

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Saturday, April 22 - EARTH DAY

- Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.
- GHS Prom, 7 p.m.
- Firemen's Spring Social, 7 p.m.

Sunday, April 23

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

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

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

"You can't help getting older, but you don't have to get old."
GEORGE BURNS



school, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

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

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

Princess Prom, 4:30 p.m.

Monday, April 24

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, boiled potato, mixed vegetables, pineapple tidbits, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg bake.

School Lunch: Taco salads.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center with potluck at noon.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: PEO meeting (outside group), 7 p.m.

Postponed: Girls Golf at Redfield Golf Course, 10 a.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

“possible” should the need arise to evacuate the U.S. Embassy in Sudan.

- Hunter Biden’s lawyers and DOJ officials are set to discuss the ongoing investigation into the president’s son next week, several sources with knowledge of the matter told CNN. The talks fall on the same week that President Joe Biden is expected to formally announce his 2024 reelection campaign.

- U.K. Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab has resigned after a protracted investigation into allegations that he bullied members of his staff.

- At least 1,200 Lyft employees are slated to lose their jobs as part of the company’s cost-cutting efforts under new CEO David Risher, according to The Wall Street Journal. Risher wrote in a note to employees that staff members will learn whether their jobs will be included in the layoffs on April 27.

- The National Football League (NFL) “indefinitely” suspended the Detroit Lions’ Quince Jackson and C.J. Moore and the Washington Commanders’ Shaka Toney for gambling violations during the 2022 football season. The Lions’ Stanley Berryhill and Jameson Williams have also been suspended for the first six games of their team’s 2023 season.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the U.S. is expediting training of Abrams tanks for Ukrainian fighters as Russian forces have reportedly taken over nearly all of Bakhmut. In early 2023, the U.S. announced plans to send 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Kyiv.

- The Supreme Court protected access to a widely used abortion medication as a lawsuit challenging the FDA’s approval of mifepristone moves forward. President Biden welcomed the news, saying his administration will continue defending the FDA’s “independent, expert authority” to review and approve prescription drugs.

- Both of Sudan’s factions have agreed to a three-day ceasefire for the Muslim holiday of Eid after days of fighting which have left over 400 people dead and forced thousands out of the country. The Pentagon said some U.S. troops have been deployed to “provide as many options as possible”

GDI LIVE.COM

GHS Prom Grand March

7 p.m., Saturday, April 22, 2023

Princesses Prom Grand March

4:30 p.m. Sunday, April 23, 2023

GDI Subscribers have free access

Otherwise \$5 ticket required to watch.

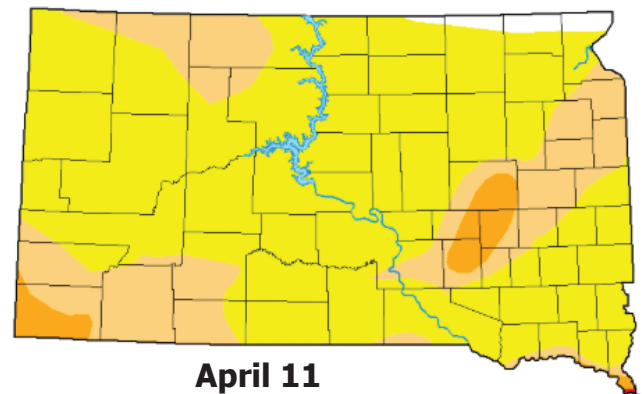
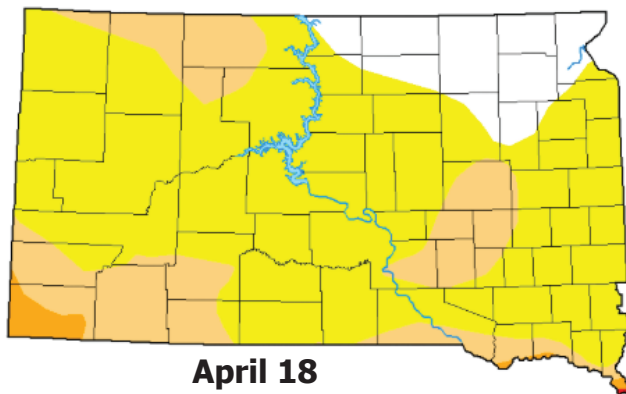
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



A majority of Kansas and portions of Nebraska remained entrenched in D3 to D4 (extreme to exceptional drought). Some D3 and D4 expansion took place there, but a few small areas saw limited improvement from localized rainfall. Some areas of deterioration were also noted across D0 to D2 areas in central and eastern Colorado, but most of the state was unchanged from last week, as was Wyoming.

Farther north, precipitation was unremarkable and generally below normal in the Dakotas, but rapid melting of the unusually deep snowpack has been recharging soil moisture and boosting streamflows, with river flooding reported in some areas. As a result, dryness and drought generally eased this past week, reducing D0 and D1 coverage, and removing last week's D2 from southeastern South Dakota.

The Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin reported poor or very poor conditions for 60 percent of Kansas winter wheat, 40 percent of Nebraska winter wheat, and 38 percent of Colorado winter wheat.

