richard Simon, a commercial diver from Coventry, Connecticut.

Simon said he had been interested in the story of the Defender for years. He spent months going over known sonar and underwater mapping surveys of the bottom of the sound, as well as government documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, to identify any anomaly that fit the size of the sub.

"A submarine has a very distinct shape," he said. "It needs to be 100 feet long and 13 feet in diameter. So I made a list of everything that was that long and there was one target on that list."

Simon then assembled a group of top wreck divers to determine if the Defender was in the location he had identified.

Poor tidal conditions forced them to abandon an attempt last Friday. They returned on Sunday and discovered the Defender lying on the bottom, more than 150 feet (45 meters) beneath the water's surface, off the coast of Old Saybrook.

"It was legitimately hiding in plain sight," he said. "It's on the charts. It's known about in Long Island Sound, just no one knew what it was."

Simon described the agony of waiting on the deck of his research vessel, staring at a dive buoy in the fog and waiting for his two divers to surface. Once they did and confirmed they had found a sub, the team erupted in "pure joy," he said.

Simon said he didn't want to give the exact depth, because he said that could give away the sub's location.

The submarine, originally named the Lake, was built by millionaire Simon Lake and his Bridgeport-based Lake Torpedo Boat Company in hopes of winning a competition for a U.S. Navy contract, according to NavSource Online, a website dedicated to preserving naval history.

It was experimental vessel, with wheels to move along the sea bottom and a door that allowed divers to be released underwater, Simon said.

The company lost that competition and Lake then tried refitting the boat for minesweeping, salvage and

rescue work, renaming it the Defender. But he never found a buyer. It was a well-known sub and was even visited by aviator Amelia Earhart in 1929, Simon said.

But the submarine spent many years unused, docked in New London before eventually being abandoned on a mud flat near Old Saybrook. It was scuttled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1946, but the corps never disclosed where, Simon said.

Simon said it was clear when his team found the wreckage that it was indeed the Defender. The length, the size and shape of protrusions on the submarine's distinct keel, and the shape and location of diving planes characteristic of Lake-built vessels, all helped identify it, he said.

Simon and his team plan to spend the summer diving on the sub, filming it and taking photographs. He said he and the company he and his wife own, Shoreline Diving, put up the money for the search. He said he hasn't figured out how to monetize the find, but said that wasn't the goal in looking for it.

He has already contacted the Navy to see if it would be interested in helping preserve the wreckage.

The ship has some protections under what is known as the Abandoned Shipwreck Act, a 1988 law that would allow it to be treated as an archaeological or historical site instead of a commercial property to be salvaged, he said.

"So, as a wreck diver, I can go visit history; I can touch it; I can experience it," he said. "It's just a different connection to history, to the past that we don't have in any other activity."

Fatal Hawaii shooting shows dangers of popular cockfights

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Police in Hawaii have vowed to step up illegal gambling enforcement after one of the most serious shootings in state history called attention to the dangers that come with cockfighting, which has deep roots in the islands and remains popular despite being illegal.

The shooting early Saturday in a rural community more than 30 miles (48 kilometers) from downtown Honolulu left a man and woman dead and three others with gunshot wounds. The Honolulu medical examiner's office as of Tuesday had yet to release the names of the dead — both of whom were taken in private cars to a hospital — and police had yet to make any arrests but said they were searching for two suspects.

Authorities say investigating cockfights is difficult in part because they are highly organized events on private property and their illegal nature and the large amount of money wagered means they often have links to organized crime. The clandestine fights happen all over Hawaii, usually on large, remote properties shrouded by brush and accessible only by dirt roads, like in Waianae, where the weekend shooting took place.

"Neighbors are also reluctant to get involved for fear of retaliation," Honolulu Police Chief Joe Logan said in a statement.

Despite being illegal in Hawaii since 1884, the fights between roosters with blades affixed to their legs have remained a part of life in the islands, especially among the state's large population of Filipinos, who are credited with bringing the practice from the Philippines, where it was introduced by Spaniards. Many cockfighting fans claim the blood sport is part of local Hawaii culture.

"People that are attendees are local, locally based, and have been doing it for generations," said former Maui police chief Gary Yabuta, now executive director of the Hawaii High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. "A saying among chicken fighters is, 'It's in my blood.'"

But Saturday's shooting, which police say started with an argument at the end of a cockfight, has some saying enough is enough and cultural claims should no longer be used to excuse the illegal fights that happen every weekend.

"People say, 'I grew up with it. It's a cultural thing. Papa had chickens ... we went to chicken fights, that's how we made our money,'" said Patty Kahanamoku-Teruya, chair of the neighborhood board in the area of the shooting. "It's not a cultural right. It's illegal. Period."

Yabuta said his program, which helps local and federal law enforcement collaborate in the fight against

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 37 of 80

illegal drugs, is concerned about cockfighting because it's wrapped up in organized crime and has links to drug-trafficking. He notes that the fights often attract hundreds of people placing bets totaling more than \$100,000.

"It's something that is so huge and so popular in Hawaii that it really can't be controlled by law enforcement," he said.

The popularity of cockfighting extends far beyond Hawaii and is truly a global industry, said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action.

"It was started by the Romans and the Greeks 3,000 years ago. And it spread all over the world with colonialism," he said.

After arriving in Hawaii, the sport has flourished in many areas, including urban parts of the islands, such as Kalihi, where many fighting birds are raised, said state Rep. Sonny Ganaden.

Crowing roosters are "part of the sights and sounds of Kalihi," he said of the neighborhood that's home to many Filipinos and Pacific Islanders.

"Kids will grab a chicken and get them to fight each other," he said.

Cockfighting has been illegal in all 50 states, but hadn't been illegal in U.S. territories until 2019, when a law signed by former President Donald Trump banning all animal fighting went into effect.

The argument that cockfighting is a cultural practice has been used in lawsuits challenging the ban, but with little success. The U.S. Supreme Court turned away a challenge to the federal law brought by individuals and organizations that argued Congress exceeded its power in applying the ban to Puerto Rico.

Some in Hawaii worry that violence linked to cockfighting will grow more volatile in a state that previously had largely escaped the scourge of gun violence seen elsewhere in the U.S.

Saturday's shooting was among the worst since 1997, when seven workers were shot and killed at a Xerox Corp. warehouse. Other shootings that grabbed headlines were a man who killed a taxi driver and a couple taking photos at a Honolulu scenic lookout in 2006 and a highway shooting spree that left one woman dead and two others injured in 2011.

Chris Marvin, a Hawaii resident with Everytown for Gun Safety, said these types of shootings will increase with the proliferation of guns in the islands.

Data from the Hawaii attorney general's office says the number of number of firearms registered annually in Hawaii climbed 319% from 2000 through 2021.

"We are going to start to replicate the trends that we've seen in the mainland," Marvin said. "And in the rest of the country, there is more than one mass shooting per day. We don't hear about all of them."

Associated Press reporter Audrey McAvoy contributed to this report.

Parents, schools face increasing scrutiny after shootings

By BEN FINLEY and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (AP) — In many school shootings, the person who pulled the trigger — often a current or former student — is the only one blamed for the crime. But the arrest last week of a mother, whose 6-year-old son shot his teacher, and a related investigation of school employees shows how parents and educators are facing increasing scrutiny over any responsibility they may bear.

While national statistics are hard to come by, at least seven criminal cases against parents have been filed in the last eight years after a child brought a gun to school and it was fired, intentionally or not.

In Virginia, the mother of the 6-year-old was charged with felony neglect, while prosecutors have started investigating whether the actions of Newport News Public Schools employees could lead to criminal charges. The criminal probe was announced a week after the wounded teacher sued the school system. She accused administrators of ignoring multiple warnings that the boy had brought a gun to school.

Criminal investigations of parents as well as schools are rare, experts say. But they appear to be gaining traction as communities demand accountability and new ways to prevent the violence.

HOW OFTEN ARE PARENTS CHARGED AFTER A SCHOOL SHOOTING?

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 38 of 80

No one tracks such data, according to groups that advocate for more firearm restrictions. But the number appears small compared to the overall number of school shootings.

Guns came from the home of a parent or close relative in 76% of school attacks where firearms were used, according to a 2019 assessment by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The K-12 School Shooting Database lists more than 2,000 incidents of gun violence in schools dating back to 1970. A review of its database and news articles shows that at least 11 adults have been charged, including the Newport News mother.

Seven cases have been brought since 2015.

Among them was a Chicago mother charged last year with child endangerment after a gun in her second-grader's backpack accidentally discharged at school, injuring a 7-year-old classmate. In 2020, the mother of an Indiana teen received probation for failing to remove guns from her home after her mentally ill son threatened to kill students in 2018. He fired shots inside his school and later killed himself.

Teenager Ethan Crumbley pleaded guilty to killing four students at his Michigan high school in 2021. His parents were charged with involuntary manslaughter and accused of ignoring his mental health needs and making the gun accessible at home.

The Newport News boy shot first-grade teacher Abigail Zwerner at Richneck Elementary on Jan. 6 as she sat at a reading table. The 25-year-old was struck by a bullet in her hand and chest. She was hospitalized for two weeks and has had four surgeries.

The boy's mother bought the gun legally, according to police. Her attorney, James Ellenson, has said she believed her gun was secured on a high closet shelf with a trigger lock.

She faces up to six years in prison if convicted of felony child neglect and a misdemeanor charge of recklessly storing a firearm. Ellenson said the mother hopes to broker a plea deal with prosecutors.

Although charges against parents have been rare, the issue has gained more attention with the rising number of shootings, according to Eve Brensike Primus, who teaches criminal procedure at University of Michigan law school.

Prosecutors have faced mounting political pressure to hold people accountable, she said. But proving negligence is challenging because prosecutors often must show that a child's actions were reasonably foreseeable.

"The question is: At what point do we charge the parents with being able to foresee that the child would do something like this," Primus said.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE CHILD GUN SAFETY LAWS?

The shooting in Newport News has also renewed calls for stronger gun storage laws.

Twenty-nine states — including Virginia — have enacted child-access prevention laws that allow for criminal charges against adults who intentionally or negligently allow children unsupervised access to guns, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The Newport News mother was charged with a misdemeanor under a Virginia law that prohibits leaving a loaded unsecured gun "in such a manner as to endanger the life or limb of a child" under 14.

Allison Anderman, senior counsel and director of local policy at the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, said the most effective laws go beyond liability and require gun owners to store firearms in a specific manner, particularly when children are around.

Fewer states have those, although Michigan's governor signed a safe-storage bill into law last week, following the 2021 shooting by Ethan Crumbley.

But Virginia lawmakers rejected several storage bills in the wake of the Newport News shooting.

The National Rifle Association said it opposes such "one-size-fits-all" mandates and cited other Virginia laws that hold gun owners responsible. Those include the felony child neglect law that's being used against the mother in Newport News.

D.J. Spiker, the NRA's Virginia state director, said the group's members already safely store firearms.

"Why do we need to add more laws to the books?" he said.

HOW OFTEN ARE SCHOOLS INVESTIGATED?

Michael Dorn, executive director of Safe Havens International, which works to make schools safer, said

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 39 of 80

he knows of only a few criminal probes involving school employees after a shooting — and they're recent.

"I suspect a lot of it is that everybody is just desperate for solutions," Dorn said.

In Newport News, the prosecutor's office is seeking a special grand jury to probe if any "security failures" contributed to the shooting by the young boy.

The office didn't elaborate, but Zwerner's lawsuit alleges a string of failures by administrators, including ignoring warnings the day of the shooting that the boy had a gun and was in a "violent mood."

A criminal investigation of school employees also followed the 2021 shooting at Oxford High School in Michigan.

Prosecutor Karen McDonald has noted that school counselors and Ethan Crumbley's parents had met the day of the shooting over a drawing a teacher found on his desk that included a bullet and the words "blood everywhere." The 15-year-old was sent back to class after his parents refused to take him home.

No school employees have been charged.

Chuck Vergon, a professor of educational law and policy at the University of Michigan-Flint, said these types of charges are rare because criminal negligence can be difficult to prove.

"Prosecutors don't want to bring actions that they can't be successful in," Vergon said, "and the facts are usually not so extreme as to make it either legally plausible to proceed or politically advantageous to proceed."

House Republicans ready border enforcement push after delays

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans for months have railed against the Biden administration's handling of the U.S. border with Mexico, holding hearings, visiting border communities and promising to advance legislation to clamp down on illegal immigration and drug trafficking.

But so far, they have failed to unify behind a plan, delaying efforts to pass legislation.

Now they are hoping to change that. Republicans on Wednesday are jumpstarting work on an immigration and border enforcement package that would remake immigration law to make it more difficult to apply for asylum and easier for the federal government to stop migrants from entering the U.S.

Rep. Jim Jordan, the Republican who is chair of the Judiciary Committee drafting the legislation, said he expected Wednesday's markup of the bill to go "well."

The undertaking comes as Washington is putting renewed focus on border security, and the plight of thousands of migrants who show up seeking entry into the U.S., with a looming May deadline that is expected to end a federal COVID-era asylum policy. The hearing also comes as Republicans, more than 100 days into their new House majority, are under political pressure to deliver on a key campaign promise to secure the border.

The Republican legislative package, which may not draw much bipartisan support from Democrats, aims to revive a number of policies either enacted or proposed under then-President Donald Trump that tightened up asylum rules.

It would give the Homeland Security secretary the power to stop migrants from entering the United States if the secretary determines the U.S. has lost "operational control" of the border.

And it would make it more difficult for asylum-seekers to prove in initial interviews that they are fleeing political, religious or racial persecution, impose a \$50 fee on adults who apply for asylum and require migrants to make the asylum claim at an official port of entry.

The bill would also enact a Trump-era policy that the Biden administration is pursuing, the so-called "safe third country" requirement, which generally denies asylum to migrants who show up at the U.S. southern border without first seeking protection in a country they passed through.

Conservative hardliners who say migrants are taking advantage of the asylum process are backing the bill.

Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, a conservative member of the Freedom Caucus who has pushed aggressive border measures, said the legislation "reflects in a package form basically where we've all wanted to head, which is to actually enforce the law."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 40 of 80

"Stop releasing people into the United States who don't have a legitimate claim to asylum that you need to adjudicate," he said.

But Roy and Jordan will have to contend with a group of fellow Republicans who have condemned attempts at aggressively limiting asylum claims as cruel and out-of-touch with Latino communities.

Rep. Tony Gonzales, a fellow Texas Republican who represents a long portion of the U.S.-Mexico border from El Paso to San Antonio, has emerged as Roy's foil in the GOP's border debate. He insists that measures to toughen border enforcement also be coupled with increasing legal immigration, such as work visas.

Moderate House Republicans, like Rep. Don Bacon, R-Nebraska, are pushing for "a balanced approach" that would also open up legal immigration. "People want to come here. They work hard. I think they eventually become great citizens," Bacon said, adding "but what's going on at the border is a catastrophe."

The GOP has made inroads with Latino communities in recent years, and while Republican voters from those communities support tougher border enforcement, Latino Republicans also want to see an increase in legal immigration. The Congressional Hispanic Conference, a group of 18 House Republicans, held a bilingual news conference in front of the Capitol on Tuesday to demand a seat at the negotiating table.

"This is what the face of the border crisis looks like," Gonzales told reporters. "Take a good hard look, because we're not going to be quiet about it. We're not going to let others just dictate what happens."

Afterward, Gonzales suggested the bill being considered by the Judiciary Committee is just one option, and "has a long way to go before it hits primetime." The Homeland Security Committee, where he holds a seat, is working on its own legislation to increase border enforcement, he said.

The Congressional Hispanic Conference highlighted three policies it wants: designating cartels as terrorist organizations, increasing criminal penalties for people who smuggle fentanyl and increasing salaries for Customs and Border Protection agents.

Democrats are skeptical of Republican efforts to toughen border enforcement. Rep. Nanette Diaz Baragán, a California Democrat who chairs the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, said the GOP is focused on "politicization of the border instead of actually trying to find a solution."

And even if Republicans manage to pass a bill through the House, hardline border enforcement and severe restraints on asylum are unlikely to advance in the Democratic-held Senate, where negotiators prefer to pair border policies with an increase in legal immigration or a path to citizenship for the hundreds of thousands of immigrants brought to the U.S. illegally as children.

"There is not consensus in either party," said Theresa Cardinal Brown, a senior advisor for immigration at the Bipartisan Policy Center. "There is certainly not consensus across the aisle."

The debate in Congress will likely play out just as an influx of migrants is expected at the southern border. Title 42, a Trump-era rule adopted by the Biden administration, is set to expire on May 11. It suspended the rights for many to seek asylum during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recent U.S. immigration policy has been cobbled together through executive actions and legal rulings, Brown said, without any significant action by Congress in decades to address a new reality at the southern border: people, including many children, arriving from a host of countries to claim asylum.

"It's going to get bad and I don't think the (Biden) administration is prepared," she said, adding, "We are at an inflection point. We will see again whether people will get serious about legislating and come to the table, or will they pound the table."

Gonzales acknowledged the political difficulties around immigration but pointed to the impact in his home district along the border. He hosted Arizona's Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat-turned-independent, for a border visit last month, and said he has been holding calls with Democrats and Republicans in hopes of crafting a bipartisan proposal.

"Congress hasn't done anything in decades, the White House has punted time and time again, and it is no doubt a difficult problem set," he said. "But I think it's a problem worth fighting for."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 41 of 80

Garland scores 32, Cavs beat Knicks 107-90 to even series

By TOM WITHERS AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Darius Garland couldn't change what happened in a disappointing playoff debut.

On Tuesday night, Garland made sure he didn't repeat it.

Setting the tone with his aggressiveness from the start, Garland scored 26 of his 32 points in the first half and the Cavaliers evened their Eastern Conference playoff series against New York at one game apiece with a 107-90 victory.

"That's the All-Star we know, and it was good to see," said Cavs guard Donovan Mitchell, one of many who urged Garland to be more assertive. "He came out with a purpose. There was just a different look in his eye."