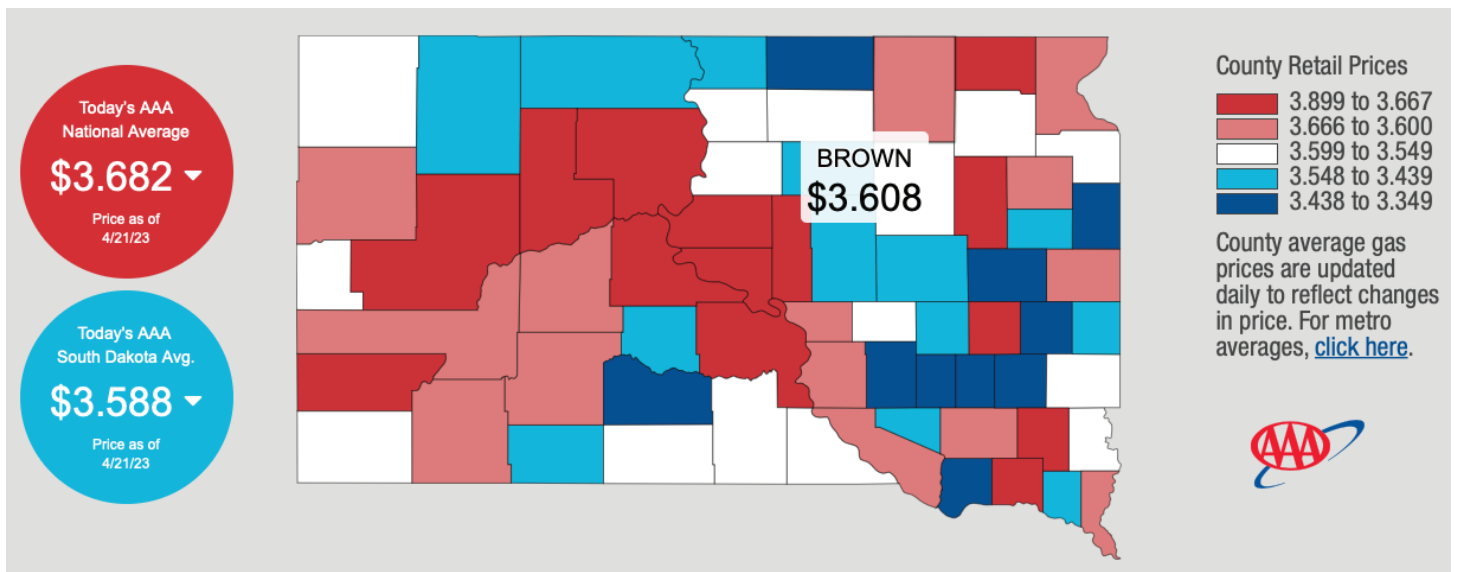
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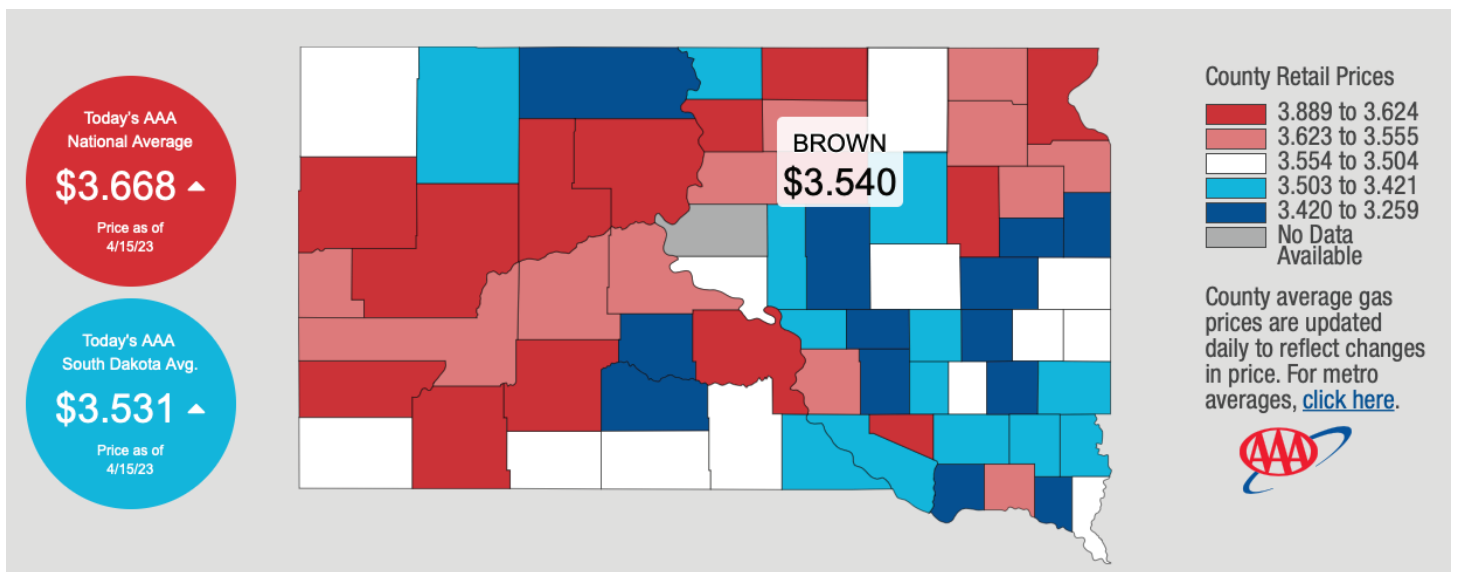
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.588	\$3.701	\$4.159	\$3.980
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.592	\$3.700	\$4.135	\$3.982
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.525	\$3.653	\$4.096	\$3.912
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.312	\$3.480	\$3.930	\$4.020
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.947	\$4.046	\$4.438	\$4.870

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



Wage Memorial Library awarded \$1,500 Grant

Stephanie Miller-Davis Library Summer Reading Grant Program

Pierre, S.D.— The Stephanie Miller-Davis Library Summer Reading Grant Program has continued its fourth year supporting summer reading programs in small rural communities in partnership with the South Dakota Community Foundation (SDCF) and the South Dakota State Library (SDSL). The program has now distributed nearly \$150,000 to libraries in rural communities across South Dakota.

Stephanie loved books. She started her legacy by donating children's books and bookcases to the school library in her hometown of Murdo, SD. She wanted to provide the children in the community the books she longed to read as a child growing up on the South Dakota prairie.

"My mother's legacy will go on through this exciting grant program," said Stephanie's daughter, Anne Franz. "If my mom was here today, I think she would be proud that we are continuing to support the heroic work of parents, teachers, librarians and other community members to provide every child the chance to read."

"The South Dakota Community Foundation is proud to partner with the Stephanie Miller-Davis family as they perpetuate their mother's passion and investment in early childhood literacy across South Dakota," said Jeff Veltkamp, SDCF Director of Development. "I think Stephanie would be very proud to see her daughters continuing her investment in children."

The SDCF administers over 1,100 funds benefiting thousands of wonderful causes every year. To learn more about charitable opportunities through the SDCF, please visit <https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/> or call (605) 224-1025.

The South Dakota State Library (SDSL) is a division of the South Dakota Department of Education. The State Library supports local libraries and works to build capacity within the state's public and school libraries, which successfully reached the goal of 100,000 South Dakota children participating in summer reading programs in 2021. The State Library encourages families to visit their local library, get involved in events and activities and keep growing readers. To learn more, please visit <https://library.sd.gov/CAL/2023/SDSummerReading2023.aspx>

In 2023, each of the following libraries were awarded \$1,500 to support their summer reading programs:

- Alcester Public Library
- Armour-Carnegie Library
- Avon Public Library
- Britton Public Library
- Doland Community Library
- Emil M. Larson Library
- Gregory Public Library
- Haakon County Public Library
- Hand County Library
- Jackson County Library
- Kennebec Public Library
- Lake Andes Carnegie Library
- Lennox Community Library
- M.P. Beebe Memorial Library
- Newell Public Library
- Parker Public Library
- Presho Public Library
- Scotland Community Library
- Tripp County Library - Grossenburg Memorial
- Wage Memorial Library
- Webster Public Library
- Woonsocket Community Library
- Grant County Public Library
- Mitchell Public Library
- Piedmont Valley Library
- R. E. Rawlins Municipal Library



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Proposed EPA 'forever chemicals' regulation could cost SD millions for testing, cleanup

BY MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 21, 2023

Nearly 100 families living in Box Elder have been drinking bottled water provided by the military for the past five years.

That's because their water system was contaminated with chemicals used in firefighting foam at nearby Ellsworth Air Force Base.

And Sioux Falls has had 21 wells — a significant amount of its water production from the Big Sioux aquifer — shut down for years due to similar contamination from the firefighting foam used at its airport and Air National Guard base. The city and the airport are separately suing chemical makers for the impact on the city's infrastructure.

The chemicals in both places are per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which at certain levels may be associated with a variety of health problems. The chemicals have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s and don't break down easily or quickly in the environment or in the human body. The chemicals can be found in everything from firefighting foam to children's clothes to soil to water. Last month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed what would be the first national standard-regulating levels of PFAS in drinking water.

Hundreds of utilities already tested across the country have levels of the "forever chemicals" above the proposed limits in their water supplies and would need to build infrastructure to treat their water, or find another source of uncontaminated water to meet the standards. All other public water systems would need to be tested if the standards are approved.

The Ellsworth Development Authority and Sioux Falls were approved for a combined \$22 million in drinking water loans from the state last year to address their contaminated water. Those loans are just to cover new water mains and a new well for each site — it doesn't include the cost of installing technology that could remove the chemicals from Sioux Falls' existing wells, which could run in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Some estimates put the total cost of meeting the proposed regulations for the entire country at around \$400 billion, which is more than 200 times the funding made available so far by the federal government to treat PFAS-contaminated water.

The question now is where the rest of the money will come from.

Companies that use the chemicals are already embroiled in lawsuits. Water customers and taxpayers are the next in line to foot the bill, said Jay Gilbertson, manager of the East Dakota Water Development District, based in Brookings.

"The water is only as good as the water needs to be to meet all the standards," Gilbertson said. "As



Firefighting foam, used at airports and military bases, has been identified as a source of toxic PFAS chemicals. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Fire Administration)

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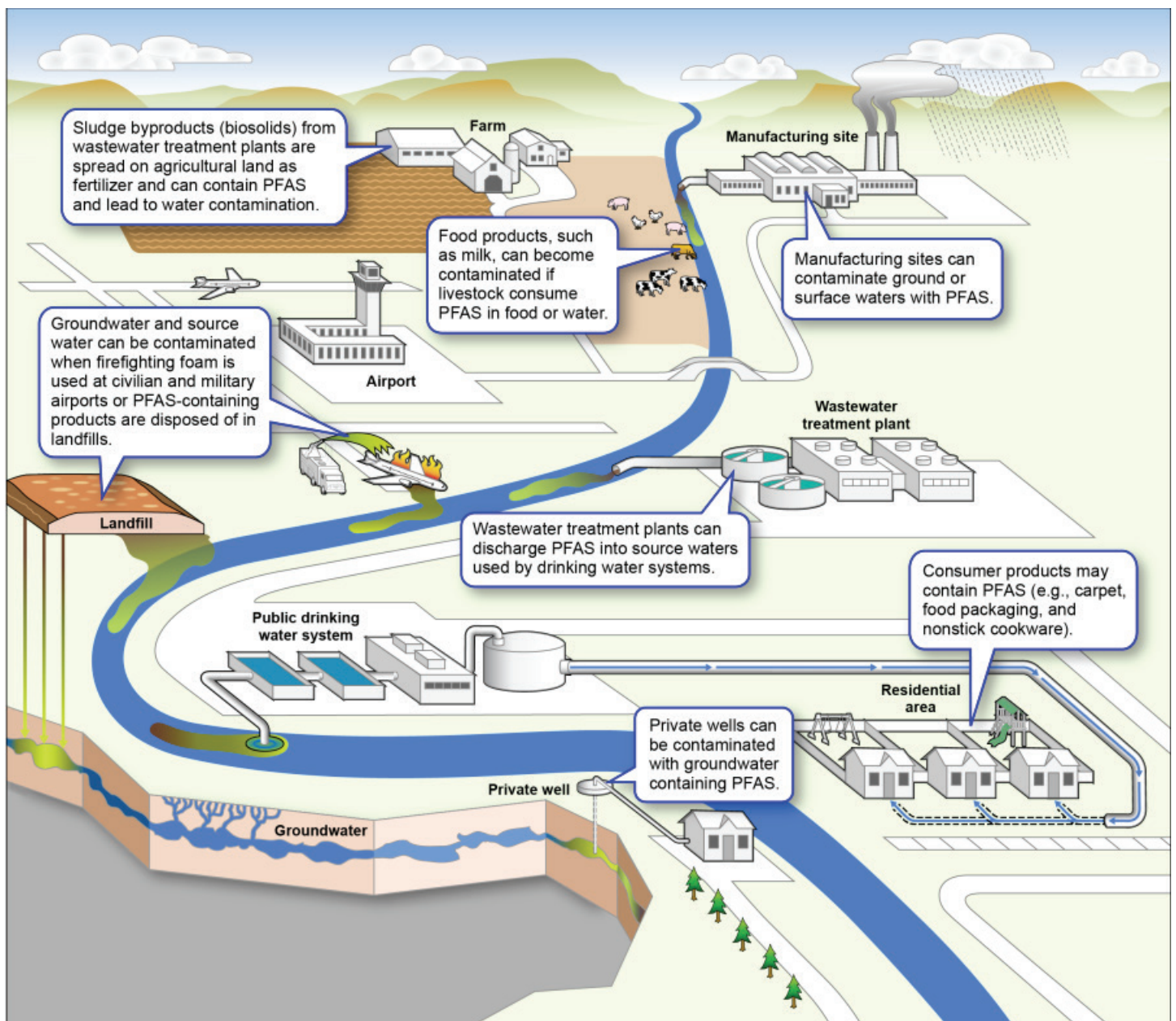
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standards get more stringent, for good health reasons, it probably means we'll have to pay more for the water. It costs money to take things out of the water — that'll be the cost of clean drinking water."

Impacts of stricter regulations on South Dakota

Aside from the Sioux Falls and Ellsworth examples, South Dakota has had at least three other instances of known PFAS contamination, including in wells at National Guard facilities near Custer and in Rapid City and in the water supply for the city of Pierre, according to the nonprofit Environmental Working Group.

Dale Brewer, superintendent of the Pierre water department, said the city was flagged for chemical levels in its drinking water above 50 parts-per-trillion in 2014. But after re-testing the groundwater source, the test came back with a non-detectable chemical level, he said. The city switched to treated Missouri River water in late 2022.



Examples of how PFAS can enter into the environment and water. (Courtesy of the U.S. Government Ac-

countability Office)

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While those three instances were below the EPA's health advisory of 70 parts-per-trillion at the time of testing, none of them would pass under the EPA's proposed standard of four parts-per-trillion.

Groundwater and soil near the Sioux Falls airport was contaminated at a combined rate of up to 255,100 parts-per-trillion in 2018, and groundwater and soil at Ellsworth Air Force Base were contaminated at a rate of up to 551,000 parts-per-trillion in 2016, according to analysis of military records by Northeastern University and the Environmental Working Group.

The new standard would allow for no more than 4 parts per trillion of the chemicals in drinking water, which is comparable to a few grains of salt in an Olympic-size swimming pool.

"From a health standpoint, what's being learned is that the less, the better," Gilbertson said. "There is effectively no level of these things that should be considered safe. We first thought a part per billion was safe, then 70 parts per trillion, and now we're all the way down to 4 parts per trillion, which really says 'we want none of this at all.'"

South Dakota starts first statewide testing effort

Kevin Christenson is tasked with testing 40 of South Dakota's rural water systems for such contaminants. He's tested about 10 systems so far since January, but he won't look at the results.

"I'm scared to find out what's out there," said Christenson, source water protection specialist with the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems. "If you find anything, then you need to figure out the steps to remedy the problem, which a lot of people don't have the answers for."

The EPA is funding the project and analyzing test results that come in. A spokesman with EPA said the agency has not received validated sample results for the state yet, and that results will be publicly available later this year.

The multi-year initiative, funded on the federal level, involves testing nearly 50 systems across the state ranging from small to large systems, including some cities that will do their own testing.

"It's not going to be cheap if there are systems — or even one system — with PFAS," Christenson said. "Maybe a town has that one water source but then the next one is miles down the road that they have to purchase and install a pipeline to get to it. Or they have to drill a new well and find a new water source that doesn't have PFAS in it."

There hadn't been a systematic effort to test for these chemicals in the state before, though other states have been testing sites for years and establishing their own limits on levels of PFAS in drinking water. But that's because South Dakota rarely goes "looking for problems," Gilbertson said.

"In the case of a contaminant of some kind that isn't regulated yet or at all, there's really not much incentive to go looking for it because nothing can be done," Gilbertson said. "If there isn't a standard then why test?"

Ellsworth begins construction, Sioux Falls awaits trial

Since contaminated water was found in Sioux Falls in 2013, the city regularly tests its drinking water for the chemicals. While it still has 21 wells out of commission, the city started purchasing water from the Lewis and Clark Regional Water system, a nonprofit, wholesale provider of treated water. Testing of water from the Lewis and Clark Regional Water System in 2019 showed PFAS contamination of 2.6 parts per trillion, which is below the proposed EPA standard.

Sioux Falls and its airport are two of thousands of plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit against manufacturers of the toxic firefighting foam used across the country for decades.

Documents filed in the Sioux Falls case in 2019 in the U.S. District Court for South Carolina allege chemical-makers tested for and were aware of health risks of compounds used in a firefighting foam that for decades was tested and stored at the Sioux Falls Regional Airport and used by the National Guard and Sioux Falls firefighters.

The first trial involving water supply contamination involves Stuart, Florida, and is scheduled to go before a jury in June. Sioux Falls and other plaintiffs will have to wait and see what happens in that first decision to see if the city will go to trial or reach a settlement agreement.