Garland scored 15 points in the second quarter, when Cleveland tightened down defensively and dominated New York, forcing nine turnovers on the way to opening a 20-point halftime lead. The Cavs pushed their lead to 29 in the fourth.

For two days, Garland had beaten himself up for his performance in Game 1, when he didn't attempt a shot in the fourth quarter and finished with one assist in 43 minutes. During film sessions, his teammates pointed out moments when he needed to shoot. Everywhere he went, he heard the same message.

"Everybody in the building told me to go be aggressive, go shoot the ball," he said. "I watched the film from the first game and seeing some opportunities where I can go get mine and go be aggressive and that's what I just tried to do today."

Cleveland's blowout ended with a hard foul and some questions about why New York's starters were still on the floor.

With the Knicks down by 23, Julius Randle went in for a breakaway dunk and was hit by Cavs center Jarrett Allen and New York's All-Star forward fell awkwardly out of bounds. Randle was upset by the contact and exchanged words with several Cavs players and coach J.B. Bickerstaff.

"I thought it was a little unnecessary," Randle said. "I understand that in the playoffs, you don't give up on plays. But typically, you run across the body. Not like that."

Allen was called for flagrant foul, which Bickerstaff felt was undeserved.

"They kept playing hard. They kept running through passing lanes. Why would one team play hard and not the other," he said. "There was nothing dirty about the play. It wasn't a flagrant foul. He contested a shot at the rim. It's that simple."

Caris LeVert scored 24 points off the bench and Mitchell added 17 and a career playoff-high 13 assists for the Cavs, who were much more physical than in Game 1 and went toe to toe with the Knicks.

Randle scored 22 points and Jalen Brunson added 20 for New York, which got the split it needed in rowdy Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse to head home for Game 3 at Madison Square Garden on Friday night.

"You know what to expect," Randle said. "It's the Garden. It's the Garden."

The Cavs matched the Knicks' physicality from the outset, winning the 50/50 balls that went to New York in the opener. And if handling Cleveland's new-found toughness wasn't enough of a challenge, the Knicks bashed each other.

During one sequence in the second quarter as the Cavs were beginning to pull away, Randle turned to run up the floor and accidentally smacked Brunson in the face, causing his teammate to recoil in pain.

Garland inflicted his own damage.

The 23-year-old was uncharacteristically timid in Game 1 and heard about it from fans and teammates. Following practice Monday, he had a deep conversation with Mitchell, who urged him to be let loose.

Garland got the message.

He drained a pair of 3-pointers during a 13-4 run in the second quarter and then showed no fear when he drove to the basket and tried to dunk over 7-foot Knicks center Isaiah Hartenstein, who got away with goaltending while fouling Cleveland's guard.

"I've never seen him try to dunk on anyone, let alone a seven-footer," Mitchell said.

The Cavs bench erupted at seeing Garland's bravado, and Mitchell slapped his hands before urging the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 42 of 80

sellout crowd to recognize him. The moment seemed to rattle the Knicks as New York's Josh Hart was called for a technical foul.

TIP-INS

Knicks: Didn't score a field goal in the first 5:13 of the second quarter. ... Randle had two extended conversations in the second with referee Tony Brothers. ... Hart was ineffective on the balky ankle. He scored just 5 points after getting 17 in Game 1.

Cavaliers: Scored 19 points off turnovers in the second quarter, and 27 in the first half. Cleveland is the first team to do that since Denver in 2009. ... F Danny Green made his first appearance in the series, scoring 3 points in 20 minutes. His 315 career playoff 3-pointers are ninth most in NBA history. ... F Isaac Okoro picked up two early fouls and played just three minutes. ... Garland's 26 points in the first half were three shy of the club playoff record for a half held by LeBron James (2018). ... Cleveland snapped a five-game playoff losing streak.

UP NEXT

The Knicks host their first playoff game since June 2, 2021, on Friday. New York is 3-1 at home in the playoffs against Cleveland.

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

Ralph Yarl armed only with 'Black skin,' family lawyer says

By MARGARET STAFFORD and JIM SALTER Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — As Ralph Yarl struggled to come to grips with being shot after going to the wrong house to pick up his younger brothers, the white Kansas City, Missouri, homeowner who shot the Black teenager turned himself in and was released on bond Tuesday.

Andrew Lester, 84, surrendered at the Clay County Detention Center a day after being charged with first-degree assault and armed criminal action. He posted bond Tuesday afternoon. Some civil rights leaders urged a hate crime charge, but Clay County Prosecuting Attorney Zachary Thompson said first-degree assault is a higher-level crime with a longer sentence — up to life in prison.

Lee Merritt, an attorney for the Yarl family, said the case should qualify as a hate crime.

"Ralph Yarl was shot because he was armed with nothing but other than his Black skin," he said.

As Yarl recovered from his wounds, supporters, civil rights leaders and politicians rallied in downtown Kansas City to call for justice for the 16-year-old and a stronger effort to improve racial relations in Missouri and the U.S.

Speakers urged the crowd to support Yarl, to fight for justice and to remove politicians who pass discriminatory laws and support gun rights.

Many carried signs saying, "He is only 16," and "Is this what Kansas City has come to? Stop gun violence."

Merritt said the family is also angry that police held Lester for only two hours after the shooting, when they legally could have held him for 24.

"If they would have held him for 24 hours, they would have held him long enough to get the statement from the kid with a bullet in his brain," Merritt said. "They got the statement the very next day."

During an interview Tuesday with "CBS Mornings," Yarl's mother, Cleo Nagbe, said her son is in good spirits but that the trauma remains evident. She said he is "able to communicate mostly when he feels like it, but mostly he just sits there and stares, and the buckets of tears just rolls down his eyes."

"You can see that he is just replaying the situation over and over again, and that just doesn't stop my tears either," she said.

The shooting happened about 10 p.m. Thursday. Police Chief Stacey Graves said that Yarl's parents asked him to pick up his twin brothers at a home on 115th Terrace.

Yarl, an honors student and all-state band member, mistakenly went to 115th Street — a block away from where he meant to be. When he rang the bell, Lester came to the door and shot Yarl in the forehead — then shot him again, in the right forearm.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 43 of 80

Lester faces arraignment Wednesday afternoon. He does not yet have a listed attorney.

Lester told police he lives alone and was "scared to death" when he saw a Black male on the porch and thought someone was trying to break in, according to the probable cause statement.

No words were exchanged before the shooting, but afterward, as Yarl got up to run, he heard Lester yell, "Don't come around here," the statement said.

Yarl ran to "multiple" homes asking for help before finding someone who would call the police, the statement said.

James Lynch was the neighbor who found Yarl. He didn't respond to an interview request, but his wife confirmed an NBC News report that said Lynch heard shouting and saw Yarl banging on the door of another home.

"I heard somebody screaming, 'Help, help, I've been shot!'" Lynch, who is white, told NBC. The father of three ran out and found Yarl covered in blood. Lynch checked his pulse and, when another neighbor came out with towels, helped stem the bleeding until paramedics arrived.

The shooting outraged many in Kansas City and across the country. President Joe Biden was among those demanding justice. He spoke with Yarl on Monday and invited him to the White House.

"No parent should have to worry that their kid will be shot after ringing the wrong doorbell," Biden tweeted. "We've got to keep up the fight against gun violence."

Thompson said Monday that there was a "racial component" to the shooting. He did not elaborate. Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Alexander Higginbotham said in an email to The Associated Press on Tuesday that "there is not a racial element to the legal charges that were filed."

Merritt said the Yarl family met privately with Thompson and asked why he said the case had a racial aspect, without elaboration. The prosecutor said he was "echoing the words from law enforcement that obviously there's a racial dynamic at play in this case," said Merritt, who called the answer "shallow."

About 150 supporters attended Tuesday's rally at police headquarters, chanting "Justice for Ralph" and demanding that the U.S. Department of Justice investigate. Lester, the activists said, received preferential treatment because he is white.

Bishop Frank Douglas of the Church of God in Christ, said the U.S. is experiencing its own version of apartheid and that if the shooter had been Black, it would have been "lynching time."

"We are putting a spotlight to what's been going on for over 100 years," Douglas said. "We got emancipation but we didn't get love."

Karen Allman, 61, said she had lived in Lester's neighborhood for 32 years, although she didn't know him or hear the shooting. She said she attended Wednesday's rally to support Yarl and his family because "if we don't speak out, it's going to keep happening."

"I don't know what they go through on a day-to-day basis being Black," said Allman, who is white. "But I do know if we don't stand with them, they don't have a chance of having any of this fixed."

The assault charge against Lester carries a penalty of up to life in prison. Lester also was charged with armed criminal action, which has a penalty range of 3-15 years in prison.

Charging Lester with a hate crime would have potentially meant a shorter sentence if he's convicted, experts said.

Washington University School of Law professor Peter Joy said the state hate crime law is used only to enhance low-level felony or misdemeanor charges.

"What the prosecutor did was charge (Lester) with the highest degree of felony they could charge him with," Joy said.

Legal experts believe Lester's lawyers will claim self-defense under Missouri's "Stand Your Ground" law, which allows for using deadly force if a person is in fear for their life. Missouri is among roughly 30 states with such statutes.

Robert Spitzer, a professor emeritus of political science at the State University of New York, Cortland, whose research focuses on gun policy and politics, said the Missouri law provides "wide latitude for people to use lethal force."

St. Louis defense attorney Nina McDonnell agreed. She said prosecutors have a strong case but that the Stand Your Ground law defense is a "huge hurdle" to overcome.

"The defendant was in his house and has expressed that he was in fear," McDonnell said.

Salter reported from O'Fallon, Missouri. Heather Hollingsworth in Mission, Kansas, contributed to this report.

Trapped by fighting, Sudanese look for ways to survive

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — For the last three days, Howeida al-Hassan and her family have been hunkered down in the first floor of her home in the Sudanese capital, sleeping on the floor as sounds of airstrikes and gunfire surround them.

This is the life of millions of Sudanese trapped in their homes since violence suddenly erupted over the weekend between forces loyal to the country's top two generals. Civilian life has come to a standstill as tens of thousands of heavily armed fighters from the military and its rival, the Rapid Support Forces, battle it out in densely populated residential areas.

For many, food supplies are already dwindling as going out to restock has become too dangerous. So sharing among neighbors has become essential. On social media, posts are appearing giving information on pharmacies and grocery stores that are still open and able to deliver essential goods to those trapped. Others post phone numbers or addresses for their homes, offering to take in anyone caught outside and scrambling for shelter when shooting comes close.

Residents have been desperate for at least a temporary cease-fire so they can stock up on supplies or move to safer areas. Media reported the two sides agreed on a 24-hour halt to fighting Tuesday, but when the reported start of the truce in the evening passed, fighting continued to rage in parts of the city. Nearly 12 million of Sudan's 46 million population live in the capital area, where most of the fighting is centered.

The toll from the violence has been difficult to determine, since many bodies are left in the street, unable to be retrieved because of clashes. The Sudan Doctors' Syndicate says at least 144 civilians have been killed and more than 1,400 wounded but that the real number is likely higher. The U.N. has put the toll at more than 185 dead and 1,800 wounded, without providing a breakdown of civilians and combatants.

Al-Hassan, a gynecologist who lives in the al-Fayhaa neighborhood of east Khartoum, said her family avoids approaching windows for fear of being killed or injured in the crossfire. Outside, forces from both sides roam the streets armed with machine guns and automatic weapons, backed by artillery shelling and airstrikes, she said.

"They fight each other in the open. Stray bullets and shelling hit homes," she said.

Al-Hassan's family has not had running water or electricity since the violence started and have had to charge their phones in their car to keep up with the latest news.

Al-Hassan ventured to a nearby bakery for bread on Monday. "I stood more than three hours in a long queue while the sound of fighting was heard very close," she said. She was eventually able to get her bread.

But she hasn't been able to reach the hospital where she works, though it's only a kilometer (about a half mile) away. She said she gives remote consultations through her phone to women in need. "This is not ideal, but it's the only option we have," she said.

The fighting is a new blow to Sudan's already faltering economy. Nearly a third of the country's population, almost 16 million people, was in need of humanitarian aid, including some 11.7 million already facing high acute food insecurity, according to the U.N.

"Thousands upon thousands of civilians are trapped in their homes, shielding from the fighting, with no electricity, unable to venture out and worried about running out of food, drinking water and medicine," said U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk.

In another Khartoum district, Farah Abbas said his family was fortunate since they had stocked up on food, including flour, rice, oil and other essentials ahead of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

"This is an annual tradition," he said. "Every Ramadan, we buy flour, rice, oil and other needs to cover the whole month."

However, the 65-year-old Abbas and his wife have been unable to go to their regular checkups for age-related health complications. He said the streets in his neighborhood of Mamoura are empty, with no one daring to go out amid the sounds of fighting.

"There is no respect to our lives, the lives of the people," he said. "Nobody is able go out even to bury bodies littered in the streets. It's very risky."

One of Abbas' sons was killed in 2019 when the military and the RSF — who were allied at the time — stormed a protest camp that pro-democracy activists had been staging outside the main military headquarters in central Khartoum. More than 120 people were killed and dozens of women raped during the attack on the camp — a major blow to the activist movement seeking to bring civilian rule to Sudan.

In 2021, the leaders of the military and the RSF again united in a coup against a transitional government that was supposed to bring civilians to full authority.

Abbas said that over the past two months, there was clear evidence that the two powerful forces were falling out and that war was coming, referring to the statements and counter-statements by the military and the RSF leaders.

"It was just a matter of time. All were pushing to this conclusion," he said.

Biden pans McCarthy's debt plan as 'huge cuts' to Americans

By LISA MASCARO, KEVIN FREKING and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Kevin McCarthy worked furiously Tuesday to build support for a Republican plan that would demand strict limits to federal spending in return for agreeing to raise the nation's debt limit and stave off an unprecedented U.S. default.

But President Joe Biden swiftly swatted down the plan, which would cap much federal spending at increases of 1% a year, as requiring "huge cuts" to programs helping millions of Americans.

It was just the latest in what is expected to be a protracted debate over how, when and even whether to raise the nation's debt limit, now at \$31 trillion, with default and a potentially devastating blow to the economy possible if Congress fails to act.

McCarthy is finding unusual support for his plan from his typically fractured House Republican majority, who view the proposal as a calling card to push Biden into negotiations. The White House has so far refused to engage in debt ceiling talks, doubtful McCarthy can unify Republicans and steer any proposal to passage.

Biden, in his first public remarks on the proposal, said at the White House that McCarthy had effectively proposed "huge cuts to important programs" that millions of U.S. households depend on.

The president said McCarthy has "threatened to be the first one to default on the debt, which would throw us into a gigantic recession and beyond unless he gets what he wants in the budget."

The high-stakes battle comes as Biden confronts this year's newly divided government with Republicans in charge of the House and eager to flex their majority power. McCarthy delivered a high-profile speech to Wall Street on Monday outlining his vision.

If McCarthy succeeds in having the House pass his proposal, he would be able to show he has the backing of his fellow GOP lawmakers as he enters spending talks with the White House. Biden says the Republicans should first reveal their own detailed spending plan — free of any connection to the debt limit. And administration officials have privately expressed doubts about the benefits of negotiating with McCarthy out of skepticism that he can actually deliver conservative Republican votes.

Biden spoke later Tuesday with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries and discussed Republicans' "brinkmanship over default and how their recklessness could crash the economy," according to a readout of the call from the White House.

The president and the Democratic leaders agreed they won't negotiate over default, the White House said. Biden told Schumer and Jeffries that he was ready to have a separate negotiation over the budget

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 46 of 80

once Republicans present their plan.

Jeffries quipped on CNBC that the House Republicans' budget plan is "in the witness protection program."

McCarthy, unable to pass a comprehensive Republican budget plan in the House, instead has been working with his leadership team to unite the "five families" — the often warring factions of Republican caucuses — to join together on his new, more general plan. He convened lawmakers Tuesday for a private meeting to discuss the proposal.

"I'm confident we'll have it and comfortable we'll pass it," said Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., chairman of the Rules Committee, who said a bill could come up for a vote as soon as next week.

Even some of McCarthy's skeptics from the staunchly conservative House Freedom Caucus — including those who initially refused to back him to be speaker — seemed ready to give his debt ceiling proposal a look. But others remained deeply skeptical, as they started piling on their own conservative priorities, showing the limits of the speaker's grip on his majority.

Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who resisted McCarthy's bid for speaker, said Tuesday he was unsold on the plan and suggested changes.

Rep. Clay Higgins, R-La., said as he exited the session: "There is no 'this.' We're discussing what the 'this' will be."

The proposal the Republican speaker outlined is far-reaching — and virtually sure to be rejected by the White House.

It would raise the debt limit into next year — putting it squarely into the 2024 presidential election — in exchange for rolling back spending to fiscal 2022 levels, recouping tens of billions of dollars of unspent COVID-19 relief funds and imposing a 1% cap on future non-defense spending each year for the decade.

The 1% spending cap would not include mandated Social Security and Medicare money.

Additionally, McCarthy's plan would impose new work requirements on recipients of government aid, cutting vast sums from the federal safety net. And it would tack on a sweeping energy package of oil and gas drilling and permit changes that would undo much of Biden's climate change agenda.

Rank-and-file Republicans want to add other priorities, roll back student loan forgiveness and rescind Biden's climate change policies passed last year in the Inflation Reduction Act.

"This is an unfair, unpopular agenda that Americans do not support," said White House press secretary Karine Jean Pierre.

In fact, U.S. adults are of two minds on federal spending, according to a March survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. A majority want to reduce the overall size of the government, but majorities also back more spending on programs such as infrastructure, health care, Social Security and education.

As for the debt limit, the Treasury Department, for now, is taking "extraordinary measures" to allow continued borrowing to pay off already accrued bills, but that will eventually run out, likely this summer.

In many ways, this is the easy part of a lengthy effort for McCarthy: A vote as soon as next week would hardly be binding since the proposal would be dead on arrival in the Senate.

That political dynamic may make it easier for McCarthy to rally his ranks behind the plan if Republicans see it as merely a starting point in negotiations designed to push Biden to the table.

"Kevin McCarthy is going to get 218 votes on this deal," said Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D., chairman of the conservative Main Street Caucus, referring to the majority needed for passage.

Said Rep. Kevin Hern of Oklahoma, chairman of the powerful Republican Study Committee, "There's still hard work ahead of us, but I believe we can get 218 votes by the end of next week."

Democrats were not impressed. Schumer said if McCarthy continues down this path of negotiating over the need to raise the debt limit, the U.S. will be headed for a default.

"No one should confuse this wish list as anything more than a recycling of the same bad ideas we've heard about for weeks, and it's still not clear that Speaker McCarthy has the votes to even pass this," Schumer said.

___ Associated Press writers Stephen Groves and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Apple Inc bets big on India as it opens first flagship store

By KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Apple Inc. opened its first flagship store in India in a much-anticipated launch Tuesday that highlights the company's growing aspirations to expand in the country it also hopes to turn into a potential manufacturing hub.

The company's CEO Tim Cook posed for photos with a few of the 100 or so Apple fans who had lined up outside the sprawling 20,000-square-foot store in India's financial capital, Mumbai, its design inspired by the iconic black-and-yellow cabs unique to the city. A second store will open Thursday in the national capital, New Delhi.

"India has such a beautiful culture and an incredible energy, and we're excited to build on our long-standing history," Cook said in a statement earlier.

The tech giant has been operating in India for more than 25 years, selling its products through authorized retailers and the website it launched a few years ago. But regulatory hurdles and the pandemic delayed its plans to open a flagship store.

The new stores are a clear signal of the company's commitment to invest in India, the second-largest smartphone market in the world where iPhone sales have been ticking up steadily, said Jayanth Kolla, analyst at Convergence Catalyst, a tech consultancy. The stores show "how much India matters to the present and the future of the company," he added.

For the Cupertino, California-based company, India's sheer size makes the market especially encouraging.

About 600 million of India's 1.4 billion people have smartphones, "which means the market is still underpenetrated and the growth prospect is huge," said Neil Shah, vice president of research at technology market research firm Counterpoint Research.

Between 2020 and 2022, the Silicon Valley company has gained some ground in the smartphone market in the country, going from just about 2% to capturing 6%, according to Counterpoint data.

Still, the iPhone's hefty price tag puts it out of reach for the majority of Indians.

Instead, iPhone sales in the country have thrived among the sliver of upper-middle-class and rich Indians with disposable incomes, a segment of buyers that Shah says is rising. According to Counterpoint data, Apple has captured 65% of the "premium" smartphone market, where prices range up from 30,000 rupees (\$360).

In September, Apple announced it would start making its iPhone 14 in India. The news was hailed as a win for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which has pushed for ramping up local manufacturing ever since he came to power in 2014.

Apple first began manufacturing from India in 2017 with its iPhone SE and has since continued to assemble a number of iPhone models from the country.

Most of Apple's smartphones and tablets are assembled by contractors with factories in China, but the company started looking at potentially moving some production to Southeast Asia or other places after repeated shutdowns to fight COVID-19 disrupted its global flow of products.

"Big companies got a jolt, they realized they needed a backup strategy outside of China — they couldn't risk another lockdown or any geopolitical rift affecting their business," said Kolla.

Currently, India makes close to 13 million iPhones every year, up from less than 5 million three years ago, according to Counterpoint Research. This is about 6% of iPhones made globally — and only a small slice in comparison to China, which still produces around 90% of them.

Last week, India's Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said the government was in regular touch with Apple to support their business here and that the company had plans to have 25% of their global production come out of India in the next five years.

The challenge for Apple, according to Shah of Counterpoint, is that the raw materials are still coming from outside India so the tech company will need to either find a local supplier or bring their suppliers, based in countries like China, Japan and Taiwan, closer to drive up production.

Still, he's optimistic this target could be met, especially with labor costs being lower in India and the

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 48 of 80

government wooing companies with attractive subsidies to boost local manufacturing.

"For Apple, everything is about timing. They don't enter a market with full flow until they feel confident about their prospects. They can see the opportunity here today — it's a win-win situation," Shah said.

This story corrects the spelling of the Apple CEO's name. It is Tim Cook, not Tim Cooke.

Fox, Dominion reach \$787M settlement over election claims

By DAVID BAUDER, RANDALL CHASE and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Fox News agreed Tuesday to pay Dominion Voting Systems nearly \$800 million to avert a trial in the voting machine company's lawsuit that would have exposed how the network promoted lies about the 2020 presidential election.

The stunning settlement emerged just as opening statements were supposed to begin, abruptly ending a case that had embarrassed Fox News over several months and raised the possibility that network founder Rupert Murdoch and stars such as Tucker Carlson and Sean Hannity would have to testify publicly.

"The truth matters. Lies have consequences," Dominion lawyer Justin Nelson told reporters outside a Delaware courthouse after Superior Court Judge Eric Davis announced the deal.

Outside of the \$787.5 million promised to Colorado-based Dominion, it was unclear what other consequences Fox would face. Fox acknowledged in a statement "the court's rulings finding certain claims about Dominion to be false," but no apology was offered.

"We are hopeful that our decision to resolve this dispute with Dominion amicably, instead of the acrimony of a divisive trial, allows the country to move forward from these issues," Fox said. Its lawyers and representatives offered no other comment or details about the settlement.

Asked by a reporter whether there was "anything to this other than money," Dominion CEO John Poulos did not answer.

The deal is a significant amount of money even for a company the size of Fox. It represents about one-quarter of the \$2.96 billion the company reported earning last year before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization — a figure often used to approximate a company's cash flow.

The settlement also follows a \$965 million judgment issued last year against Alex Jones by a Connecticut jury for spreading false conspiracy theories about the Sandy Hook school massacre.

Coupled with other lawsuits in the pipeline, the agreement shows there is a real financial risk for conservative media that traffic in conspiracy theories. What remains unknown is how much of a deterrent this will be. Even as the Dominion case loomed this spring, Fox's Tucker Carlson aired his alternate theories about what happened at the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.

Dominion had sued Fox for \$1.6 billion, arguing that the top-rated news outlet damaged the company's reputation by peddling phony conspiracy theories that claimed its equipment switched votes from former President Donald Trump to Democrat Joe Biden. Davis, in an earlier ruling, said it was "CRYSTAL clear" that none of the allegations about Dominion aired on Fox by Trump allies were true.

Dominion set out to prove in the lawsuit that Fox acted with malice in airing allegations that it knew to be false, or with "reckless disregard" for the truth. It presented volumes of internal emails and text messages that showed Fox executives and personalities saying they knew the accusations were untrue, even as the falsehoods were aired on programs hosted by Maria Bartiromo, Lou Dobbs and Jeannine Pirro.

Records released as part of the lawsuit showed that Fox aired the claims in part to win back viewers who were fleeing the network after it correctly called hotly contested Arizona for Democrat Joe Biden on election night. One Fox Corp. vice president called them "MIND BLOWINGLY NUTS."

During a deposition, Murdoch testified that he believed the 2020 election was fair and had not been stolen from Trump.

"Fox knew the truth," Dominion argued in court papers. "It knew the allegations against Dominion were 'outlandish' and 'crazy' and 'ludicrous' and 'nuts.' Yet it used the power and influence of its platform to promote that false story."

Several First Amendment experts said Dominion's case was among the strongest they had ever seen. But

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 49 of 80

there was real doubt about whether Dominion would be able to prove to a jury that people in a decision-making capacity at Fox could be held responsible for the network's actions.

Dominion's Nelson called the settlement "a tremendous victory" and noted that there are six more lawsuits pending regarding election claims.

"We settled because it was about accountability," Nelson said in an interview. "Our goals were to make sure that there was accountability for the lies, and to try to make our client right. And we accomplished both goals."

It's hard to tell what the deal will mean financially for Dominion. The company would not provide its most recent earnings, saying the figures were not public.

In the weeks leading up to the trial, Davis significantly narrowed Fox's potential line of defense, including nixing the network's argument that it was merely airing newsworthy allegations. Newsworthiness is not a defense against defamation, he said.

In a March 31 ruling, he pointedly called out the network for airing falsehoods while noting that bogus election claims still persist more than two years after Trump lost his bid for reelection.

"The statements at issue were dramatically different than the truth," Davis said in that ruling. "In fact, although it cannot be attributed directly to Fox's statements, it is noteworthy that some Americans still believe the election was rigged."

In its defense, Fox said it was obligated to report on a president who claimed that he had been cheated out of reelection.

"We never reported those to be true," Fox lawyer Erin Murphy said. "All we ever did was provide viewers the true fact that these were allegations that were being made."

Dominion had sued both Fox News and its parent, Fox Corp, and said its business had been significantly damaged. Fox said the company grossly overestimated its losses, before agreeing to pay about half of what Dominion had asked for.

In a 1964 case involving The New York Times, the U.S. Supreme Court limited the ability of public figures to sue for defamation. The court ruled that plaintiffs needed to prove that news outlets published or aired false material with "actual malice" — knowing such material was false or acting with a "reckless disregard" for whether or not it was true.

That has provided news organizations with stout protection against libel judgments. Yet the nearly six-decade legal standard has come under attack by some conservatives in recent years, including Trump and Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, who have argued for making it easier to win a libel case.

"The larger importance of the settlement ... is that the high level of protection for news media in a defamation case remains intact for now," said Doreen Weisenhaus, an instructor of media law at Northwestern University.

In documents released in recent months, Fox executives and anchors discussed how not to alienate the audience, many of whom believed Trump's claims of fraud despite no evidence to back them up. Fox's Tucker Carlson suggested a news reporter be fired for tweeting a fact check debunking the fraud claims.

Some of the exhibits were simply embarrassing, such as scornful behind-the-scenes opinions about Trump, whose supporters form the core of the network's viewers. Text exchanges revealed as part of the lawsuit show Carlson declaring, "I hate him passionately," and saying that "we are very, very close to being able to ignore Trump most nights."

Fox News announced the settlement on Neil Cavuto's afternoon news show. "It's a done deal," he said. "It's a settlement and for at least Fox, it appears to be over."

But Fox's legal problems may not be over. It still faces a defamation lawsuit from another voting technology company, Smartmatic. Its lawyer, Erik Connolly, said Tuesday that "Dominion's litigation exposed some of the misconduct and damage caused by Fox's disinformation campaign. Smartmatic will expose the rest."

___ Associated Press writers Jennifer Peltz in New York and Nicholas Riccardi in Denver contributed to this report.

The Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory

coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Planning a trip? Oregon's magic mushroom experiment advances

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Oregon's pioneering experiment with legalized magic mushrooms took a step closer to reality as the first "facilitators" who will accompany clients as they experience the drug received their state licenses, authorities said Tuesday.

Voters approved the regulated use of psilocybin in a 2020 ballot measure, and anticipation has been building over the past 2 1/2 years for the day — expected to come later this year — when people can gain access to the drug that studies indicate has therapeutic value.

Hundreds of people have invested thousands of dollars apiece in this budding industry, and some worry that the rollout is proceeding too slowly.

"We thank you for your dedication to client safety and access as we move closer to opening service centers," Oregon Psilocybin Services Manager Angie Allbee said in a statement Tuesday to three people who received the state's first facilitator licenses.

But to date, no service centers — where customers would access psilocybin in controlled, calm environments with music, eye masks and mats — have been licensed. Nor has any laboratory where the products must be tested for potency. The psilocybin may come in the form of whole dried mushrooms, ground homogenized fungi, extracts and edible products, the Oregon Health Authority says.

Tori Armbrust applied for a license to grow magic mushrooms on Jan. 2, the first day the health authority began accepting applications. In March, she became the first person to receive a manufacturer license. Allbee at the time congratulated Armbrust "for representing women leading the way for the emerging psilocybin ecosystem."

Armbrust paid \$10,000 for the license, which is good for only one year. To renew it, she will have to pay another \$10,000. Between the license fee, renting a space in Portland to grow the mushrooms and setting up utilities and other elements, the 33-year-old said she has already spent about \$25,000 of her life savings.

And she has yet to earn a dime.

She is growing psilocybin mushrooms, with the first harvest expected in a few weeks, but has no one to sell them to because no service centers have been licensed. Even before any of her "psilocybe cubensis" mushrooms can go to a service center, she needs a licensed lab to test them.

"People are under a lot of pressure with all this overhead," Armbrust said in an interview Monday. "It's a lot of money and we have to get it going."

Oregon Psilocybin Services, which is part of the health authority, said Tuesday that it anticipates issuing licenses to service center and lab applicants "in the coming months."

"We're going to have to see how it all plays out," Armbrust said. "This is all new and nobody can say for sure what's going to happen. So, I'm just trying my best to, on my own, grow as much medicine as I can."

About 100 people recently completed a \$7,900, six-month course at a retreat near Portland to learn how to become facilitators and earn a certificate. That enables them to then take a test administered by the health authority to receive facilitator licenses.

As of Tuesday, three manufacturing licenses and three facilitator licenses have been issued.

Oregon Psilocybin Services expects centers to open their doors and licensed facilitators to offer services sometime this fall, said health authority spokesperson Afiq Hisham.

"Many applicants are working through complex issues, such as working with their cities and counties on zoning or ensuring the proposed premises meets requirements," Hisham said. "We are prioritizing applications in the order received and working to provide site inspections for those that are ready."

Restored Tennessee Rep. Pearson charts progressive path

By JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee Rep. Justin Pearson never guessed he'd be expelled for leading a gun control protest on the House floor after a deadly school shooting. Nor did he predict that he'd be propelled into the national spotlight, placing his state at the forefront of the conversation on gun regulations.

Activism had yielded results for years for the 28-year-old son of a preacher and a teacher. At age 15, he prodded a school board to get his Memphis high school more textbooks. After college, he fought a planned oil pipeline through wetlands and poor, predominantly Black neighborhoods in the city's south. The project was canceled in 2021.

The push to boot Pearson and two other Democrats has kept national attention fixed on reliably Republican Tennessee. They hope the pressure from thousands of students, parents and others who have protested at the Capitol for gun control can yield quick change. GOP Gov. Bill Lee has called for legislation to keep firearms away from people who could harm themselves or others. But Republican lawmakers have been noncommittal, and want to adjourn soon, possibly this week.

Meanwhile, it's hard not to look ahead for Tennessee Democrats. The attention has attracted the kind of campaign cash that has eluded them for years.

"I think there's a new awakening that's happening," Pearson told The Associated Press in an interview Monday. "And we're going to be able to consistently build on that, because the issues that we're fighting aren't going away, and the people who are fighting aren't going away, either."

Pearson was expelled for protesting on the House floor alongside a fellow Democratic Black lawmaker, Nashville's Rep. Justin Jones. Rep. Gloria Johnson, who is white, was spared by one vote. Jones and Pearson have since been restored.

Pearson said his activism and oratory came partly "through osmosis" — from his mother, an English teacher, and his father, a preacher — as he "grew up financially poor, but spiritually rich."

He briefly attended school in a wealthy Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C., and realized that, by comparison, the school he attended in Memphis lacked resources. On his return, Pearson said, he held up his mother's bachelor degree and his algebra book before school board officials, asking how students could ever get a degree without enough textbooks. Days later, he showed up at school to more books.

"I remember walking in, and it's just like, 'Oh, so this is change?'" Pearson said. "You take an issue, you raise your voice, you explain the injustice, you fight for it."

Pearson attended Bowdoin College in Maine, then returned to Memphis and helped lead a winning fight against the planned oil pipeline through southwest Tennessee and north Mississippi. The Memphis City Council was considering an ordinance to make it harder for the company to build the pipeline, but no vote occurred before the cancelation.

Republican state lawmakers noticed.

In 2022, they largely stripped the ability of local governments to stop oil and gas pipelines and other fossil fuel infrastructure projects. Pearson, who lobbied against the bill, helped secure some amendments. But he said the GOP's legislative supermajority showed its "punitive" attitude toward left-leaning cities.

"The problem with that entire legislative process was the pipeline was canceled before we passed any laws locally," Pearson said. "And so, it's trying to have an overcorrection to something that wasn't a correction."

Pearson subsequently won a primary election for the seat left open after Rep. Barbara Cooper died. With no general election opponent, local officials installed him early on an interim basis.

Republican legislative leaders chastised the Democrats targeted for removal for breaches of decorum and rules — House Majority Leader William Lamberth said Thursday that "you can't step into the well, whip out a bullhorn and start yelling at folks."

Pearson said the move represented more than a miscalculation.

"I think the Republican Party of Tennessee was hoping that expelling us would somehow expel our fight, and they were wrong," Pearson said. "It wasn't just a miscalculation. It was the result of anti-democratic behavior that has become aligned to this Republican Party."

A day after the expulsions, Democratic U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy from Connecticut said he had helped to raise \$425,000 for Pearson and Jones. It's unclear how high the amount has grown nearly two weeks later.

Tennessee's Democratic Party on Friday told prospective donors it had raised almost \$400,000 in one week.

Sitting lawmakers can't take campaign cash during legislative sessions, but Pearson and Jones were able to go on a dayslong fundraising spree at the height of their popularity because Republican lawmakers kicked them out. It's unclear how much they raised.

Pearson said the wave of attention and campaign donations presents "a responsibility, an obligation and an opportunity."

The Republican supermajority in the House has allowed the GOP to waive rules to fast-track certain bills, cut off debates and more. Johnson, the third lawmaker targeted for expulsion, said Democrats must try to elect enough progressive lawmakers to affect change.

"We've got to get 10 seats," Johnson told the AP last week. "We need to get 10 folks who are going to speak up, and stand up, and not bow down to the supermajority."

Democrats have struggled to recalibrate since Phil Bredesen lost to Republican U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn in 2018 by nearly 11 percentage points, despite being a popular, moderate former governor. Only Nashville-Davidson County and Memphis' Shelby County voted against Gov. Lee's 2022 reelection.