The city would not answer questions about PFAS testing and mitigation from South Dakota Searchlight

because it “does not comment on pending litigation,” said Gregg Engler, senior assistant city attorney for Sioux Falls.

The U.S. Department of Defense is investigating, inspecting and cleaning sites in South Dakota for PFAS contamination. The Camp Rapid National Guard base in Rapid City is complete while cleanup efforts continue at Ellsworth and National Guard facilities at the Rapid City and Sioux Falls airports.

The Ellsworth Development Authority has been working on a proposed water system to get water from Rapid City to impacted residents near the Air Force base at Box Elder. Construction is expected to start this summer.

The EPA has set a 60-day period for public comment on the proposed PFAS regulations, after which it can finalize the standard. The EPA expects to finalize the regulation by the end of 2023.

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.

State regulators propose, then roll back, stricter environmental requirements for oil wells

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - APRIL 21, 2023 4:30 PM

State regulators proposed stricter environmental requirements for three oil wells in South Dakota but are poised to roll back some of the requirements after the affected company objected.

The company is Citation Oil & Gas Corp. of Houston, Texas. It's attempting to renew an expiring surface-water discharge permit for three wells – including one that's not currently producing – in South Dakota's Harding County. The sparsely populated county contains most of the state's oil industry, with 152 of the state's 166 active oil wells.

Citation needs a discharge permit because its wells bring up water from deep underground with oil. The company uses chemicals, heat and gravity to separate the oil from the water. The separated water flows from treatment tanks into a manmade detention pond, and some water drains into nearby tributaries that lead to creeks. The creeks provide water for fish, wildlife, livestock, irrigation and recreation.

Over the life of the three wells, they've produced about 144 million gallons of water, according to data maintained by the state. Water discharged from oil wells may contain substances such as dissolved solids, petroleum hydrocarbons, radium, benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene.

Surface-water discharge permits impose monitoring requirements and limits on some substances to ensure water is safe for its approved uses. The state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources published a draft renewal of Citation's discharge permit for the three wells in December 2021. The proposed new permit included some changes, including more frequent water sampling and stricter limits on some substances.

Bob Redweik, a Citation vice president, responded with a letter to the department.

“Citation contends that unreasonable limitations are being established in the draft permit such that undue harm may occur to both Citation and the landowner without any environmental justification,” the letter said, in part.

The letter went on to cite six concerns about changes in the permit. After considering those concerns, the state rejected some requested changes but agreed to others.



An oil derrick pump, detention pond, treatment tank and other equipment at a Citation Oil & Gas Corp. well in northwest South Dakota. (Images from SD DANR permit file)

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The state agreed to remove:

- Daily company self-inspections during water discharges, settling instead for weekly inspections.
- A requirement to measure the depth of water in the detention ponds.
- A requirement to report the duration of water discharges.
- Monthly discharge monitoring report forms, settling instead for quarterly reports.
- Limits on benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene, after sample results showed amounts well below a maximum standard (the state's response said it reserves the right to impose these limits later "if it is determined there is reasonable potential the discharge could violate water quality standards").
- Monitoring for total dissolved solids, conductivity, alkalinity, radium-226 and water temperature, on the basis that "the daily maximum flow rate of 4,500 gallons per day will ensure any discharge from Citation will not reach Jones Creek or Bull Creek."

Redweik told South Dakota Searchlight that the state determined the discharged water "doesn't make it down there" to the creeks. When asked where it does go, he said it goes into tributaries where it's "used up watering the wildlife and the livestock."

The state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources responded to South Dakota Searchlight questions by email.

"There is no evidence the discharge waters reach either creek," said Brian Walsh, a spokesperson with the department.

The state opened a 30-day comment period on the draft permit March 24. Within 30 days after the close of that comment period, the secretary of the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources will issue a final determination.

Jay Gilbertson, manager of the East Dakota Water Development District, has submitted written comments on the draft permit. He is urging state regulators to reinstate limits on several substances.

"With the changes proposed in the draft permit, most parameters used to assess the fish and wildlife propagation, recreation and stocking suitability will be discontinued, and none of the parameters used to assess irrigation water suitability will be collected," Gilbertson wrote. "I am at a loss as to how the purpose of the permit can be accomplished under these circumstances."

Redweik told South Dakota Searchlight that the revised draft permit will allow the wells to keep producing oil.

"If we had to do something different with this water, it would make the field more uneconomic," Redweik said. "The state is appropriately regulating us based on the volume of discharge and our record of compliance."

Oil production from the three wells since the 1970s has totaled a combined 830,580 barrels, according to records maintained by the state.

The state's Office of School and Public Lands owns the mineral rights for at least one of the wells, named State Cave Hills #1. The office (and therefore public education, which is the ultimate recipient of the money) has received \$550,982 from the lease of those mineral rights since 1998, the earliest date of records available from the state. The payments are based on the value of the oil produced.

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

Iowa court denies South Dakota man's appeal in pipeline trespassing case

BY: JARED STRONG - APRIL 21, 2023 11:15 AM

The Iowa Supreme Court has rejected the appeal of a carbon dioxide pipeline surveyor who was charged last year with trespassing in northwest Iowa and wanted the case dismissed before trial, according to court records.

Stephen James Larsen, 28, of Arlington, South Dakota, was cited in August for going onto a Dickinson County property to conduct a land survey for Summit Carbon Solutions' proposed pipeline after other surveyors had previously been told to leave and not return.

A district court judge denied Larsen's request to dismiss the case in January, and a trial is now set for June 29, court records show.

Larsen sought a review from the Supreme Court of that judge's denial, but the high court declined to do so in an order last week.

The order, signed by Justice Christopher McDonald, noted that the appeal contained too many documents — a total of more than 90 pages that exceeds a normally allowed 25-page limit set forth by the state's Rules of Appellate Procedure.

"These documents appear to constitute the entire record of the proceedings below," McDonald wrote. "The length limitation is designed to ensure an orderly and efficient process for deciding motions by providing the court with ready access to the most critical aspects of the record."

Larsen is being represented by attorneys Alan Ostergren of Des Moines and Bethany Brands of Spirit Lake.

Ostergren has argued that Iowa law explicitly protects land surveyors for pipelines from being charged with trespassing. The law gives pipeline companies access to private land after they hold informational meetings about the projects and provide 10 days' written notice via certified mail.

"The entry for land surveys ... shall not be deemed a trespass and may be aided by (court) injunction," the law says.

"If you if you think of this as a sword and a shield in the same sentence, the shield is: The entry is not deemed a trespass," Ostergren said during a district court hearing in December. "The sword is: The pipeline company gets the ability to go to court and get legal process to aid its entry."

Dickinson County Attorney Steven Goodlow, who is prosecuting the case, has said landowners and a tenant refused to accept certified letters from the company and that Summit should have sought an injunction to force the survey, potentially with the assistance of law enforcement.

Other pending cases

The trespassing case is among several challenges to the state's land survey law.

Another district court judge's decision is pending in Woodbury County, where pipeline company Navigator CO2 Ventures has sued landowners to get an injunction.

That case, involving William and Vicki Hulse, went to trial in March. It hinges on whether Navigator met its requirements for notifying the Hulses of the survey and whether the survey law is constitutional.

It's unclear when the case will be decided. It is one of several lawsuits that Navigator and Summit have filed against unwilling landowners.

Early this month, a judge overseeing a lawsuit in Clay County found that Navigator had complied with notification requirements but did not yet issue an injunction, pending a decision about the constitutionality of the law.

Brian Jorde, an Omaha, Nebraska, attorney who is representing landowners in the lawsuits, said the Clay County case differs from the one in Woodbury County because the Clay landowner admitted he signed



The Iowa Supreme Court chamber in the Iowa Judicial Building on Feb. 22, 2023. (Kathie Obradovich/Iowa Capital Dispatch)

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for the 10-day notice.