Pearson wants to see more organizations and resources in the state focused on preventing gun violence and boosting other progressive issues, along with the "political activation" of young people.

"I'm hopeful that we will be able to use resources to keep our fight going and to get progressive voices in the state of Tennessee and the state Legislature," Pearson said, "because there are a lot of people in our communities who can speak no more because they suffered from the effects of gun violence."

Oklahoma sheriff says recording of killing talk was illegal

By KEN MILLER and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

An Oklahoma sheriff's office says a newspaper's audio recording in which the sheriff and other county officials are reportedly heard discussing killing two journalists and hanging Black people was illegal and predicted felony charges will be filed.

A post on the sheriff's office Facebook page — the agency's first public comment since the comments by Sheriff Kevin Clardy and others were reported by the McCurtain Gazette-News — does not address the recorded discussion, but calls the situation "complex" and one "we regret having to address."

The threatening comments by the officials that were recorded have sparked outrage and protests. Oklahoma's GOP Gov. Kevin Stitt and state Rep. Eddy Dempsey, a Republican who represents the area, have called for Clardy and others to resign. NAACP leaders in Oklahoma also called for the FBI and the Department of Justice to investigate.

The sheriff's statement calls the past 72 hours "amongst the most difficult and disruptive in recent memory" and says the recording was altered and involves many victims.

"There is and has been an ongoing investigation into multiple, significant violation(s) of the Oklahoma Security of Communications Act ... which states that it is illegal to secretly record a conversation in which you are not involved and do not have the consent of at least one of the involved parties," according to the statement.

Joey Senat, a journalism professor at Oklahoma State University, said under Oklahoma law, the recording would be legal if it were obtained in a place where the officials being recorded did not have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

Bruce Willingham, the longtime publisher of the McCurtain Gazette-News, said the recording was made March 6 when he left a voice-activated recorder inside the room after a county commissioner's meeting because he suspected the group was continuing to conduct county business after the meeting had ended in violation of the state's Open Meeting Act.

Willingham said he twice spoke with his attorneys to be sure he was doing nothing illegal.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 53 of 80

The newspaper released portions of the recording in which Clardy, sheriff's Capt. Alicia Manning and District 2 County Commissioner Mark Jennings appear to discuss Bruce and Chris Willingham, a reporter for the newspaper who is Bruce Willingham's son. Jennings tells Clardy and Manning "I know where two deep holes are dug if you ever need them," and the sheriff responded, "I've got an excavator."

Jennings also reportedly says he's known "two or three hit men" in Louisiana, adding "they're very quiet guys."

In the recording, Jennings also appears to complain about not being able to hang Black people, saying: "They got more rights than we got."

Jail Administrator Larry Hendrix was also present during the conversation.

The Associated Press could not immediately verify the authenticity of the recording. None of the four have returned telephone calls or emails from The Associated Press.

Glenn Cook, the executive editor of the Las Vegas Review-Journal, where reporter Jeff German was stabbed to death in September allegedly by an elected official the reporter was investigating, said he was "chilled to the bone" after learning about the Oklahoma case.

"What's almost as troubling as the contents of the recording is the complete absence of shame," Cook said of the sheriff's office's response to the incident. "Sadly, the willingness of government to protect itself at all costs really never surprises me, but in this particular case the kind of digging in that we're seeing reflects incredibly poorly on the people of Oklahoma."

A spokesperson for the FBI's office in Oklahoma City declined to comment on the case. Phil Bacharach, a spokesperson for Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond, said the agency had received an audio recording and is investigating the incident, but declined to comment further.

Bruce Willingham said he believes the local officials were upset about "stories we've run that cast the sheriff's office in an unfavorable light," including the death of Bobby Barrick, a Broken Bow, Oklahoma, man who died at a hospital in March 2022 after McCurtain County deputies shot him with a stun gun. The newspaper has filed a lawsuit against the sheriff's office seeking body camera footage and other records connected to Barrick's death.

Separately, Chris Willingham has filed a federal lawsuit against the sheriff's office, Clardy, Manning and the Board of County Commissioners alleging Manning slandered him after he wrote an eight-part series of articles detailing problems inside the sheriff's office. The lawsuit claims after the first few articles were published, Clardy and Manning began investigating which office employees were speaking to the newspaper and were attempting to get a search warrant for Willingham's phone.

The lawsuit, which was filed on the same day the recording was made, alleges that after the series was published, Manning told a third party during a teleconference that Chris Willingham exchanged marijuana for pornographic images of children from a man who had been arrested on child pornography charges.

"Manning made these (and other) false statements about Willingham in retaliation for articles he wrote about the (sheriff's office) as a reporter for the McCurtain Gazette and to destroy his credibility as a reporter and journalist," the lawsuit states.

More than 100 people gathered outside the McCurtain County Courthouse in Idabel on Monday, with many of them calling for the sheriff and other county officials to resign.

On Tuesday, the Oklahoma Sheriff's Association, a voluntary membership organization and not a regulatory agency, held an emergency meeting of its board. It voted unanimously to suspend Clardy, Manning and Hendrix from the association.

The sheriff's office statement said there have been "a large number of threats of violence including death threats" against unspecified county employees, officials, their families and friends since the conversation was first reported.

The statement said the sheriff's office will issue news releases until its investigation concludes "and findings are forwarded to the appropriate authorities for felony charges to be filed on those involved."

The incident in Oklahoma follows the February killing of a television news reporter who was shot and killed and a cameraman wounded in Florida while filming a story about a homicide that happened earlier

that day.

Coroner: Aaron Carter drowned in tub from drug, inhalant

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Singer and rapper Aaron Carter accidentally drowned in his bathtub as a result of sedatives he'd taken and gas used in spray cleaners he had inhaled, a coroner's report said Tuesday.

Carter, the younger brother of the Backstreet Boys' Nick Carter, was found submerged and dead at age 34 in the bathtub of his home in Lancaster, California, on Nov. 5, the autopsy report from the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner-Coroner said.

Sheriff's deputies had been the last people to see Carter alive when they visited his house at 2 a.m. on Nov. 4 for a welfare check after he had been seen and heard "huffing" an inhalant on an Instagram live video, according to a police report included in the autopsy findings. He asked the deputies to leave, and they did.

The autopsy found that the sedative alprazolam, often sold under the brand name Xanax, was found in his system, as was the compressed gas difluoroethane, which the report says is "a gas commonly used as a propellant in air spray cleaners," which "can induce feelings of euphoria when inhaled."

The two substances incapacitated him in the tub, and caused the drowning, the report said.

Later in the evening, after deputies checked on Carter, he missed an appointment with a drug counselor, the police report said.

The following day, a person whom authorities called a house sitter at the time but whom the report identifies in quotes as a "housekeeper" came to Carter's house to offer him coffee. She let herself in when she got no response and heard his dogs barking, according to the report.

The woman found him submerged, wearing a T-shirt and necklace, in a Jacuzzi-style tub with the jets running, and called 911. The operator told her to pull him out and perform CPR, according to the report. Paramedics immediately declared him dead when they arrived.

Investigators found several prescription bottles and multiple scattered cans of an electronic duster that he used for inhaling.

The report referred to Carter as "a celebrity with a known history of substance abuse" who had "multiple interactions with local police relating to the substance abuse." It cited a particular history of inhalant abuse, and a recent relapse.

Carter began performing as a child in the 1990s, opening for acts including his brother's boy band and Britney Spears. His career peak came in 2000 with the triple-platinum album "Aaron's Party (Come Get It)," which produced hit singles including the title song and "I Want Candy."

He also acted on television shows including "Lizzie McGuire," and appeared on the family reality show "House of Carters" and "Dancing With the Stars."

Carter for years had been open about his substance abuse struggles, detailing his issues with inhalants in a 2019 episode of the talk show "The Doctors." He also said in the interview that he was taking medications for acute anxiety and bipolar disorder.

Nick Carter said after his younger brother's death that "I have always held onto the hope that he would somehow, someday want to walk a healthy path and eventually find the help that he so desperately needed."

Follow AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/andyjamesdalton>

Can a doorbell ring justify a 'stand your ground' shooting?

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Andrew Lester had already gone to bed when the doorbell rang a little before 10 p.m. He got up, grabbed a gun and went to check it out. Seeing a Black male appearing to pull the handle of the front door, police say the 84-year-old white man opened fire. No questions asked.

Lester told police he believed someone was attempting to break into his house.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 55 of 80

That belief — though wrong — could become a defense as Lester faces charges of first-degree assault and armed criminal action for shooting 16-year-old Ralph Yarl, an honor student who went to the wrong Kansas City address while attempting to pick up his younger siblings.

The case, which has stirred outrage across the country, could shine a light on one of the most common self-defense policies in the U.S — the right to protect yourself in your home. Most states have some version of a “castle doctrine,” either by law or court precedent, that says residents don’t have to retreat when threatened in their homes but instead can respond with physical force.

Missouri is one of about 30 states that also have “stand your ground” laws, which provide even broader self-defense rights regardless of the location.

MISSOURI’S SELF-DEFENSE LAW

A 2007 Missouri law allows people to use deadly force under certain circumstances, including against someone who “attempts to unlawfully enter a dwelling, residence or vehicle” that is occupied. The legislation, backed by the National Rifle Association, was passed overwhelmingly by the Republican-led Legislature.

Then-Gov. Matt Blunt, a Republican, enacted the law with fanfare by flying around the state to promote it.

The law “ensures law-abiding Missourians will not be punished when they use force to defend themselves and their family from attacks in their own home or vehicle,” Blunt said in a statement at the time.

In 2016, Missouri lawmakers overrode the veto of then-Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, to expand the castle doctrine into a broader stand your ground law — applying the no-retreat self-defense to people in “any other location such person has the right to be.”

Missouri’s law “provides wide latitude for people to use lethal force,” said Robert Spitzer, a professor emeritus of political science at the State University of New York, Cortland, whose research focuses on gun policy and politics and who wrote the book “Guns Across America: Reconciling Gun Rules and Rights.”

Though no shots were fired, Missouri’s self-defense laws also were in the spotlight in 2020 when St. Louis attorneys Mark and Patricia McCloskey waved guns at Black Lives Matter protesters passing by their home. The McCloskeys eventually pleaded guilty to misdemeanors, but Republican Gov. Mike Parson pardoned them.

Last year, Missouri lawmakers considered legislation that would have presumed shooters claiming self-defense were acting reasonably — a measure dubbed the Make Murder Legal Act by a prosecutor opposing it. The bill failed.

A DOORBELL RING LEADS TO SHOTS

Lester turned himself in to authorities Tuesday, a day after being charged for shooting Yarl. Lester has no listed attorney, and his legal defense is not clear. But a document filed by police in support of charging Lester indicates that Lester thought he faced a threat.

“Lester stated he opened the interior door, and saw a black male approximately 6 feet tall pulling on the exterior storm door handle. He stated he believed someone was attempting to break into the house, and shot twice within a few seconds of opening the door,” according to the police statement. Lester told police he was “scared to death.”

There apparently were no words exchanged before the shooting. Yarl told police he pressed the doorbell but didn’t pull on the door. He said the man shot him in the head, then after he fell to the ground, shot him a second time in the arm. As Yarl got up to run, the man said, “Don’t come around here,” according to the police report.

Some legal experts said Tuesday that although Lester could try to use the castle doctrine as a defense, prosecutors could counter that he did not have reasonable grounds to believe Yarl was breaking into his house.

Nothing in the law “allows someone to shoot first and ask questions later when someone innocently rings a doorbell. That’s something that UPS does on a daily basis, delivery drivers, children selling Girl Scout cookies,” said Ari Freilich, an attorney and state policy director with the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

“Our laws can’t be structured in a way that allow (guns) to be used that cavalierly,” Freilich added.

OTHER SIMILAR CASES

A stand your ground law had been in effect in Florida for over six years when it was elevated to national attention by the 2012 shooting death of Trayvon Martin, a Black 17-year-old. George Zimmerman, a self-appointed neighborhood watchman who thought Martin looked suspicious, was acquitted after a trial in which his attorneys essentially used the law as a defense.

Similar laws have proliferated in states during the past two decades, and shootings with similarly disputable self-defense assertions have continued to occur. Unlike Zimmerman, some others have been convicted.

Attorneys used a self-defense argument in the trial of Travis McMichael, his father Greg McMichael and neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan for the 2020 shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, which also has a stand your ground law. The white men claimed they chased Arbery, a Black man, because they thought he was a burglar. Attorneys argued that Travis McMichael raised a gun at Arbery hoping to de-escalate the situation but shot Arbery when he turned toward him as if to fight. All three were convicted of murder.

On Saturday, just two days after Yarl was shot, a woman looking for a friend's house in upstate New York was fatally shot after the car in which she riding mistakenly pulled into the wrong driveway. Kaylin Gillis, 20, was traveling through the rural town of Hebron when homeowner, Kevin Monahan, 65, came out onto his porch and fired two shots, the local sheriff's office said. Monahan has been charged with second-degree murder. New York doesn't have a "stand your ground" law.

Associated Press writer Heather Hollingsworth contributed to this report from Mission, Kansas.

Neighbor: Man in wrong-turn shooting disliked trespassers

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

When Kaylin Gillis and her friends took a wrong turn into an upstate New York driveway last weekend, they couldn't have known the property was owned by a man who, according to a neighbor, had grown increasingly bitter over the years at people driving onto his land by mistake.

This time, the error proved fatal. The Hebron landowner, Kevin Monahan, opened fire Saturday night, killing 20-year-old Gillis as she and her friends drove away after turning around in the long dirt driveway, Washington County Sheriff Jeffrey Murphy said.

Monahan, 65, was arrested on a second-degree murder charge and remains detained pending a bond hearing.

One of his neighbors, Adam Matthews, who runs an auto repair shop in nearby Salem, said Monahan had become more and more upset in recent years at people making wrong turns into his driveway.

"I'm just a bit overwhelmed," Matthews said in a phone interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday after speaking to other news outlets. "It is a tragic event."

Murphy said Gillis and her friends got lost while going to another friend's nearby house. They were driving two cars and a motorcycle when they turned into Monahan's driveway. As they realized the mistake and turned around, Monahan fired two gunshots at them as they drove away, Murphy said.

One of the bullets struck the rear of the car Gillis was in and hit her, causing a fatal injury, Murphy said. Gillis' father, Andrew Gillis, said in a Facebook post Tuesday that his family is devastated.

"Kaylin was a kind, beautiful soul and a ray of light to anyone who was lucky enough to know her," the post said. "She was just beginning to find her way in the world with kindness, humor, and love. ... She was taken from us far too soon."

Andrew Gillis wrote that his daughter was an honors student and talented artist who was looking forward to attending college in Florida with dreams of becoming a marine biologist.

"Our family will never be the same but we will be guided by Kaylin's positivity, optimism, and joy as we learn to live with her loss," he wrote.

Monahan's lawyer, meanwhile, spoke publicly for the first time Tuesday, calling the sheriff's version of the events a "superficial, simplistic" account of what actually happened.

The attorney, Kurt Mausert, declined to discuss details of the shooting, citing the pending criminal case.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 57 of 80

"I believe we have series of mistakes that led to a tragedy," he said in a phone interview. "But I don't believe my client is a villain. But not every case with a tragedy has a villain, and I think this is one of them."

The sheriff described Monahan as uncooperative, saying he initially refused to come out of the house before peacefully surrendering after about an hour.

Mausert disputed there was any standoff, saying he was on the phone with his client as law enforcement officers were at Monahan's door. He said Monahan was talking to police outside his door and officials would not say why they were there and did not have an arrest warrant. The lawyer said Monahan was exercising his right to remain silent when he declined to talk to police about what happened.

When police officials told the lawyer over the phone that someone had died, Mausert said he helped arrange the peaceful surrender.

"They told me there was a fatality, then it started to make sense to me," he said. "At that point, it's dangerous for everybody. My goal at that point was to facilitate my client turning himself in to the police safely."

As Gillis' family mourned Tuesday, officials at the school system she attended held a news conference to express their sadness about her death. Gillis graduated in 2021 from Schuylerville High School, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Monahan's home in Hebron. Her two younger sisters are in grades seven and nine in Schuylerville.

"We have very very close-knit community," said Katie Elsworth, the middle school principal. "And we say to them upon graduation that we will always be your school family. We will always be here to support you and take care of you and love you. And when something happens to one of students who graduated, it hurts our hearts just as much as when they're here."

Schuylerville High School Principal James Ducharme said Gillis had an infectious smile.

"Her smile would light up a room," he said. "Her personality would light up any classroom that she walked into or any club activity that she participated in."

School officials said Gillis was on the competition cheerleading team in high school for two seasons, took part in Future Farmers of America programs and was an avid artist.

A celebration of Gillis' life was scheduled for Friday in Schuylerville.

Southwest passengers face delays after nationwide grounding

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

DALLAS (AP) — Southwest Airlines planes were briefly grounded nationwide Tuesday for what the airline called an intermittent technology issue, leading to more than 2,200 delayed flights just four months after the carrier suffered a much bigger meltdown over the Christmas travel rush.

The hold on departures was lifted by mid-morning Eastern time, according to Southwest and the Federal Aviation Administration, but not before traffic at airports from Denver to New York City backed up.

"Southwest has resumed operations after temporarily pausing flight activity this morning to work through data connection issues resulting from a firewall failure," the Dallas-based airline said in a prepared statement. "Early this morning, a vendor-supplied firewall went down and connection to some operational data was unexpectedly lost."

Southwest urged customers to check on their flight status "and explore self-service options" for travel as the airline worked on restoring its operation.

By late afternoon on the East Coast, more than half of all Southwest flights were delayed, and the airline accounted for half of all delays nationwide. On the positive side, Southwest had only about a dozen flights canceled, roughly in line with other major airlines, according to FlightAware.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg retweeted an FAA post about the ground stop, adding, "We are here to ensure passengers have strong protections when airline failures like this affect their plans." He referred travelers to a Transportation Department checklist of passenger rights, and his press secretary noted that "no other airlines experienced disruptions."

Tuesday's delays added to the picture of an airline that has struggled more than most with technology issues.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 58 of 80

"It was a 17-minute ground stop. This will have no long-lasting affect on Southwest's reputation," said Henry Harteveltdt, a travel analyst with Atmosphere Research Group. "What matters now for Southwest is getting to the cause and doing all it can to ensure incidents like this don't occur again."

Rob Britton, a former American Airlines executive who teaches crisis management at Georgetown University, said the damage from Tuesday's incident will be minor but will add to the erosion of Southwest's image. He said Southwest has underinvested in technology while growing rapidly, and it suffers from an "insular culture" that "keeps them from looking outside for solutions."

In December, Southwest canceled nearly 17,000 flights in a 10-day stretch around Christmas — wrecking holiday travel plans for well over 2 million people — when a winter storm shut down its operations in Denver and Chicago and the airline's system for rescheduling pilots and flight attendants was overwhelmed.

Those cancellations cost the airline more than \$1 billion and led to an ongoing Transportation Department investigation and a congressional hearing during which lawmakers complained that Southwest provided little or no help to stranded travelers.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., who led that hearing, said Tuesday's breakdown "is another demonstration that Southwest Airlines needs to upgrade their systems and stop the negative impacts to individual travelers."

The airline's unions have said they warned management about problems with the crew-scheduling system after a previous meltdown in October 2021.

CEO Robert Jordan has embarked on a campaign to repair the airline's damaged reputation. Southwest said last month it would add deicing equipment and increase staffing during winter weather that is cold enough to limit the amount of time that ground workers can stay outside.

Shares of Southwest Airlines Co. fell Tuesday nearly 1% while its closest rivals — American, Delta and United — all gained at least 1.5%.

Republicans object to replacing Feinstein on Judiciary panel

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans blocked a Democratic request to temporarily replace California Sen. Dianne Feinstein on the Senate Judiciary Committee Tuesday, leaving Democrats with few options for moving some of President Joe Biden's stalled judicial nominees.

South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, objected to a resolution offered by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer that would have allowed another senator to take Feinstein's place on the panel while the Democrat recuperates from a case of shingles. Republicans have argued that Democrats only want a stand-in to push through the most partisan judges, noting that many of Biden's nominees have bipartisan support and can move to the Senate floor for a vote.

As he objected, Graham said Democrats were trying to "change the numbers on the committee in a way that I think would be harmful to Senate, and to pass out a handful of judges that I think should never be on the bench."

Democrats could still hold a roll call vote on the request. But with what appears to be unified GOP opposition to the move, it would likely be rejected.

Feinstein, 89, made the unusual request last week after pressure from Democrats who are concerned about the judicial nominees and amid some calls for her resignation. She has been absent from the Senate since February and has given no date for a return, creating a headache for Democrats who are hoping to use their majority to confirm as many of President Joe Biden's judicial nominees as possible.

Ahead of the vote, Schumer said the replacement for Feinstein would be Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin, a lawyer and third-term senator from Maryland. Schumer would not answer questions about whether he thinks Feinstein should consider resigning, but said he had spoken to Feinstein and "she and I are both very hopeful that she will return soon."

Earlier Tuesday, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell called the effort to place a substitute on the panel as Feinstein recovers from a case of shingles "an extremely unusual" request with no known

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 59 of 80

precedent.

"Let's be clear," said McConnell in remarks on the Senate floor. "Senate Republicans will not take part in sidelining a temporarily absent colleague off a committee just so Democrats can force through their very worst nominees."

McConnell's comments came after several Republican senators said on Monday that they wouldn't support the Democratic plan — both because they don't want to help Democrats confirm liberal judges and because they don't think senators should try to push out one of their own.

Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Chuck Grassley of Iowa said they think Democrats are pressuring Feinstein unfairly.

Collins said that she and Feinstein are good friends, and she thinks there has been a "concerted campaign" to push her off the judiciary committee. "I will have no part of that," Collins said.

Feinstein has come under increasing pressure to resign or step down from her duties. While she has defended her effectiveness, she has faced questions in recent years about her cognitive health and memory, and has appeared increasingly frail.

In 2020, she said she would not serve as the top Democrat on the judiciary panel after criticism from liberals about her handling of Justice Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation. Earlier this year, she said she would not serve as the Senate president pro tempore, or the most senior member of the majority party, even though she was in line to do so. The president pro tempore opens the Senate every day and holds other ceremonial duties.

Grassley, a longtime member of the panel who is the same age as Feinstein, chastised Democrats for denying Feinstein the opportunity to become chairman of the committee and trying to force her out of office "because she's old."

"I don't intend to give credence to that sort of anti-human treatment," Grassley said.

If Feinstein were to resign immediately, the process would be much easier for Democrats, since California Gov. Gavin Newsom would appoint a replacement. The Senate regularly approves committee assignments for new senators after their predecessors have resigned or died. But a temporary replacement due to illness is a rare, if not unprecedented, request.

Some Democrats have called for her full resignation. Her statement asking for a temporary substitute came shortly after Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., called on her to resign from the Senate, saying it is "unacceptable" for her to miss votes to confirm judges who could be weighing in on abortion rights, a key Democratic priority.

Another member of the California delegation, Democratic Rep. Pete Aguilar, said Tuesday that Feinstein is "a legend in California politics and a legend in the Senate chamber" but that her vote will be needed as Congress tries to figure out how to raise the debt ceiling this year.

"I will say that our expectation as House Democrats is that every senator is going to need to participate," he said, adding that "she should get to choose that timeline."

Asked if Feinstein should resign, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said Monday, "I'm not going to push her into any other decision." Durbin had previously expressed frustration about his committee's stalled nominees.

Durbin appealed to his Republican colleagues to "show a little kindness and caring for their colleague."

If the Senate votes to replace her on the panel, "I think we can take care of this issue, do it very quickly," Durbin said. "I hope we can find 10 Republicans who will join us in that effort."

Associated Press writer Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Putin, Zelenskyy rally troops with war poised for new phase

By ADAM PEMBLE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin visited command posts of his forces fighting in Ukraine for the second time in two months, officials said Tuesday, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made his latest trip near the front line.

The visits — on different days and in different provinces — sought to stiffen the resolve of soldiers as the war approaches its 14th month and as Kyiv readies a possible counteroffensive with Western-supplied weapons.

Some of the most significant of those weapons appeared to have recently arrived in Ukraine. Germany's official federal government website on Tuesday listed a Patriot surface-to-air guided missile system as among the military items delivered within the past week to Ukraine.

Ukraine has been pressing for Patriots and other air defense systems from its allies for months, and Germany's appeared to be the first to have arrived. Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat declined to confirm Tuesday that a Patriot is in Ukraine, local media outlet RBC-Ukraine reported, while stating that receiving the missiles would be a landmark event, allowing Ukrainians to knock down Russian targets at a greater distance.

Elsewhere, Kremlin video showed Putin arriving by helicopter at the command post of Russian forces in southern Ukraine's Kherson province, then flying to the headquarters of the Russian National Guard in Luhansk province, in the country's east. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the visits took place Monday.

Dressed in a dark suit, Putin attended briefings with his military brass on both of his stops. The locations of the military headquarters weren't disclosed, making it impossible to assess how close they were to the front line. Nor was it possible independently to verify the video's authenticity.

On Tuesday, Zelenskyy made his latest trip to visit units in Avdiivka, an eastern city in Donetsk province where fierce battles are taking place. He heard first-hand reports about fighting and handed out awards.

Zelenskyy's visits to areas feeling the brunt of Russia's full-scale invasion gathered pace last month as he shuttled across the country, often by train. As with Putin, the Ukrainian president's wartime trips usually aren't publicized until afterward.

While official coverage of Putin's trip showed him in mostly formal and ceremonious settings, Zelenskyy's office issued photos showing the Ukrainian president taking selfies with soldiers, eating cake with them and drinking out of paper cups.

Russia's war in Ukraine has become largely deadlocked, with heavy fighting in the east, particularly around the Donetsk province city of Bakhmut, which for 8½ months has seen the longest and bloodiest battle so far.

Russia illegally annexed Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia provinces in September, following local referendums that Ukraine and the West denounced as shams. Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak was scathing in his criticism of Putin's trip, accusing him of "degradation" and being the author of "mass murders" in the war.

Large parts of Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, as well as some areas of Luhansk province, have remained under Ukrainian control. In November, Russian forces ceded territory in Kherson province, including the region's namesake capital.

In a related development, the Moscow-appointed governor of the occupied part of Donetsk province, Denis Pushilin, went to the Belarus capital of Minsk and won pledges of support from President Alexander Lukashenko, a Putin ally.

"The Kremlin forces Minsk to get involved in the war more actively in order to pressure Ukraine," Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich said in a telephone interview. "It is clear that Pushilin's visit to Minsk has been synchronized with Putin's trip to the occupied Ukrainian regions and aims to show that the Belarusian threat hasn't gone away."

During his visits, Putin congratulated the military divisions on Orthodox Easter, which was celebrated Sunday, and presented them with icons. Speaking to senior officers at the Kherson headquarters, Putin handed them a copy of an Orthodox icon he said belonged to a 19th century Russian general.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 61 of 80

The senior officers present at the meetings reflected which ones were currently in favor with Putin. Col. Gen. Mikhail Teplinsky, the chief of Russia's airborne troops, was among the top generals at the Kherson base.

Teplinsky, a career officer who rose from lieutenant to become chief of the elite military branch, is known for being popular with his troops. Last fall, however, he was temporarily relieved of his position amid a spat with the military brass. He was restored to the job this year, and his meeting with Putin indicated he was back in favor.

A senior officer who greeted Putin in the Luhansk region, Col. Gen. Alexander Lapin, also was relieved of his duties as commanding officer in northeastern Ukraine after he was blamed for a hasty Russian pullback from parts of Kharkiv province in the face of a Ukrainian counteroffensive in September. Lapin was later named as chief of staff of the ground forces, and his meeting with Putin signaled he had the president's trust.

Putin's and Pushilin's trips came as Ukraine is preparing a new counteroffensive to reclaim occupied territories, possibly using the newly arrived Patriot.

In addition to Germany, the United States and Netherlands have pledged to provide Patriots, and a group of 65 Ukrainian soldiers trained in Oklahoma last month on how to use them.

The Patriot is a surface-to-air guided missile system first deployed in the 1980s that can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles. A Patriot missile battery typically includes six mobile launchers, a mobile radar, a power generator and an engagement control center. Zelenskyy has said Ukraine needs at least 20 Patriot batteries.

Ukrainian officials have said they're depleting Russian forces in eastern Ukraine while preparing for a counteroffensive.

Meanwhile, at least three civilians were killed and 11 wounded in Ukraine between Monday and Tuesday, according to Zelenskyy's office. Most of the casualties occurred in the Donbas, the eastern region made up of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces, the office said. Six people were wounded in artillery fire in the city of Kherson.

In another in a series of possible cross-border attacks into Russia, a drone a Russian official said was sent from Ukraine hit a military office in the Bryansk town of Novozybkov. Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said on Telegram that the building was damaged and no one was hurt. Ukrainian officials, in keeping with past practice, didn't comment on the incident.

Associated Press Writer Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, and Hanna Arhirova in Kyiv contributed.

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

Netflix to bring down the curtain on its DVD-by-mail service

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Netflix is poised to shut down the DVD-by-mail rental service that set the stage for its trailblazing video streaming service, ending an era that began a quarter century ago when delivering discs through the mail was considered a revolutionary concept.

The DVD service, which still delivers films and TV shows in the red-and-white envelopes that once served as Netflix's emblem, plans to mail its final discs on Sept. 29.

Netflix ended March with 232.5 million worldwide subscribers to its video streaming service, but it stopped disclosing how many people still pay for DVD-by-mail delivery years ago as that part of its business steadily shrank. The DVD service generated \$145.7 million in revenue last year, which translated into somewhere between 1.1 million and 1.3 million subscribers, based on the average prices paid by customers.

The growth of Netflix's video streaming service has been slowing down over the past year, prompting management to put more emphasis on boosting profits. That focus may have also contributed to the decision to close an operation that was becoming a financial drain.

But the DVD service was once Netflix's biggest money maker.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 62 of 80

Shortly before Netflix broke it off from video streaming in 2011, the DVD-by-mail service boasted more than 16 million subscribers. That number has steadily dwindled and the service's eventual demise became apparent as the idea of waiting for the U.S. Postal Service to deliver entertainment became woefully outdated.

But the DVD-by-mail service still has die-hard fans who continue to subscribe because they treasure finding obscure movies that are aren't widely available on video streaming. Many subscribers still wax nostalgic about opening their mailbox and seeing the familiar red-and-white envelopes awaiting them instead of junk mail and a stack of bills.

"Those iconic red envelopes changed the way people watched shows and movies at home — and they paved the way for the shift to streaming," Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos wrote in a blog post about the DVD service's forthcoming shutdown.

The service's history dates back to 1997 when Netflix co-founder Marc Randolph went to a post office in Santa Cruz, California, to mail a Patsy Cline compact disc to his friend and fellow co-founder Reed Hastings. Randolph, Netflix's original CEO, wanted to test whether a disc could be delivered through the U.S. Postal Service without being damaged, hoping eventually to do the same thing with the still-new format that became the DVD.

The Patsy Cline CD arrived at Hastings' home unblemished, prompting the duo in 1998 to launch a DVD-by-mail rental website that they always knew would be supplanted by even more convenient technology.

"It was planned obsolescence, but our bet was that it would take longer for it to happen than most people thought at the time," Randolph said in an interview with The Associated Press last year across the street from the Santa Cruz post office where he mailed the Patsy Cline CD. Hastings replaced Randolph as Netflix's CEO a few years after its inception, a job he didn't relinquish until stepping down in January.

With just a little over five months of life remaining, the DVD service has shipped more than 5 billion discs across the U.S. — the only country in which it ever operated. Its ending echoes the downfall of the thousands of Blockbuster video rental stores that closed because they couldn't counter the threat posed by Netflix's DVD-by-mail alternative.

Even subscribers who remain loyal to the DVD service could see the end coming as they noticed the shrinking selection in a library that once boasted more than 100,000 titles. Some customers also have reported having to wait longer for discs to be delivered as Netflix closed dozens of DVD distribution centers with the shift to streaming.

"Our goal has always been to provide the best service for our members but as the business continues to shrink that's going to become increasingly difficult," Sarandos acknowledged in his blog post.

Netflix rebranded the rental service as DVD.com — a prosaic name that was settled upon after Hastings floated the idea of calling it Qwikster, an idea that was widely ridiculed. The DVD service has been operating from a non-descript office in Fremont, California, located about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from Netflix's sleek campus in Los Gatos, California.

Iowa's Senate advances bill to loosen child labor laws

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Lawmakers in Iowa's Senate passed a controversial bill Tuesday that would allow minors to work longer hours and work in currently banned roles, like serving alcohol at restaurants, the Des Moines Register reported.

Supporters of the bill — mainly Republicans — said it would give children valuable opportunities to work and get paid, whereas opponents — largely Democrats — said it would harm children.

Although two Republicans defied their party and voted against the bill with Democrats, the measure still passed 32-17 in the GOP-controlled Senate. The bill requires approval from the Republican-controlled House and from Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds to become law.

The bill would allow kids under 16 to work up to six hours a day, which is two more hours than currently allowed for that age group. It would also allow 16- and 17-year-olds to serve alcohol at restaurants, with written permission from their parent or guardian.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 63 of 80

"Ultimately, parents and kids will decide if they want to work or not," Reynolds has said favorably about the bill. "It teaches the kids a lot. And if they have the time to do it and they want to earn some additional money, I don't think we should discourage that."

The U.S. Department of Labor's top lawyer, Seema Nanda, disagreed, saying it is "irresponsible for states to consider loosening child labor protections."

Democrats and labor unions echoed that sentiment, saying the bill would increase the chance of workplace accidents and injuries among youth.

The Biden administration this month urged U.S. companies to make sure they aren't illegally hiring children to perform dangerous jobs, after an investigation found more than 100 kids working overnight and handling hazardous equipment — like skull splitters and bone saws — for a company that cleans slaughterhouses across the country.

The Labor Department says it has more than 600 child labor investigations underway, and officials are concerned about the exploitation of children, particularly migrants who may not even have a parent in the United States.

US charges 4 Americans, 3 Russians in election discord case

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Four Americans affiliated with a Black empowerment and political organization have been charged along with three Russians with conspiring to covertly sow discord in U.S. society, spread Russian propaganda and interfere illegally in U.S. elections, according to an indictment unsealed Tuesday.

The U.S. citizens and two Russians were added to an existing case in Tampa, Florida, federal court involving Aleksandr Ionov, described by prosecutors as the founder of a Moscow-based organization funded by the Russian government to carry out a clandestine influence campaign in the U.S.

The four Americans are all part of the African People's Socialist Party and Uhuru Movement, which has locations in St. Petersburg, Florida, and St. Louis. Among those charged is Omali Yeshitela, chairman of the U.S.-based organization — which was raided by the FBI last summer when Ionov was originally charged.

"Russia's foreign intelligence service allegedly weaponized our First Amendment rights — freedoms Russia denies to its own citizens — to divide Americans and interfere in elections in the United States," said Assistant Attorney General Matthew Olsen of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

"The department will not hesitate to expose and prosecute those who sow discord and corrupt U.S. elections in service of hostile foreign interests, regardless of whether the culprits are U.S. citizens or foreign individuals abroad," Olsen said in a news release.

Yeshitela and three other U.S. citizens — Penny Joanne Hess, Jesse Nevel and Augustus C. Romain Jr — are charged with conspiracy to defraud the U.S. Hess, Yeshitela and Nevel are also charged with impersonating agents of a foreign government. Ionov and the other two Russians, who remain in their country, face the fraud conspiracy charge.