Navigator has two other pending lawsuits against landowners which have been consolidated into one case, set for trial in May in Butler County.

Summit has pending lawsuits in six counties that are set to go to trial between May and August.

Summit's hearing with the Iowa Utilities Board for its hazardous liquid pipeline permit request is expected to be held starting in October.

New board appointments

That hearing will follow a significant shake-up in the composition of the three-member board. Existing members had overseen the entirety of the proceedings for three proposed carbon dioxide pipelines.

Those proceedings began in August 2021 for Summit, in October 2021 for Navigator and in June 2022 for Wolf Carbon Solutions.

Board member Richard Lozier's term expires at the end of this month, and Gov. Kim Reynolds announced in early April her appointment of Erik Helland to the board as its chairperson.

Helland is an attorney and former state representative who has most recently been a member of the Iowa Public Employment Relations Board.

Huser's term as chairperson was set to expire at the end of the month, but her term as a board member extended into 2027. However, Huser has "stepped down" from the board, said Kollin Crompton, a spokesman for the governor's office. He did not specify when that happened or when it was effective.

This week, Reynolds announced her appointment of Sarah Martz to the board. Martz is the director of engineering for utility distribution at Iowa State University.

The Senate on Thursday approved those appointments, which required two-thirds support. Helland was confirmed with a 39-11 vote, and Martz was unanimously confirmed.

This story was originally published by Iowa Capital Dispatch, which like South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, a network of news bureaus supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. Iowa Capital Dispatch maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor Kathie Obradovich for questions: info@iowacapitaldispatch.com. Follow Iowa Capital Dispatch on Facebook and Twitter.

Jared Strong is the senior reporter for the Iowa Capital Dispatch. He has written about Iowans and the important issues that affect them for more than 15 years, previously for the Carroll Times Herald and the Des Moines Register. His investigative work exposing police misconduct has notched several state and national awards. He is a longtime trustee of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which fights for open records and open government. He is a lifelong Iowan and has lived mostly in rural western parts of the state.

Congressional Roundup: Thune wants to rein in electric vehicle incentives

BY: SETH TUPPER - APRIL 22, 2023 6:00 AM

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the latest installment in a series of periodic updates on the activities of South Dakota's congressional delegation.

Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, says the federal government gives too much help to the electric vehicle industry.

Automakers can tap into the Department of Energy's \$40 billion pool for loans and loan guarantees to lower the cost of electric vehicle production. Buyers are also eligible for up to \$7,500 in tax credits.

Thune calls that "double dipping." This week, he reintroduced a bill to make automakers choose one incentive or the other.

"My bill would protect American taxpayers from footing the bill for the Democrats' sweeping windfall for EVs, especially for subsidy costs that would skyrocket under the administration's recent proposal to phase out gas-powered vehicles," Thune said in a news release.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently proposed emission regulations for new cars and trucks that could cause two-thirds of all new vehicle sales to be electric within a decade. The administration has said a multipronged approach to incentivizing electric vehicle manufacturing and sales is necessary to "bring a clean, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation future to Americans even faster."

Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, is one of the five cosponsors – all Republicans – of Thune's bill.

Anti-China legislation

Rounds introduced a bipartisan bill this week with Sen. Jacky Rosen, D-Nevada, that aims to counter China's influence on Taiwan.

The bill would require the U.S. Department of Defense to expand cybersecurity cooperation with Taiwan, which suffers millions of cyberattacks from China per month, according to Rounds.

"With increasing aggressiveness by the People's Republic of China toward Taiwan, this legislation will help deter and, if necessary, defeat an attack by the PRC on Taiwan," Rounds said in a news release.

Lead ammunition

Rounds and Thune teamed with Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana, and 22 of their Senate Republican colleagues to introduce a bill that would stop several federal agencies from banning lead ammunition or tackle on public lands in some circumstances.

An exception in the text of the bill says bans could be imposed if field data show that lead ammunition or tackle led to a decline in the wildlife population on the land in question.

Rounds said in a news release that the bill "keeps the heavy hand of government from interfering with our way of life in South Dakota." Some hunters prefer to use lead where it's allowed, including on private land, saying it's more effective for pheasants and other game.

Yet South Dakota already requires nontoxic ammunition, such as steel, when hunting some species on



Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, meets with leaders of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate in April 2023 in Washington, D.C. (Sen. Thune's Office/Twitter)

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public land.

The bill is partly motivated by a successful lawsuit from the Center for Biological Diversity that forced the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to begin phasing out lead ammunition and tackle at several wildlife refuges. The center says lead can poison endangered animals like whooping cranes that ingest it when feeding in fields and waterways.

Johnson supports GOP debt deal

U.S. House Republicans unveiled a debt limit proposal Wednesday that would lift the nation's borrowing capacity by \$1.5 trillion into next year.

The bill, introduced by Speaker Kevin McCarthy, carries numerous Republican initiatives that are unlikely to get the bipartisan support necessary to clear the divided Congress. Congress faces a deadline as soon as mid-June to raise the debt limit or risk the nation's first-ever default.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, said in a news release that he took part in efforts to draft the plan. He said priorities of the Republican Main Street Caucus, which he chairs, were included.

"We are \$32 trillion in debt, and in six weeks our nation defaults on our debts," Johnson said in a news release. "We are duty-bound to address both of those crises. Republicans have a reasonable plan to do so."

President Joe Biden criticized Republicans for tying dozens of conservative policy positions to their debt limit bill.

Popularity ratings

New rankings from the polling firm Morning Consult say Thune is the fourth most popular senator in the country among his constituents, and Rounds is the seventh.

The rankings are based on surveys of registered voters in each state conducted from January to March. Sixty-three percent of respondents approved of Thune's job performance, and 61% approved of Rounds.

How they voted

In notable floor action this week:

- Johnson voted yes on a bill to prohibit transgender student athletes from competing on girls sports teams consistent with their gender identity, which passed 219-203 but is viewed as doomed in the Democratic-controlled Senate.
- Thune and Rounds each voted in favor of an attempt to block abortion access at Department of Veterans Affairs facilities but the bill failed 48-51.
- Johnson voted yes on a veto override to stop Biden's expansion of waters that can be regulated under the Clean Water Act; the override, which needed a two-thirds majority, failed 227-196.
- Johnson voted yes on a bill that would require U.S. diplomats and intelligence officials to report to Congress their work with allies deterring Chinese surveillance aircraft and to provide a classified briefing on any airborne spying over the U.S. by the rival nation since 2017; the bill passed 405-6 and now heads to the Senate.

– States Newsroom's D.C. Bureau contributed to this report.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

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New records release puts pardons from Gov. Noem at 228

BY: JOHN HULT - APRIL 22, 2023 5:00 AM

The South Dakota Secretary of State's Office has released 28 additional pardons signed by Gov. Kristi Noem since 2019.

Earlier this year, the office released 200 of Noem's pardons in response to a records request from South Dakota Searchlight.

It's unknown why the additional pardons were not in the first batch. Deputy Secretary of State Tom Deadrick said his office had no comment on how or why the new records were discovered.

The secretary of state keeps records of each governor's pardons for five years, after which the records are sealed.

The new records were sent on April 11, days after the publication of a South Dakota Searchlight report on Noem's pardons and commutations.

An analysis of the new batch of records revealed the 28 additional pardons were granted in 2019, 2021 and 2022. All but two were signed in batches on the following dates: Nov. 26, 2019, Sept. 10, 2021, and March 10, 2023. One was signed on Sept. 9, 2021, another on Sept. 15, 2021.

The latter was one of three pardons issued less than five years from the date of sentencing, which is the amount of time the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles typically asks a person to wait before requesting a pardon.

The crimes pardoned less than five years from the date of the sentence were (ages current):

- Petty theft 2nd degree, \$400 or less in Davison County, issued in 2021 to a 26-year-old woman sentenced in September 2018.
- Driving under the influence, first offense in Brookings County, issued last July to a 31-year-old woman sentenced in February 2018.
- Criminal entry of a motor vehicle in Minnehaha County, issued in 2021 to a 35-year-old man sentenced in October 2017.
- The Board of Pardons and Paroles has sent several favorable recommendations for pardons to Gov. Noem so far in 2023. The board can recommend pardons, but only the governor can sign and finalize them, an act that can clear crimes from the pardoned person's record.

Last week, the board recommended pardons for four people.

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

U.S. Interior secretary unveils \$125 million for local climate projects

Funding includes \$2.35 million for projects in South Dakota

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 21, 2023 8:02 PM

BOISE, Idaho — The U.S. Interior Department will send \$125 million from the bipartisan infrastructure law to scores of local climate resiliency and conservation projects, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland told a group of environmental reporters Friday.

Speaking at the Society of Environmental Journalists annual conference, Haaland promoted several aspects of the Interior Department's agenda, including programs receiving funds from the \$1.9 trillion bipartisan infrastructure law and Democrats' 2022 climate and spending law, both of which President Joe Biden signed.

Haaland called the spending in those laws "once-in-a-generation funding."

"These investments have the potential to be transformational," she said.

The funding announced Friday will support 240 projects throughout the country, she said. A full list of projects is available here.

The money is meant for several different priorities, including cleaning up legacy pollution funding, such as former mining sites and orphaned oil and gas wells, improving resiliency to wildfires and flooding and restoring biodiversity.

Interior will also send \$35 million for 39 National Fish Passage Program projects in 22 states. The program, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, works to remove barriers such as dams and levees to create passages that allow fish to follow their natural migration patterns.

Separately, Haaland announced \$140 million for Western water projects through the department's Bureau of Reclamation. That funding also comes from the bipartisan infrastructure law.

The money will go to 84 projects in 15 states, Haaland said. Those projects are expected to conserve 77 billion gallons of water, she said.

In addition to the funding announcement, Haaland also endorsed recent administration actions related to environmental justice and public lands.

The United States faces several environmental crises related to climate change, Haaland said. The rising sea levels, worsening fires and other impacts of climate change are felt most acutely by disadvantaged "people at the margins," Haaland said.

The Biden administration is committed to environmental justice to address those inequities, Haaland said.

Biden on Friday signed an executive order creating an Office of Environmental Justice within the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

U.S. House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Bruce Westerman, an Arkansas Republican, criticized the order in a statement, saying the administration should instead focus on lowering energy costs.

"Studies, scorecards and new offices filled with bureaucrats aren't going to do anything to improve the environment," he said.

Haaland also praised a draft rule the Bureau of Land Management released last month to promote conservation as a core function of federal lands. The rule is meant to put conservation on an equal footing with extractive industries such as mining and energy development, she said.



U.S. Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland delivers remarks near the Yellowstone River in 2021. (NPS/Jacob W. Frank, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)

(NPS/Jacob W. Frank, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)

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And Haaland promoted her own 2021 order to remove a derogatory term for Native American women from official place names.

Permitting reform

In an earlier appearance at the conference Friday, Bureau of Land Management Director Tracy Stone-Manning called on Congress to approve Biden's budget request, which includes funding increases for agencies that grant environmental permits for energy and infrastructure projects.

That additional funding would help speed approvals of renewable energy and transmission projects more effectively than reforming laws like the National Environmental Policy Act that govern how the federal government processes permits to build energy and infrastructure projects, she said.

"From where I sit, NEPA and permitting is not the biggest problem," Stone-Manning said. "The biggest problem is having enough people to do the work."

Haaland has often been the target of Republican calls for the administration to open more oil and gas development, while also receiving criticism from climate activists who want the administration to end fossil fuel development on public lands and waters.

Asked about that balance Friday, Haaland said the department was bound by federal law that required holding oil and gas lease sales but was also prioritizing renewable energy projects.

Haaland declined to answer a question about her personal feelings on a recent decision to allow oil drilling in Alaska.

Earlier Friday, Haaland and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director Martha Williams also made an appearance in Nampa, Idaho, to announce \$1 million for the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge under the agency's Urban Wildlife Conservation program.

South Dakota funding

Seven projects in South Dakota will receive a total of \$2.35 million.

Projects sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs:

Parmelee Dam Recreation Facilities Project, \$100,000

Oglala Reservoir Recreation Improvement Project, \$500,000

Rosebud Dam Recreation Improvement, \$300,000

Ghost Hawk Reservoir Recreation Improvement, \$250,000

Parmelee Dam Recreation Improvement Project, \$100,000

Other projects:

Increase Native Seed for Northern Great Plains, National Park Service, \$900,000

Prairie Restoration on Easements in South Dakota, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, \$200,000

— *Source: Department of Interior project list*

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.

U.S. Supreme Court preserves access to abortion pill as lawsuit continues

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JENNIFER SHUTT - APRIL 21, 2023 5:57 PM

WASHINGTON — The abortion pill will remain available throughout the United States while a lawsuit over its approval and use works through the appeals process, the U.S. Supreme Court said Friday.

The court issued a stay that ensures access to mifepristone nationwide, reversing lower court rulings about when and how the abortion medication should be available in a case filed by anti-abortion organizations. The case is expected to ultimately be decided by the high court following appeals court deliberations.

Friday's decision stems from a ruling in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, where Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, in early April, essentially overturned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval of mifepristone dating back to 2000. Kacsmaryk is a nominee of former President Donald Trump.

The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans then placed a partial hold on the district court ruling, following a request from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The ruling by that three-judge panel would have kept mifepristone on the market, but required use and administration of mifepristone to revert to the FDA's pre-2016 instructions.

Mifepristone, which blocks a hormone called progesterone that is needed for a pregnancy to continue, is one of two drugs used in a medication abortion. Medical abortions make up more than half of abortions in the U.S., according to research by the Guttmacher Institute.

Friday's highly anticipated ruling by the high court means the abortion pill will remain on the market for now without the limitations placed on it by the appeals court.

"The April 7, 2023, order of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, case No. 2:22-cv-223, is stayed pending disposition of the appeal in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit," read the opinion, issued just before 7 p.m. Eastern on Friday.

Dissents from Thomas, Alito

The only noted dissents were from Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito. Alito wrote that he would not have granted the stay for the lower court decision, arguing that the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals placed the suit on a "fast track."

"(T)here is reason to believe that they would get the relief they now seek — from either the Court of Appeals or this Court — in the near future if their arguments on the merits are persuasive," Alito wrote.

In a statement, President Joe Biden said the stay granted by the Supreme Court prevented a lower court from undermining the "FDA's medical judgment and put women's health at risk."

"I continue to stand by FDA's evidence-based approval of mifepristone, and my Administration will continue to defend FDA's independent, expert authority to review, approve, and regulate a wide range of prescription drugs," he said.

In his dissent, Alito argued that the Justice Department did not prove "that they are likely to suffer irreparable harm."

Regarding a separate, contrary ruling issued by a federal judge in Washington state that preserves full access to the abortion pill in more than a dozen states, Alito said the argument that "chaos" could ensue from the opposite decisions "should not be given any weight."



In this photo illustration, packages of mifepristone tablets are displayed at a family planning clinic on April 13, 2023, in Rockville, Maryland. (Anna MoneyMaker/Getty Images)

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That separate case pertaining to access to mifepristone that contradicts the Texas decision came from 17 Democratic state attorneys general — and the District of Columbia — who filed a suit, arguing that the FDA wrongly imposed restrictions on mifepristone. Shortly after the Texas judge's decision, Washington state judge Thomas Rice, an appointee of former President Barack Obama, ordered the FDA to preserve the status quo for mifepristone for those 17 states and the District of Columbia.