Court records did not list attorneys for any of the seven defendants, and it wasn't immediately clear if they have been arrested. An email seeking comment was sent to the African People's Socialist Party, which has previously denied working covertly for Russia or that any members committed a crime.

Prosecutors said Ionov operated an entity called the Anti-Globalization Movement of Russia that was used to carry out its U.S. influence efforts, overseen by the Russian intelligence service known as the FSB. They recruited U.S.-based organizations to help sway elections, make it appear there was strong support in the U.S. for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and backing efforts such as a 2015 United Nations petition to decry the "genocide of African people" in the U.S., according to the indictment.

Among other things, the indictment charges that an unnamed candidate for local office in St. Petersburg received clandestine funding and political strategy from the group. Ionov and another Russian said at one point that their Florida effort would extend to the 2020 presidential campaign, which they called the "main topic of the year."

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 64 of 80

The Uhuru group did have a candidate who ran unsuccessfully for St. Petersburg City Council in 2019, Eritha Akile Cainion, who is not charged in the indictment. She held a news conference in 2022 in which she defended Russia, saying "world colonial powers have been collaborating against Russia" for more than a century.

St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch, a Democrat, called the allegations troubling. "It is important to underscore that the City of St. Petersburg does not support, condone or tolerate any foreign government engaging in activities to undermine or influence our elections," Welch said in a statement.

Yeshitela, the indictment adds, traveled from Tampa to Moscow in 2015 to meet with Ionov and other Russians to "communicate on future cooperation," according to an Ionov email. What followed was covert Russian funding and support for various activities in the U.S. until summer 2022, including demonstrations at the California and Georgia state capitols and at an unnamed social media company in San Francisco.

Much of the alleged cooperation involved support for Russian's invasion of Ukraine. In March 2022, Yeshitela held a news conference in which he said the "African People's Socialist Party calls for unity with Russia in its defensive war in Ukraine against the world colonial powers." He also called for the independence of the Russian-occupied Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine.

In addition, the Justice Department announced a separate indictment in Washington charging Russian national Natalia Burlinova with conspiring with Russian intelligence to recruit U.S. academics and researchers to attend programs that advanced Russian interests. Burlinova concealed that her efforts were funded by the Russian government, prosecutors said.

It was not immediately clear Tuesday if Burlinova has an attorney to speak on her behalf.

NRA shows gun rights power but pushback grows from shootings

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The roster of Republican presidential hopefuls who flocked to the National Rifle Association's annual convention reflects the political potency of gun rights, despite the group's eroding revenues and an opposition movement that's growing increasingly vocal as the drumbeat of mass shootings marches on.

Even amid internal turmoil and legal woes, the gun ownership culture and movement that the NRA helped build remains formidable. And the landmark Supreme Court ruling on the Second Amendment last summer has given new strength to gun-rights activists seeking to invalidate firearm restrictions across the country.

"On the one hand, the gun-rights movement has never been stronger," said Adam Winkler, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles who wrote "Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America." But "one of the interesting things about this moment is the NRA, in some ways, has never faced more organizational incoherence and disarray."

This year's convention came just days after mass shootings at a school in Nashville, Tennessee and at a bank last week in Louisville, Kentucky, the latter of which marked the 15th mass killing of the year in the U.S. in which four or more people were killed other than the perpetrator, according to a mass killings database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. That was the most during the first 100 days of a calendar year since 2009, when 16 incidents had occurred by April 10.

"No one wants to see the violence you see in schools and stuff today," Randy Conner, a pistol and rifle instructor for the NRA from Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, told The Associated Press during the event. "But I don't think taking the guns away from ordinary citizens is going to change any of that at all."

The Indianapolis gathering drew a slew of Republicans, including former President Donald Trump and former Vice President Mike Pence, potential rivals for the GOP's 2024 presidential nomination. They vowed to defend the Second Amendment and dismissed the idea that gun restrictions are the answer to violence on the streets.

It also came as the NRA grapples with the fallout of infighting and lawsuits.

A judge last year ruled that the New York attorney general's lawsuit accusing some top NRA executives

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 65 of 80

of financial improprieties can move forward, even though the judge rebuffed Attorney General Letitia James' bid to put the group out of business. The NRA filed for bankruptcy in 2021, but a judge dismissed that case, ruling it was not filed in good faith.

Five years ago, the NRA had a \$36 million deficit because of lavish spending, followed by lawsuits from its own members as well as the attorneys general in New York and Washington, D.C.

In the years since, the group appears to have pulled itself out of a financial hole, but not because of an influx of cash, said Brian Mittendorf, an accounting professor at Ohio State University who has studied the group's finances. Revenue fell by 4% in 2020, and by 18% the following year, he found. The group cut back on spending on longstanding programs, including education and training, recreational shooting and law enforcement initiatives, Mittendorf said.

Their primary source of revenue has always been membership dues, but that base has also declined in recent years, and cuts to programs could make it harder to draw in new members, Mittendorf said.

"Despite the fact that they've reduced their footprint, they're still not getting enough revenues to cover their costs. So it suggests something has to give for this organization," he said.

Still, a bigger piece of the NRA's influence has been its ability to mobilize people to oppose gun control by creating a social identity around gun ownership, said Matt Lacombe, a Case Western Reserve University political science professor and author of "Firepower: How the NRA Turned Gun Owners into a Political Force." And people are motivated to oppose efforts that feel like a threat to part of their identity, he said.

"The NRA was responsible for creating that identity, but it is now a thing that exists in the world somewhat independently of the National Rifle Association as an organization," he said. "So if the NRA were to fold tomorrow or to go out of business, it's not as though this constituency of people who own guns and who largely view politics through this lens of being a gun owner is going to go anywhere, at least overnight."

An NRA spokesperson said the organization is "financially strong and as effective as ever in its mission to protect the Second Amendment, despite the effects of a pandemic, weak economy and other factors that have affected so many corporations and organizations."

"The 'demise of the NRA' is a desperate and false narrative - one we've heard every year for decades," spokesperson Andrew Arulanandam said in an emailed statement. "And yet, the strength of this organization was on full display this past week, as nearly 80,000 people gathered in Indianapolis to celebrate the Association and listen to almost every pro-Second Amendment presidential candidate."

Gun sales in the U.S. rose to unprecedented levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Florida just became the latest state to do away with requirements that people get a permit to carry a concealed weapon.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court's Bruen decision in June — in a case brought by an NRA-affiliate — has prompted gun rights activists to file a flurry of challenges to firearm restrictions across the country. Judges already have pointed to the ruling, which changed the test that lower courts long used to evaluate gun laws, to declare unconstitutional measures designed to keep weapons out of the hands of domestic abusers and defendants under felony indictment, among other laws.

Yet, the last decade also has seen a growing counterweight in the gun-control movement.

"Kissing the NRA's ring may help GOP presidential hopefuls win a primary, but it will be the kiss of death in a general election where a clear majority of voters favor common-sense gun safety laws," John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety, said in an emailed statement.

Congress passed its first major gun legislation in decades over the summer, stepping up FBI background checks for buyers under 21 and sending millions of new dollars to mental health services for children and schools.

The Biden administration has also tightened regulations on so-called ghost guns and stabilizing braces, an accessory used in at least two mass shootings. President Joe Biden has also signed executive orders expanding background checks on gun sales, and has called for reinstating a ban on so-called "assault weapons," or certain semi-automatic rifles.

Still, the political prospects for that step look bleak at best. And NRA CEO Wayne LaPierre made clear during his Friday speech that the gun-rights group will mobilize supporters to fight such efforts.

"Gun-hating politicians should never go to bed unafraid of what this association, and all of our millions of members, can do to their political careers," he said.

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press data journalist Larry Fenn contributed to this report. Arleigh Rodgers also contributed. She is a corps member for The Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Twitter removes policy against deadnaming transgender people

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Twitter has quietly removed a policy against the "targeted misgendering or deadnaming of transgender individuals," raising concerns that the Elon Musk-owned platform is becoming less safe for marginalized groups.

Twitter enacted the policy against deadnaming, or using a transgender person's name before they transitioned, as well as purposefully using the wrong gender for someone as a form of harassment, in 2018.

On Monday, Twitter also said it will only put warning labels on some tweets that are "potentially" in violation of its rules against hateful conduct. Previously, the tweets were removed.

It was in this policy update that Twitter appears to have deleted the line against deadnaming from its rules.

"Twitter's decision to covertly roll back its longtime policy is the latest example of just how unsafe the company is for users and advertisers alike," said Sarah Kate Ellis, the president and CEO of the advocacy group GLAAD. "This decision to roll back LGBTQ safety pulls Twitter even more out of step with TikTok, Pinterest, and Meta, which all maintain similar policies to protect their transgender users at a time when anti-transgender rhetoric online is leading to real world discrimination and violence."

Twitter did immediately respond to a message for comment Tuesday.

FDA clears extra COVID booster for some high-risk Americans

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. regulators on Tuesday cleared another booster dose of the Pfizer or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines for older Americans and people with weak immune systems.

The Food and Drug Administration also took steps to make coronavirus vaccinations simpler for everyone, saying that anyone getting a Pfizer or Moderna dose — whether it's a booster or their first-ever vaccination — will get the newest formula, not the original shots.

The FDA said those 65 or older can opt to roll up their sleeves again for another booster as long as it's been at least four months since their first dose of the so-called bivalent vaccine that targets omicron strains.

And most people who are immune-compromised also can choose that extra spring booster at least two months after their first, with additional doses in the future at the discretion of their physician, the agency said.

If the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention signs off, those spring boosters could begin within days. The CDC's advisers are set to meet Wednesday.

"COVID-19 remains a very real risk for many people," FDA vaccine chief Dr. Peter Marks said.

It's too soon to know if younger, healthy people will eventually be offered yet another shot but the extra dose for the most vulnerable is one of several steps FDA is taking to simplify COVID-19 vaccinations going forward.

Here are some things to know:

ONE FORMULA FOR PFIZER AND MODERNA SHOTS

COVID-19 vaccines have saved millions of lives but protection wanes over time and as new, more contagious variants have popped up. So last fall, Pfizer and Moderna rolled out updated "bivalent" boosters that added protection against omicron strains then circulating to the original vaccine recipe. Tuesday, the FDA said that updated formula will be used for anyone getting a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. For unvaccinated

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 67 of 80

adults, that means one combo shot would replace having to get several doses of the original vaccine first.

WHO NEEDS A BOOSTER?

Anyone who's gotten their original vaccinations but hasn't had an updated booster yet can still get one. Only 42% of Americans 65 and older — and just 20% of all adults — have gotten one of those updated boosters since September. "Those individuals certainly could go out and get a bivalent booster now to improve their protection," Marks said.

SOME PEOPLE ARE AT HIGHER RISK

For many Americans, COVID-19 has become less of a health fear and more of an inconvenience, and masking, routine testing and other precautions have largely fallen by the wayside. But at least 250 people in the U.S. a day still die from COVID-19, and high-risk Americans who last got a dose in the fall have anxiously wondered when they could get another.

Letting seniors and the immune-compromised get an extra booster dose puts the U.S. in line with Britain and Canada, which also are offering certain vulnerable populations a spring shot. It's a reasonable choice, said Dr. Matthew Laurens of the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

"We do have vaccines that are available to protect against these severe consequences, so why not use them?" he said. "They don't do any good just sitting on a shelf."

WILL YOUNGER, HEALTHIER PEOPLE GET A FALL DOSE?

Stay tuned. The FDA will hold a public meeting in June to consider if the vaccine recipe needs more adjusting to better match the latest coronavirus strains — just like it adjusts flu vaccines every year. And part of that discussion will be whether younger, healthier people also need a booster.

The updated Pfizer and Moderna shots being used now target the BA.4 and BA.5 omicron versions, which have been replaced by an ever-changing list of omicron descendants. Still, while protection against mild infections is short-lived, those updated doses continue to do a good job fighting severe disease and death even against the newest variants, Marks said.

Whether the recipe gets adjusted again or not, Tuesday's move "is essentially preparing to have a simpler, more straightforward way of going about vaccinating people," he said. "It's essentially a single dose of the appropriately strained vaccine as we move into the fall and winter months."

TWEAKS TO CHILD SHOTS, TOO

Millions of U.S. children still haven't gotten their initial COVID-19 vaccinations but Tuesday's step means they, too, can get the most updated version of the shots. Tots ages 6 months through 5 years who are unvaccinated can choose two Moderna shots or three of the Pfizer-BioNTech version. Children who are 5 years old can get two Moderna doses or a single Pfizer shot.

Children already fully or partially vaccinated with the original Pfizer or Moderna shots may get a bivalent vaccine, but how many doses will depend on their vaccination history, the FDA said.

WHAT ABOUT THE NOVAVAX VACCINE?

Novavax makes a more traditional type of COVID-19 vaccine, and its original formula remains available for people who don't want the Pfizer or Moderna option. Novavax said Tuesday it also is getting ready in case FDA urges a fall update, by manufacturing several additional formulas.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

21 die in Beijing hospital fire, others escape from windows

BEIJING (AP) — A fire killed at least 21 people at a hospital in Beijing on Tuesday and forced dozens of people to evacuate, Chinese state media reported.

As clouds of black smoke billowed into the sky, people trapped in the multistory building apparently tied bedsheets into makeshift ropes and escaped by climbing out windows, as seen in videos circulating on social media. Others took refuge by perching on air conditioning units just outside.

Emergency crews have since extinguished the fire, which broke out in the east wing of the inpatient

department of Beijing Changfeng Hospital, state media including CGTN reported, and at least 71 patients were rescued. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Most of the hospital building appeared to be without power late Tuesday, with only a few windows illuminated by the flickering flashlights of workers inside. The exterior of the building was blackened and charred in places, and police cars could be seen parked at the north entrance.

There was no official word by early Wednesday on how many of the dead were patients or the number of people who may have been injured. A telephone call to the hospital seeking comment Tuesday went unanswered.

US reporter held by Russia on spying charges denied release

By The Associated Press undefined

A Russian judge ruled Tuesday that American journalist Evan Gershkovich must remain behind bars on espionage charges in a case that is part of a crackdown the Kremlin has intensified on dissent and press freedom since invading Ukraine.

Appearing in public for the first time in weeks, the 31-year-old Wall Street Journal reporter stood in a defendant's glass cage in Moscow City Court, wearing blue jeans and a navy blue gingham checked shirt. He paced at times with his arms folded, talking through an opening with his lawyers and occasionally smiling as he acknowledged the other journalists crammed into the courtroom for photos before the hearing was closed because Russian authorities have declared the case secret.

Gershkovich is the first U.S. correspondent since the Cold War to be detained in Russia on spying charges, and his arrest rattled journalists in the country and drew outrage in the West. Gershkovich, his employer and the U.S. government deny he was involved in spying and have demanded his release.

"Evan is a member of the free press who right up until he was arrested was engaged in newsgathering. Any suggestions otherwise are false," the Journal has said. Last week, the U.S. officially declared that Gershkovich was "wrongfully detained."

Russia's Federal Security Service arrested Gershkovich in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg on March 29 and accused him of trying to obtain classified information about a Russian arms factory.

In rejecting Gershkovich's appeal to be released from pretrial detention, the judge ruled he must remain in jail until at least May 29. The journalist's lawyers said they petitioned for house arrest or for his release on bail of 50 million rubles (about \$610,000), but were rejected. The lawyers said they plan to appeal the ruling, which the Journal and its publisher, Dow Jones, called "disappointing."

Russian journalist Vasily Polonsky posted a video in which he shouts, "Evan, hang in there. Everyone says hello!" Gershkovich then nods.

Gershkovich could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted. Russian lawyers have said past espionage investigations took a year to 18 months, during which time he could have little contact with the outside world.

He is held in Moscow's Lefortovo prison, which dates from the czarist era and has been a terrifying symbol of repression since Soviet times, especially under Josef Stalin.

"It's not a very nice place in general, but conditions are OK. He doesn't complain," his lawyer, Tatyana Nozhkina, said after Tuesday's hearing.

Gershkovich had no medical complaints and was getting exercise by walking, she said, adding that he also was watching a cooking show on TV and reading, including Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace."

"He said that in the morning he eats porridge, and he wrote to his mother that it looks like his childhood," Nozhkina said, a reference to his Russian heritage. His parents moved to the United States from the Soviet Union.

"He's in good fighting spirit. He's ready to prove his innocence and defend media freedom," she said.

She added that Gershkovich has received letters from his parents and supporters, but hasn't been allowed any phone calls. He also told his lawyers he was thinking about writing a book about the ordeal when he's free.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 69 of 80

The case has exacerbated tensions between Moscow and the West over the invasion of Ukraine and is another sign of the Kremlin's crackdown on opposition activists, independent journalists and civil society groups. The sweeping campaign of repression is unprecedented since the Soviet era. Activists say it often means the very profession of journalism is criminalized, along with the activities of ordinary Russians who oppose the war.

On Monday, in the same courthouse where Gershkovich's hearing was held, top opposition figure Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr. was convicted of treason for publicly denouncing the war and sentenced to 25 years in prison. Last month, a court convicted a father over social media posts critical of the war after his daughter drew antiwar sketches in school and sentenced him to two years in prison.

Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned the U.S., U.K. and Canadian ambassadors over "crude interference in Russia's internal affairs" after they attended the Kara-Murza hearing Monday.

After pressing authorities for days to grant consular access to Gershkovich, U.S. Ambassador Lynne Tracy, who attended the hearing, said Monday she had visited him in prison. She tweeted that "he is in good health and remains strong," reiterating a U.S. call for his immediate release.

U.S. President Joe Biden spoke to Gershkovich's parents last week and again condemned his detention. "We're making it real clear that it's totally illegal what's happening, and we declared it so," he said.

The last American reporter to be arrested on espionage charges by Moscow was Nicholas Daniloff in 1986. A correspondent for U.S. News & World Report, Daniloff spent 20 days in custody before being swapped for an employee of the Soviet Union's U.N. mission who was arrested by the FBI, also on spying charges.