"The Washington District Court enjoined the FDA from altering its current practice regarding mifepristone — something that the FDA had never hinted it was contemplating," Alito wrote. "The FDA did not appeal that appealable order, and when seven States that might take such an appeal asked to intervene, the FDA opposed their request. This series of events laid the foundation for the Government's regulatory 'chaos' argument."

Reactions pour in

Following the Friday stay, congressional Democrats acknowledged that the decision to keep mifepristone on the market is a short reprieve.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said in a statement that the Supreme Court's stay is "a temporary victory."

"Make no mistake, extreme MAGA Republicans will continue to pursue their nationwide abortion ban until they impose their anti-choice agenda on all Americans," he said.

The co-chair of the House Pro-Choice Caucus, Democratic Rep. Diana DeGette of Colorado, said in a statement that the stay "averted a disaster that not only would have put women's health at risk, but also threatened to upend our nation's entire drug-approval process going forward."

"As the 5th Circuit now prepares to consider this case, I'm hopeful any future decisions regarding Americans' ability to access this important medication are based solely on science, not politics," she said.

Alliance Defending Freedom, the organization representing the plaintiffs, maintains the FDA approved the drug without safeguards, despite numerous studies showing the drug's safety and effectiveness.

"As is common practice, the Supreme Court has decided to maintain the status quo that existed prior to our lawsuit while our challenge to the FDA's illegal approval of chemical abortion drugs and its removal of critical safeguards for those drugs moves forward," said the organization's senior counsel, Erik Baptist, in a statement Friday night.

"Our case seeking to put women's health above politics continues on an expedited basis in the lower courts. ... We look forward to a final outcome in this case that will hold the FDA accountable," the statement continued.

The 5th Circuit ruling, which will no longer go into effect, was unworkable, said the federal government, the manufacturers of the brand name and generic versions of the drug, and reproductive rights organizations.

It would have meant that mifepristone would no longer have been approved for up to 10 weeks gestation, but seven weeks.

Patients would have to attend three in-person doctor visits instead of one, all adverse events would have to be reported to the FDA, and dosage and administration of the medication would have reverted to pre-2016 instructions.

It would have prevented doctors from prescribing mifepristone via telehealth and prohibited delivery of the medication through the mail.

The generic version of mifepristone would no longer have been approved.

Oral arguments in the appeals court are scheduled for mid-May.

Ariana Figueroa contributed to this report.

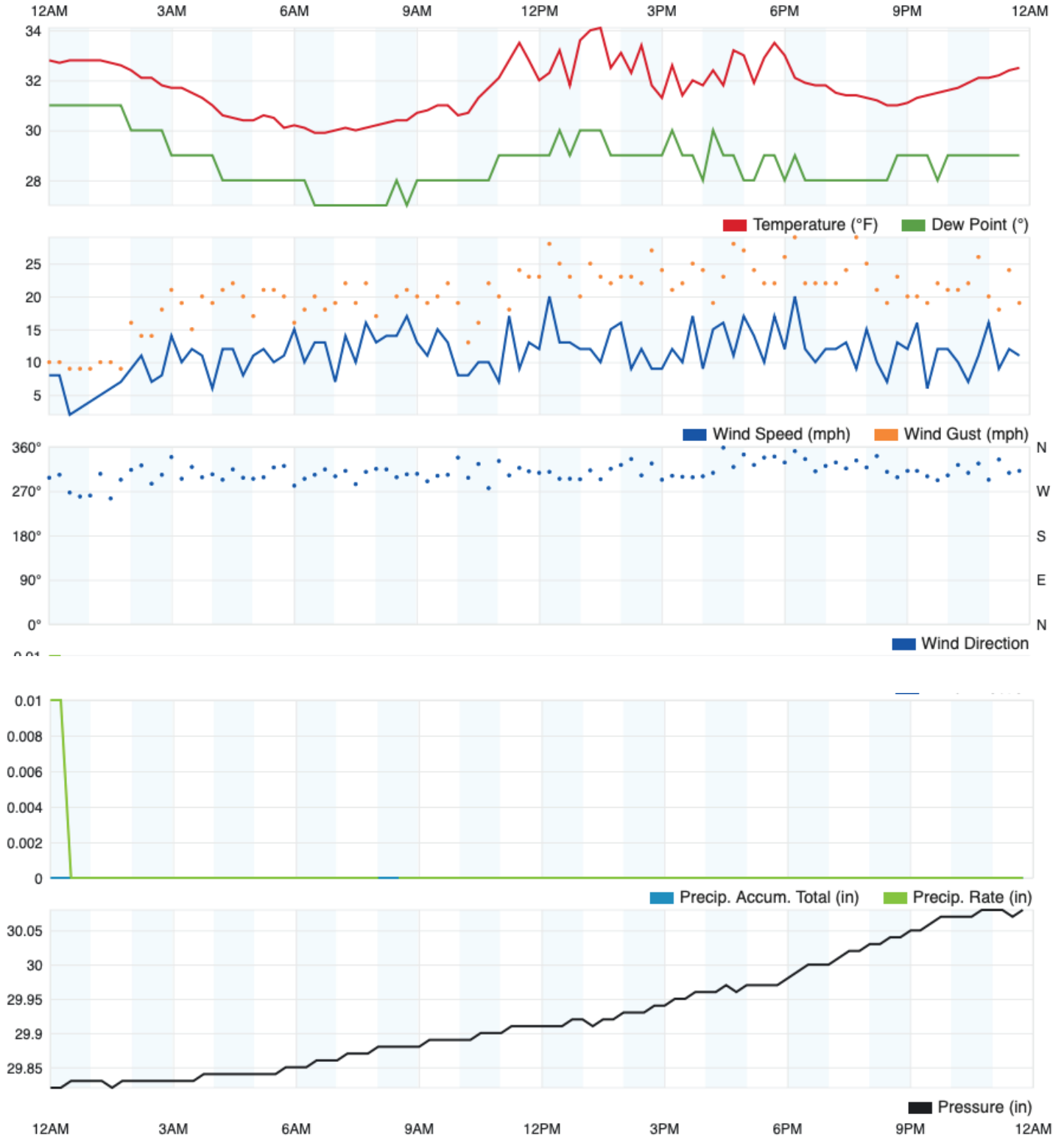
Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

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

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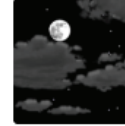
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Yesterdays Groton's Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday	Tuesday Night
							
Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Partly Cloudy
High: 38 °F	Low: 19 °F	High: 44 °F	Low: 20 °F	High: 47 °F	Low: 24 °F	High: 51 °F	Low: 30 °F