A top Russian diplomat said last week that Russia might be willing to discuss a potential prisoner swap with the U.S. involving Gershkovich — but after his trial. That means any exchange is unlikely soon.

In December, WNBA star Brittney Griner was exchanged for Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout following her trial and conviction on drug possession charges. She had been sentenced to nine years in prison and ended up spending 10 months behind bars.

Another American, Michigan corporate security executive Paul Whelan, has been imprisoned in Russia since December 2018 on espionage charges, which his family and the U.S. government have called baseless.

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

Rocket science: Alaska sky spiral caused by SpaceX fuel dump

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Northern lights enthusiasts got a surprise mixed in with the green bands of light dancing in the Alaska skies: A light baby blue spiral resembling a galaxy appeared amid the aurora for a few minutes.

The cause early Saturday morning was a little more mundane than an alien invasion or the appearance of a portal to the far reaches of the universe. It was simply excess fuel released from a SpaceX rocket that launched from California about three hours earlier.

Sometimes rockets have fuel that needs to be jettisoned, said space physicist Don Hampton, a research associate professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geophysical Institute.

"When they do that at high altitudes, that fuel turns into ice," he said. "And if it happens to be in the sunlight, when you're in the darkness on the ground, you can see it as a sort of big cloud, and sometimes it's swirly."

While not a common sight, Hampton said he's seen such occurrences about three times.

The appearance of the swirl was caught in time-lapse on the Geophysical Institute's all-sky camera and shared widely. "It created a bit of an internet storm with that spiral," Hampton said.

Photographers out for the northern lights show also posted their photos on social media.

"This all happened as it passed over Alaska during a beautiful aurora display, stunning many night-watchers including myself," professional photographer Todd Salat, known for stunning aurora images, told The Associated Press in an email.

"Trust me, at first, I was totally bewildered," he said. "I now know it can be explained with rocket sci-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 70 of 80

ence, but during and immediately after the experience, I thoroughly enjoyed the mysterious feeling of the unknown.”

The rocket took off from Vandenberg Space Force Base in California on Friday night with about 25 satellites as its payload.

The timing of the fuel dump and the fact that it was a polar launch made the blue spiral visible over a large swath of Alaska. “And we got that really cool looking spiral thing,” Salat noted.

In January, another spiral was seen, this time over Hawaii’s Big Island. A camera at the summit of Mauna Kea, outside the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan’s Subaru telescope, captured a spiral swirling through the night sky.

Researchers have said it was from the launch of a military GPS satellite that lifted off earlier on a SpaceX rocket in Florida.

Rep. Jones brings infant-sized casket into Tennessee Capitol

By GEORGE WALKER IV Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The recently reinstated Rep. Justin Jones carried an infant-sized casket into Tennessee’s Capitol as protesters calling for gun safety legislation outside the Capitol were blocked from bringing caskets inside.

After passing troopers and security, Jones was then barred from bringing the casket onto the House floor, briefly passing it off at the doorway to fellow Rep. Justin Pearson, who was also recently reinstated.

Demonstrators led by Bishop William Barber II had marched in Nashville on Monday, demanding that lawmakers pass the gun safety legislation and stop using their authority to trample democracy. They carried several caskets symbolizing those lost to gun violence on Monday.

“The legislators are back, but returning duly elected lawmakers to their seat does not solve the problem,” Barber said, demanding that lawmakers “stop committing policy murder.”

The fatal shooting of six people at a Nashville private school last month kicked off a stream of calls for changes to Tennessee’s gun laws, including a ban on assault weapons, tougher background checks and a “red flag” law. Republican Gov. Bill Lee has urged lawmakers to pass legislation that would keep firearms away from people who could harm themselves or others. So far, the Republican supermajority has refused.

Reps. Jones and Pearson, both Democrats, returned to the GOP-dominated General Assembly last week after being ousted for their role in a pro-gun control demonstration from the House floor. The episode has turned Tennessee into a new front in the battle for the future of American democracy and pressured lawmakers to address gun control in a state known for its lax firearm regulations.

On Monday, when protesters were blocked from bringing caskets into the Capitol, Jones carried an infant-sized casket inside and walked with protesters, including Barber, through the building. When he reached the House chamber, the sergeant-at-arms stopped Jones from bringing it onto the floor. As Jones entered the chamber after the session and tried unsuccessfully to get the attention of Republican House Speaker Cameron Sexton, Pearson held the casket at the door. When Sexton left, he stopped for a moment to speak to a few protesters.

Littlest intruder: Toddler crawls through White House fence

WASHINGTON (AP) — A curious toddler on Tuesday earned the title of one of the tiniest White House intruders after he squeezed through the metal fencing on the north side of the executive mansion.

U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division officers, who are responsible for security at the White House, walked across the North Lawn to retrieve the tot and reunite him with his parents on Pennsylvania Avenue. Access to the complex was briefly restricted while officers conducted the reunification. Officers briefly questioned the parents before allowing them to continue on their way.

Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said officers “encountered a curious young visitor along the White House north fence line who briefly entered White House grounds.”

“The White House security systems instantly triggered Secret Service officers and the toddler and par-

ents were quickly reunited," he said in a statement.

It may be the first successful intrusion onto the complex since the White House fence was doubled in height to roughly 13 feet (3.96-meters) in recent years after a series of security breaches. While taller, the new fence has an additional inch of space between pickets, for a total of 5½ inches (12.7 centimeters) between posts.

Older children have sometimes become stuck in the iconic barrier, which has also been the scene of demonstrations, with protesters chaining themselves to the fence.

Donut painting sparks free speech debate for bakery, town

By KATHY McCORMACK and ROBERT F. BUKATY Associated Press

CONWAY, N.H. (AP) — Bakery owner Sean Young was thrilled when high school art students covered the big blank wall over his doorway last spring with a painting of the sun shining over a mountain range made of sprinkle-covered chocolate and strawberry donuts, a blueberry muffin, a cinnamon roll and other pastries.

The display got rave reviews, and Young looked forward to collaborating with the school on more mural projects at his roadside bakery in Conway, New Hampshire.

Then the town zoning board got involved, deciding that the pastry painting was not so much art as advertising, and so could not remain as is because of its size. Faced with modifying or removing the mural, or possibly dealing with fines and criminal charges, Young sued, saying the town is violating his freedom of speech rights.

The painting could stay right where it is if it showed actual mountains, instead of pastries suggesting mountains, or if the building wasn't a bakery.

"They said it would be art elsewhere," Young told The Associated Press in an interview. "It's just not art here."

"The town should not have the right to police art," he said.

The controversy has residents of this town of 10,000 grappling with big questions about creativity and liberty as it tries to preserve its rural character. Like other White Mountain communities that draw skiers, nature lovers and shoppers, Conway is under development pressure, making the sign dispute fraught with worries that any concession to commerce could change what they hold dear.

Many — including the zoning board members — applauded the students' colorful work, but said rules must be followed, even if they're old and outdated. At about 90 square feet (8.6 square meters), the mural is four times bigger than the sign code allows.

Following a longstanding democratic tradition of New England town meetings, residents deliberated how to define a sign before ultimately voting down changes last week. The local newspaper said the proposed wording wasn't clear. Ultimately, a judge may have to resolve what remains an open debate in town.

"Those kids put their heart in it," retiree Steve Downing said. He thinks the painting should stay.

"Everyone has to comply with the ordinance," said Charlie Birch, a former U.S. Forest Service worker. "And even though it was done by the students, which was well done, and I give them a lot of credit for it ... if you have the ordinance, 'One for all,' that's where we are. You can't really make any exceptions, otherwise everybody else will want the exception."

Art teacher Olivia Benish, who worked with three students on the project, apologized to the board in September for not doing "due diligence" to make sure the mural would comply. She didn't respond to requests for an interview. But she told the board members that there has to be a way to give students the opportunity to create positive public works of art "without upsetting the law and the powers that be," according to the town minutes.

The lawsuit Young filed in January argues that the town is unconstitutionally discriminating against him. He asked a judge to prevent the town from enforcing its sign code.

And now other businesses have been drawn into the controversy.

Long before the pastry painting was installed, the town had allowed other murals at a local shopping center, but in December the town found that three of those artworks are, indeed, signs that violate size

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 72 of 80

limits. They go before the zoning board on Wednesday.

Young, who is being represented by the Virginia-based Institute for Justice, asked for \$1 in damages. Meanwhile, he's selling T-shirts as a high school art department fundraiser, saying "This is Art" with the artwork on the front, and "This is a Sign" of a roadside "Leavitt's Country Bakery" sign on the back.

"As Conway officials have confirmed, the town does not consider a painting to be a "sign" if it does not convey what town officials perceive to be a commercial message," the lawsuit says. "But the town's perception is that any mural depicting anything related to a business is a 'sign.' This is governmental discrimination based on the content of the speech" and the speaker's identity, it said.

The lawsuit says the town's sign definition is "incredibly broad," with no mention of murals in the code: A sign in Conway is "any device, fixture, placard, structure or attachment thereto that uses color, form, graphic, illumination, symbol, or writing to advertise, announce the purpose of, or identify the purpose of any person or entity, or to communicate information of any kind to the public, whether commercial or noncommercial."

Board member Luigi Bartolomeo said he thinks the pastry painting is art, not advertising. He read the definition out loud at the board's meeting in August, and said he agrees with a local attorney who called it "unconstitutionally vague."

"I think it's a very badly written piece of code here," said Bartolomeo, who recently retired. But Board Chairperson John Colbath said the board has to work with the ordinance, which was approved by voters, and that there is a process to change that.

"If they had done a seasonal mural on the wall — covered bridges and sunflowers and what have you — and it did not represent what your business is in, then it would be more likely to be a well-respected piece of art and not construed as a sign," Colbath said at the August meeting.

He said to Young, "I understand the art thing — and you look and you see a mountain — but the general public sees donuts on the front of the bakery."

"I think most of the people said it's art," Young responded.

In its denial of Young's appeals, the board concluded that the bakery won't be negatively affected without the display.

"This supposed distinction between murals and signs shouldn't matter," attorney Betsy Sanz of the Institute said in a news release. "After all, nothing in the First Amendment distinguishes between art and commercial signs — or commercial speech of any kind."

The town and Young agreed in February to pause court proceedings — and any potential fines or charges — pending a vote on a revised definition that would allow the painting to stay. But it failed in last week's elections, with 805 to 750 voting against it, according to the town clerk's office. The judge now wants to hear from both sides by May 10.

"We're ready to keep going," Young said.

Town Manager John Eastman declined an interview, referring questions to town lawyer Jason Dennis, who said he would soon meet with town officials to discuss next steps.

The Conway Daily Sun offered its analysis in an editorial last week: "Voters smartly concluded that the proposed new definition of signs would only further complicate enforcement. That said, it is not a stretch to conjecture that most voters are fine with the murals at Leavitt's Country Bakery and Settlers Green. We suggest the town figure out a way to back off enforcement until a clearer definition can be written, one that accommodates 'art.'"

McCormack reported from Concord, New Hampshire.

Your tax refund could be smaller than last year. Here's why

By CORA LEWIS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Expecting a tax refund? It could be smaller than last year. And with inflation still high, that money won't go as far as it did a year ago.

The more than 100 million taxpayers who have had their returns processed as of April 7 got refunds that were an average of 9.3% less than last year, in part due to pandemic relief programs expiring. The filing deadline for most taxpayers is Tuesday, though it has been extended for parts of California, Alabama, Georgia, New York, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Indiana that were hard hit by severe weather.

The average refund is \$2,878, down from \$3,175, a difference of nearly \$300, according to the most recent IRS data available.

For many households, especially working families, the tax refund is the biggest one-time financial windfall of the year, said Kathy Pickering, chief tax officer of H&R Block.

"We know that working families in general are the most cash-strapped," she said, adding that the expanded earned income tax and child tax credits during the COVID pandemic provided a lot of benefits for families with children.

The child tax credit, for example, is reverting to \$2,000 per child, while the pandemic credit was as high as \$3,600 per child. The child and dependent care credit, a tax break available to parents and those who care for family members while they work, had been expanded to a maximum of \$8,000 in 2021 and is now a maximum of \$2,100.

"As those provisions expired, that's had a big impact," Pickering said.

Rachel Zhou, 20, a college student in Boston whose father works in food delivery and whose stepmother is a social worker, said her family has used refunds in the past for things like home repairs that require big one-time payments. One rebate they received during the pandemic went toward fixing her house's heating, air, and ventilation system, she said.

Zhou has worked since she was a teenager, and has already filed her taxes this year. Her refund? \$1. Last year and the previous year she received "upwards of several hundred dollars," she said.

"Overall it does make the situation a bit more tenuous," said Zhou. "It is nice to have (the refund) at the end of the year — tax season — for when there are gaps to be made up for in the budget."

Zhou has worked as a receptionist, at a grill and an ice cream shop, and in other jobs. For her father, who has shifted more towards self employment in the past few years (receiving 1099 forms for DoorDash and other delivery work), she said taxes have also become "more of a hit and less of a refund."

Pickering said that more Americans took on side hustles, gig and freelance work during and since the pandemic, and so they may be experiencing the self-employment tax and the consequences of a lack of withholding. A traditional employer who provides a W2 withholds taxes from each paycheck, meaning less of a potential shock at the end of the tax year.

Ted Rossman, an analyst with Bankrate.com, said those who receive refunds tend to use the money "very practically," often to pay off debt and boost savings.

"What I do think is definitely significant is the fact that other costs have gone up," Rossman said. "It's bad enough that this is taking 10% off your tax refund, but on top of that, your groceries might be up, and rent, and gas prices. This is money that a lot of people really count on every year."

"Even a difference of \$300 on the tax refund, that does pale in comparison to the stimulus people received during the pandemic," he said. "Psychologically, economically speaking, it probably feels like, 'Just one more thing.' So maybe it weighs on confidence more than actual spending."

Alaina, 32, a Florida-based fiber artist who asked to be identified by her first name to protect her privacy, said her refund will go toward house repairs and "clearing up debt."

"I have a lot on credit cards and have had to borrow money from people that I need to pay back," she said. "I wish it could go for fun stuff, but money is too tight."

Alaina, who sells her work online, has been self-employed since she lost her job in the healthcare sector in 2021. She said she hasn't yet filed her taxes this year but that last year she and her husband, who is unemployed, received about \$3,600 after filing jointly.

According to Bankrate's Rossman, there's a possibility that this year's lower tax refunds could weaken consumer spending and, as result, help slow inflation.

"It's bad news for households because people want higher refunds, obviously, but I think perhaps quietly the Fed might cheer," he said.

To combat inflation, the Fed has been raising interest rates to increase the cost of borrowing money, with the hope of slowing the economy.

Unfortunately, for those households that have spent through their savings, and who are now relying on credit cards to get by month to month, those higher interest rates have also led to average credit card interest rates of over 20%.

"That becomes a tough cycle to break," Rossman said. "We are dealing with fairly blunt tools when you talk about raising interest rates and changing the price of money. High inflation left unchecked will be bad for everyone — but it will be worst for the lowest end of the income spectrum."

You can see all of AP's Financial Wellness content at <https://apnews.com/hub/financial-wellness>.

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Volkswagen unveils electric luxury sedan at China auto show

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

SHANGHAI (AP) — Volkswagen unveiled an electric luxury sedan that promises a 700-kilometer (435-mile) battery range as global and Chinese automakers displayed their latest SUVs, sedans and muscle cars at the world's biggest auto show Tuesday.

Auto Shanghai 2023 reflects the intense competition in China's fast-growing electric vehicle market after the ruling Communist Party poured billions of dollars into promoting the technology. China accounted for two-thirds of global electrics sales last year.

Brands including General Motors, BMW and Nissan and Chinese rivals BYD Auto and NIO unveiled dozens of new EVs in the cavernous Shanghai exhibition center. Brands touted faster charging, satellite-linked navigation and entertainment, and the future possibility of self-driving technology.

Volkswagen's ID.7 sedan, the new flagship model for its electric vehicles, was one of 28 models displayed by the German automaker, half of them electrified.

"We are turbo-charging our electric campaign," said the CEO of VW's passenger car brand, Thomas Schaefer, who rode onto the stage aboard an electric minibus. Schaefer said VW plans to release another 10 electric models in the next three years.

The show is the auto industry's first full-scale sales event in its biggest market since 2019 following the end of anti-virus controls in December that blocked most travel into and out of China.

Automakers are looking to China to drive sales growth at a time of slack American and European demand, but that requires them to pour money into creating competitive models that can appeal to Chinese buyers in a crowded market.

Established global brands face pressure from ambitious Chinese newcomers and to meet government sales quotas for electrics. Many are forming partnerships to split soaring development costs.

China is "playing a leading role in the industry's electric and digital transformation," said Ford Motor Co. CEO Jim Farley in a recorded message played on a video screen.

Electrics accounted for just over a quarter of the 23.6 million SUVs, sedans and minivans sold last year in China while sales of traditional gasoline-powered vehicles declined.

GM debuted an electric SUV, the Buick Electra E5, ahead of the auto show. Toyota Motor Co. unveiled two new models for its bZ line of zero-emissions vehicles. Honda Motor Co. premiered a new prototype for its China-focused electric brand, e:N.

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 75 of 80

Toyota also displayed a prototype self-driving taxi developed with China's Pony.ai, a leading competitor in the country's fast-evolving autonomous vehicle industry.

Chinese luxury electric brand NIO Inc., which competes with Tesla Inc. at the premium end of the market, unveiled its latest SUV, the ES6, and an update of its flagship sedan, the ET7. Both have digital cockpits and an onboard computer with connections for tablet computers and other devices.

BMW AG showed an all-electric lineup including two new models, the i7 M70L and XM Label Red. The German sport luxury brand's M760Le had its China debut.

Automakers also highlighted China's growing role as a source of exports and innovation, especially EVs.

NIO and BYD Auto are among a growing group of Chinese EV brands that are starting to sell in foreign markets. BYD Auto exports to Europe and opened a dealership in Japan this year. NIO started selling in Europe in 2021 and says it plans to serve 25 countries by 2025.

Global brands all have design centers in China and increasingly are drawing on Chinese talent for engineering, software and other development.

VW is adding as many as 2,000 employees to a research and development center in the eastern city of Anhui to work on "intelligent connected vehicles," Schaefer said. He said a separate software unit would add up to 1,200 employees this year.

"We are gaining innovative strength by taking on local R&D responsibility," Schaefer said. "Our guiding principle: Developing in China for China."

The organizers said automakers would debut 100 new models, 70 of them electric, according to Chinese media.

Drivers in China bought 5.4 million all-electric vehicles last year — about two-thirds of the global total of 8 million — plus 1.5 million gasoline-electric hybrids. This year's EV sales are forecast to rise another 30%.

Beijing is winding down government support and shifting the burden to automakers by requiring them to earn credits for EV sales.

China's BYD Auto, which competes with Tesla for the title of world's biggest-selling EV brand, displayed the U9 supercar from its luxury Yangwang brand and an SUV, the U8. The automaker says the U9, with a 1-million-yuan (\$145,000) sticker price, can accelerate from zero to 100 kph (60 mph) in two seconds.

Another Chinese EV brand, Aion, part of state-owned GAC, announced rapid charging technology it said needs as little as five minutes to power up a battery to go 200 kilometers (120 miles).

Aion also unveiled a system it said can remove a drained battery and install a fresh one in as little as two minutes. The company said that would be quicker than filling a gasoline tank, eliminating a drawback to EV ownership.

China's auto sales peaked in 2017 at 24.7 million but collapsed in 2020 to 20.2 million after dealerships closed as part of efforts to contain COVID-19. They are recovering but have yet to return to the pre-pandemic level.

For drivers who aren't ready to give up fossil fuels, state-owned BAIC unveiled a hulking, American-style pickup truck, the Mars, with a 6.8-liter diesel engine. The company boasted that with its flaring wheel wells, the Mars is 2.1 meters (6.9 feet) wide.

The ruling party's support for EV development is part of plans to gain wealth and global influence by transforming China into a creator of profitable technologies.

That campaign has strained relations with Washington and other trading partners, which are cutting off access to advanced processor chips used by makers of smartphones, electric cars and other high-tech products. China's own foundries can supply low-end chips used in many cars but not processors for artificial intelligence and other advanced functions.

Sales of gasoline-electric hybrids and all-electric vehicles rose 26.2% over a year ago in the first three months of 2023 to 1.6 million, according to the China Association of Auto Manufacturers. Sales of purely electric vehicles rose 14.4% to 1.2 million while hybrids increased 75.1% to 433,000.

Tesla and some other brands cut prices by 5% to 15% starting in January after sales growth slowed, though to still-robust levels compared with the U.S. and European markets. That prompted warnings that

the squeeze on an industry with dozens of fledgling brands might force smaller automakers into mergers or out of business.

Gardening is strenuous. How to go gentle on your body

By JESSICA DAMIANO Associated Press

Gardening is widely regarded as a moderate to strenuous form of exercise. All that bending, lifting, digging and hauling burns calories and builds muscle.

But it can also strain backs and leave even the fittest among us aching the next day. And when we're less fit, or have arthritis, a limited range of motion or other mobility issues, the once-pleasurable pastime can seem impossible.

But there's no need to throw in the trowel.

Before heading out for a weeding or planting session, I wrap heating pads around my neck and lower back, which are my personal Achilles heels. Five minutes is usually all it takes to loosen my muscles. Sometimes, I apply disposable, stick-on pads like those made by ThermaCare to whatever happens to hurt at the moment and wear them while I work. A few minutes of pre-gardening gentle stretching helps, too.

A little forethought can go a long way toward saving your strength and energy. For instance, collecting all the tools you anticipate needing before you begin your work will cut down on unnecessary trips to and from the shed. While you're in there, be sure to store the heaviest items on waist-height shelves for the easiest and safest retrieval.

Sometimes, simple postural adjustments like remembering to bend at the knees when lifting bags of mulch or standing with your feet shoulder-width apart to maintain good balance are all you need. But if bending has become too difficult, or if you garden while seated, grow plants in waist- or chair-height raised beds or vertically in towers, wall-affixed planting units or trellises.

Using a wheelbarrow instead of carrying heavy supplies sounds like a no-brainer, but I can't tell you how many times I've overestimated my ability and paid dearly for it. When carrying by hand, hug heavy objects like filled containers to your chest, keeping your back as straight as possible. Better yet, set pots in place while they're empty, then fill them.

My flower garden contains mostly perennials, because I prefer them and also because they don't need replanting every year as annuals do. That cuts my work – and bending – a great deal. Plus, perennials, which return year after year, typically cost more at the outset but, over time, are more cost-effective than buying new annuals every spring.

Scoot around the yard on a rolling garden seat, or use a padded kneeler to cushion the earth. Many adaptive tools available these days can make raking, hoeing or tending to other chores easier, too. If you haven't shopped around in a while, you might be surprised by the ergonomic options available.

Corona, Fiskars and other leading brands make tools with extendable-reach handles that eliminate bending and facilitate gardening in a wheelchair. Rotoshovel, a battery-powered, "hand-held automatic shovel" that won a 2022 AmericanHort Retailer's Choice award, makes easy work of digging small holes for plants and bulbs.

And if you have hand pain or difficulty holding onto things, many tools now come with easy-grip handles. Foam grips and wraps also are sold separately to accommodate a wide range of older tools you might already own.

Most importantly, pace yourself. Limit gardening sessions to between 60 and 90 minutes. Remember, home wasn't built in a day.

Jessica Damiano writes regular gardening columns for The Associated Press. She publishes the award-winning Weekly Dirt Newsletter. Sign up here for weekly gardening tips and advice.

For more AP gardening stories, go to <https://apnews.com/hub/gardening>.

China calls US accusations of police stations 'groundless'

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — China denied all accusations of an overseas police presence, saying Tuesday that the United States was making "groundless accusations" after U.S. law enforcement arrested two men in New York for establishing a secret police station.

"The relevant claims have no factual basis, and there is no such thing as an overseas police station," spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Wang Wenbin said Tuesday.

U.S. authorities arrested two men, identified as "Harry" Lu Jianwang, 61, and Chen Jinping, 59, both U.S. citizens, on Monday morning. Under the direction of an official in China, the two men allegedly set up a station where they offered some basic services, such as helping Chinese citizens renew their Chinese driver's licenses.

The station, however, also took on roles beyond ordinary bureaucracy, including locating Chinese dissidents living in the U.S., officials said.

The U.S. Justice Department also charged 34 officers in the Ministry of Public Security on Monday with creating and using thousands of fake social media accounts on Twitter and other platforms to harass dissidents abroad.

Wang said China does not interfere in other countries' sovereignty.

China has shown that it is willing to target its own citizens even after they have left China for various reasons, whether political or economic. The Associated Press has previously reported that a Chinese woman was detained in Dubai at a Chinese-run detention facility.

In recent years, Beijing has been running two separate campaigns to bring suspects wanted mostly for economic crimes back to China as part of an anti-corruption drive. It has begun flexing its muscles abroad to bring people back home, whether through the use of extradition treaties or unofficial methods, such as putting coercive pressure on relatives back home in China.

"China firmly opposes the smear and political manipulation by the U.S., who maliciously fabricated the narrative of so-called cross-border suppression and blatantly prosecuted Chinese law enforcement officials," Wang said.

What are China's alleged 'secret overseas police stations'?

BEIJING (AP) — Police in New York have arrested two men for allegedly setting up a secret police station for a Chinese provincial police agency to collect information on opponents of the ruling Communist Party.

Such offices have been reported across North America, Europe and in other countries where Chinese communities include critics of the Communist Party who have family or business contacts in China. China denies that they are police stations, saying that they exist mainly to provide citizen services such as renewing driver's licenses.

Party leader and head of state Xi Jinping has waged a campaign against corruption that has also targeted criticism of his regime at home and abroad, while seeking to chase down those accused of financial crimes.

The arrests Monday in New York came alongside charges against 34 officers with China's national police force in China for using social media to harass party critics in the United States, authorities said Monday.

Below is a look at the allegations that China is running secret overseas police stations and the backlash they have encountered.

WHAT IS THE LATEST IN THE NEW YORK CASE?

The two men who were arrested were acting under the direction and control of a Chinese government official, the Justice Department said in a statement Monday.

The arrests of the men, identified as "Harry" Lu Jianwang, 61, of the Bronx, and Chen Jinping, 59, of Manhattan, both U.S. citizens, are the first of their kind anywhere in the world.

The two did not register with the Justice Department as agents of a foreign government, U.S. law enforcement officials said. And though the office did perform some services such as helping Chinese citizens renew their Chinese driver's licenses, it also served a more "sinister" function, including helping the Chi-

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 78 of 80

nese government locate a pro-democracy activist of Chinese descent living in California and threatening a fugitive whom police wanted to return to China, officials said.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE OFFICES?

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said there was “no such thing as an overseas police station,” and accused the U.S. of “smears and political manipulation.” China’s Foreign Ministry says it operates the centers abroad to help citizens with bureaucratic tasks, such as renewing drivers’ licenses, that typically are done at police stations in China.

But the Spain-based nongovernment group Safeguard Defenders accused Chinese police of using the offices to spy on critics abroad and to harass or threaten both citizens and non-citizens in a report published last year. A Chinese official claimed last year that 210,000 suspects of fraud were “persuaded to return” to China in 2021 as part of a crackdown on telephone scams, although the researchers wrote that not all were charged with crimes. Countries including Canada and Ireland asked China to close such stations or opened investigations of their own following the Safeguard Defenders report.

According to prosecutors in New York, the station in New York was operated by the Fuzhou branch of the Ministry of Public Security; they wrote that it had no authority to operate there and infringed U.S. law and national sovereignty.

HOW WILL THE INVESTIGATION AFFECT US-CHINA RELATIONS?

China-US political relations are at a historic low. In February, the U.S. canceled a visit by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to Beijing amid a furor over a Chinese spy balloon that overflew the U.S. Suspicion of China is one of the few areas where the Democratic and Republican parties find common ground, and the accusations of illegal Chinese police stations will likely galvanize sentiment for banning of Chinese brands such as Huawei and TikTok. Countries are required by international treaty to inform each other of when and where they operate their diplomatic missions.

It’s not clear if China will seek the release of the two men arrested in the U.S., who are both U.S. citizens. China has in past been accused of hostage diplomacy, including imprisoning two Canadian nationals over the detention of a top executive of the electronics giant Huawei.

WHERE ELSE DOES CHINA OPERATE SIMILAR OFFICES?

In a February 2002 news release, the government of Fujian province said it had established a first batch of 30 “Fuzhou Police Overseas Service Stations” on five continents. The province has traditionally sent waves of migrants to Southeast Asia, North America, Australia and Europe.

Scores of service offices — Safeguard Defenders estimates more than 100 — have been reported around the world, from Canada to New Zealand. Some are based in embassies, while others have operated out of commercial centers frequented by members of the Chinese diaspora.

In Italy, Chinese police made an agreement with the government in 2016 to conduct joint patrols with local police to assist Chinese-speaking tourists. Italy ended the program last year following the Safeguard Defenders report.

Vandalized snooker table reclothed, back in play at worlds

By STEVE DOUGLAS AP Sports Writer

A snooker table vandalized by a climate activist during a match at the world championship was reclothed overnight and back in play at the Crucible Theatre on Tuesday.

The green baize on Table 1 at the venue in Sheffield, England, turned orange at the start of the evening session on Monday when a protestor interrupted a match by jumping on the table and releasing a packet of powder.

The match between English players Robert Milkins and Joe Perry was abandoned — it will restart on Tuesday — and the previously pristine cloth needed to be replaced.

There was no visible sign of any orange powder when Jack Lisowski and Noppon Saengkham began their first-round match on the same table in Tuesday’s morning session.

A man wearing a T-shirt bearing the words “Just Stop Oil” carried out the stunt in an attempt to draw

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 79 of 80

attention to fossil fuel projects in Britain.

The activist group Just Stop Oil posted a video of the incident — adding the caption “NEW OIL AND GAS WILL SNOOKER US” — and called for “UK sporting institutions to step into civil resistance against the government’s genocidal policies.”

At the same time as the man was throwing orange powder, a woman leapt into the playing arena and attempted to tie herself to the middle pocket of the other table in play.

The referee held her back and she was taken away by security. That match, between Mark Allen and Fan Zhengyi, resumed 45 minutes later and played to a finish.

Allen said it was a “surreal moment.”

“I heard a bang, that I thought it was on the other table, and then I turned round and there was a woman on my table,” said the Northern Irish player, who won the match 10-5. “It could have been a lot worse — you saw what happened on the other table and how much disruption it caused.

“I feel like even talking about it is giving them airtime they don’t deserve because they are just idiots. What are they trying to gain from what they have done? I am sure there are better ways to get their point across.”

Police said late Monday that two people — a 30-year-old man and a 52-year-old woman — were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage and were in custody.

It’s the second time in three days that a big sporting event in Britain was disrupted, after 118 people were arrested at the Grand National horse race on Saturday. Some protestors scaled the perimeter fence around Aintree Racecourse and attempted to affix themselves to the big fences on the track.

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

Today in History: April 19, Revolutionary War begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, April 19, the 109th day of 2023. There are 256 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On April 19, 1775, the American Revolutionary War began with the battles of Lexington and Concord.

On this date:

In 1865, a funeral was held at the White House for President Abraham Lincoln, assassinated five days earlier; his coffin was then taken to the U.S. Capitol for a private memorial service in the Rotunda.

In 1897, the first Boston Marathon was held; winner John J. McDermott ran the course in two hours, 55 minutes and 10 seconds.

In 1912, a special subcommittee of the Senate Commerce Committee opened hearings in New York into the Titanic disaster.

In 1943, during World War II, tens of thousands of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto began a valiant but ultimately futile battle against Nazi forces.

In 1977, the Supreme Court, in *Ingraham v. Wright*, ruled 5-4 that even severe spanking of schoolchildren by faculty members did not violate the Eighth Amendment ban against cruel and unusual punishment.

In 1989, 47 sailors were killed when a gun turret exploded aboard the USS Iowa in the Caribbean. (The Navy initially suspected that a dead crew member had deliberately sparked the blast, but later said there was no proof of that.)

In 1993, the 51-day siege at the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Texas, ended as fire destroyed the structure after federal agents began smashing their way in; about 80 people, including two dozen children and sect leader David Koresh, were killed.

In 1995, a truck bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. (Bomber Timothy McVeigh, who prosecutors said had planned the attack as revenge for the Waco siege of two years earlier, was convicted of federal murder charges and executed in 2001.)

Groton Daily Independent

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 285 ~ 80 of 80

In 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany was elected pope in the first conclave of the new millennium; he took the name Benedict XVI.

In 2013, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv), a 19-year-old college student wanted in the Boston Marathon bombings, was taken into custody after a manhunt that had left the city virtually paralyzed; his older brother and alleged accomplice, 26-year-old Tamerlan (TAM'-ehr-luhn), was killed earlier in a furious attempt to escape police.

In 2015, Freddie Gray, a 25-year-old Black man, died a week after suffering a spinal cord injury in the back of a Baltimore police van while he was handcuffed and shackled. (Six police officers were charged; three were acquitted and the city's top prosecutor eventually dropped the three remaining cases.)

Newspaper publisher Al Neuharth, 89, died in Coco Beach, Florida. Children's author E.L. Konigsburg, 83, died in Falls Church, Virginia.

Five years ago: Raul Castro turned over Cuba's presidency to Miguel Mario Diaz-Canel Bermudez, the first non-Castro to hold Cuba's top government office since the 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro and his younger brother Raul. Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois brought her 10-day-old daughter to the Senate floor one day after senators approved a new rule permitting it; Duckworth was the first senator to have given birth while serving in the Senate. Walter Leroy Moody, age 83, was executed by lethal injection in Alabama for the mail-bomb slaying of a federal judge in 1989; Moody became the oldest prisoner put to death in the U.S. in modern times. Authorities in Minnesota ended their investigation into the death of music superstar Prince from an accidental overdose without charging anyone in the case.

One year ago: Russia assaulted cities and towns along a boomerang-shaped front hundreds of miles long and poured more troops into Ukraine in a pivotal battle for control of the country's eastern industrial heartland of coal mines and factories. A New Jersey diocese agreed to pay \$87.5 million to settle claims involving clergy sex abuse with some 300 alleged victims in one of the largest cash settlements involving the Catholic church in the United States. The influential sitcom "black-ish" aired its last episode on ABC after eight seasons.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elinor Donahue is 86. Rock musician Alan Price (The Animals) is 81. Actor Tim Curry is 77. Pop singer Mark "Flo" Volman (The Turtles; Flo and Eddie) is 76. Actor Tony Plana is 71. Former tennis player Sue Barker is 67. Motorsports Hall of Famer Al Unser Jr. is 61. Actor Tom Wood is 60. Former recording executive Suge Knight is 58. Singer-songwriter Dar Williams is 56. Actor Kim Hawthorne (TV: "Greenleaf") is 55. Actor Ashley Judd is 55. Singer Bekka Bramlett is 55. Latin pop singer Luis Miguel is 53. Actor Jennifer Esposito is 51. Actor Jennifer Taylor is 51. Jazz singer Madeleine Peyroux (PAY'-roo) is 49. Actor James Franco is 45. Actor Kate Hudson is 44. Actor Hayden Christensen is 42. Actor Catalina Sandino Moreno is 42. Actor-comedian Ali Wong is 41. Actor Victoria Yeates is 40. Actor Kelen Coleman is 39. Actor Zack Conroy is 38. Roots rock musician Steve Johnson (Alabama Shakes) is 38. Actor Courtland Mead is 36. Retired tennis player Maria Sharapova is 36. NHL forward Patrik Laine is 25.