The Weekend & Later Outlook

April 22, 2023
2:43 AM

Today

- Mostly Cloudy, few early snow showers east, Highs 31-48°

Tonight

- Partly Cloudy, Lows 15-30°

Sunday

- Partly Sunny & Milder, Highs 36-56°

Monday-Wednesday

- Dry until Wed, Lows 20s to 30°, Highs 50s to near 60°



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The Weekend Forecast

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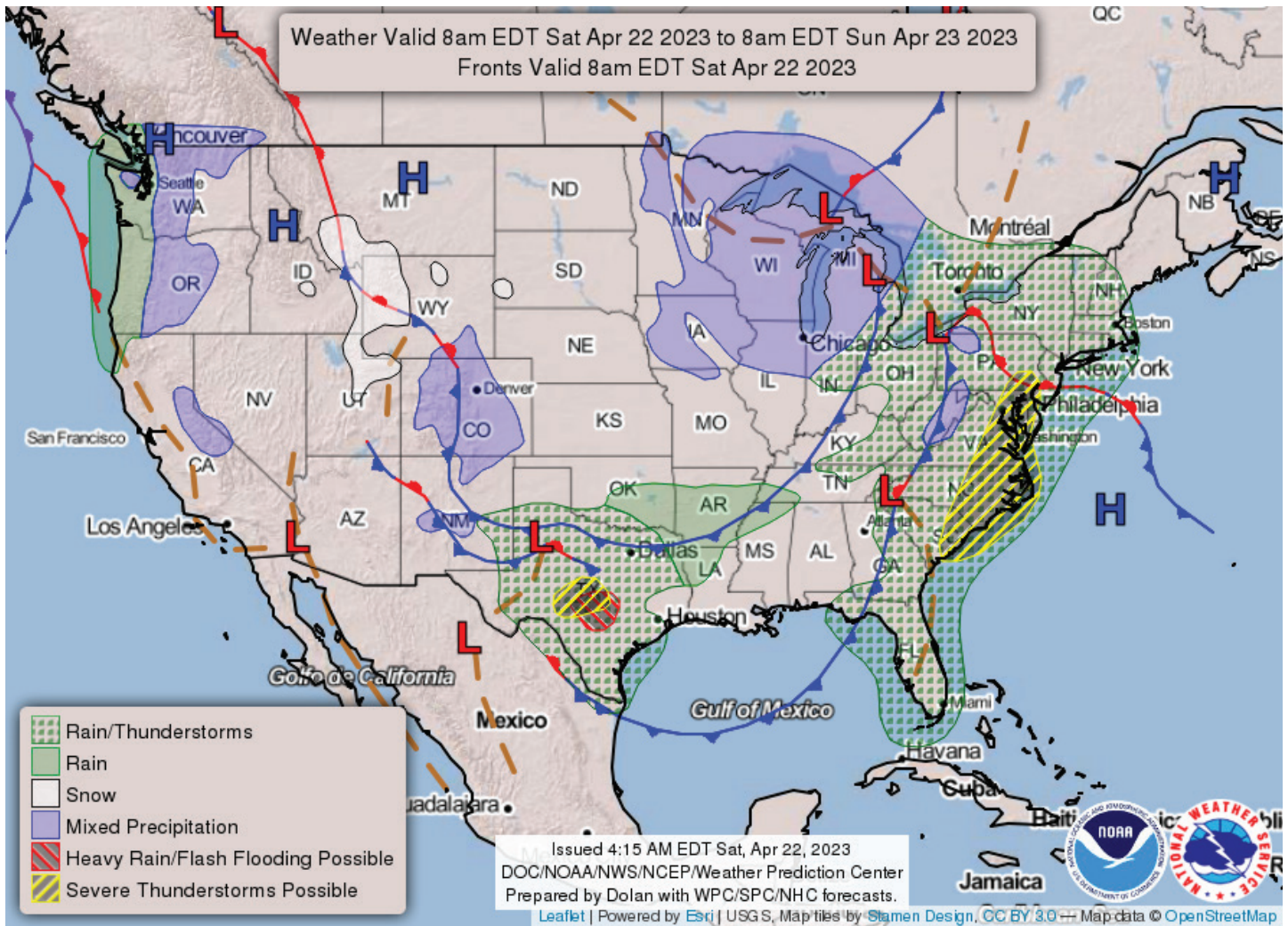
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 34 °F at 1:17 PM
Low Temp: 30 °F at 6:34 AM
Wind: 29 mph at 6:12 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 55 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 90 in 1990
Record Low: 15 in 2015
Average High: 61
Average Low: 34
Average Precip in April.: 1.19
Precip to date in April.: 1.67
Average Precip to date: 3.25
Precip Year to Date: 5.60
Sunset Tonight: 8:28:40 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:31:28 AM



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Today in Weather History

April 22, 1968: A late season snow storm affected most of South Dakota, with the heaviest snowfall measuring 18 inches at Eagle Butte. Also, localized icing damaged utility lines, and 40 mph winds caused localized blizzard conditions. Some calf losses were reported.

April 22, 1992: With a fresh blanket of snow from a recent snowstorm helping to keep the air cool the high temperature at Sioux Falls only reached 31 degrees. This cold temperature is the latest below freezing high temperature on record in Sioux Falls.

April 22, 2001: Heavy snow of 7 to 15 inches fell across much of central and northeast South Dakota from early on the 22nd to early on the 23rd. Some freezing rain also brought heavy icing in Buffalo, Eastern Lyman, and far southern Roberts counties resulting in some downed trees and branches along with some downed power lines. This late season snowstorm caused many travel problems along with some accidents. There were many vehicles in the ditch along Interstate-29 in Roberts County. Many schools and events were either canceled or delayed on the 22nd and 23rd. The heavy snow also caused problems with ranchers and their livestock with some calves lost in the storm. Around 9:30 am on the 23rd in Kennebec, the heavy snow resulted in the roof of the 40 by 64-foot feed and seed warehouse to collapse. Late season record snowfalls were set at Aberdeen and Pierre. Some snowfall amounts included 7 inches at Timber Lake and Leola, 8 inches at Eagle Butte, Mobridge and Aberdeen, 9 inches at Kennebec and Pollock, 10 inches at Gettysburg, Selby, Redfield, and Webster, and 11 inches at Onida, Mission Ridge, Hosmer, and Columbia. Locations with snowfall amounts of a foot or more included, 12 inches at Britton, Ree Heights, Highmore, Blunt, Seneca, and Pierre, 13 inches at Murdo, Presho, Miller, and Wilmot, 14 inches at Roy Lake and southwest of Harrod, and 15 inches at Saint Lawrence.

1883: A tornado outbreak from Louisiana to Kansas claimed the lives of at least 127 people and injured over 800 others. One of the tornadoes destroyed the town of Beauregard, Mississippi.

1978: Lightning sometimes strikes tents. In this case, a tent containing some sleeping Girl Scouts was hit by lightning as they were camping at DeGray Lake in Arkansas. Two of the Girl Scouts suffered minor burns.

1980 - A record April heat wave sent the mercury up to the 100 degree mark in Iowa. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Fifteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 96 degrees at Pensacola FL established a record for the month of April. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Heavy snow fell over northern Nebraska, with 15 inches reported at Mullen. Heavy snow also blanketed the mountains of northern Arizona, with 16 inches reported at Munds Park. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty-seven cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The high of 96 degrees at Omaha was an April record, and the high of 100 degrees at Lubbock TX equalled their record for April. Hill City KS and Liberal KS tied for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 103 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern and Central High Plains to north-west Florida during the afternoon and evening. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 67 mph at Gillette WY, hail two inches in diameter west of Roswell NM, and deluged Cheyenne OK with 8.68 inches of rain leaving some parts of the town under five feet of water. Temperatures reached the low 90s in the north central U.S. Chamberlain SD and Pickstown SD tied Presidio TX for honors as the hot spot in the nation with afternoon highs of 94 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1999: A one million dollar air charter Bowling 727 flew into large hail. Although the plane and its 66 occupants landed safely, the aircraft was declared a total loss.

2003: Tropical Storm Ana became the first Atlantic tropical storm since records began in 1871 to form during the month April. Maximum sustained winds reached 55 mph. Starting as a non-tropical area of low pressure on the 18th about 210 miles south-southwest of Bermuda, it was classified as a sub-tropical storm early on the 20th, it gained full tropical characteristics near 0000 UTC on the 21st, developing an "eye" feature.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

AVOIDING THE TRUTH

A gentleman was fascinated with an advertisement he read about a barometer. He thought he would be the envy of his neighbors to have such an instrument at his home. In his mind he imagined them coming to him for weather reports. So, he ordered one.

When it arrived, the needle was pointing to "Tornado." In disbelief, he shook it, slapped it, then waved it from side to side. But the needle remained pointing toward the word "tornado." In anger, he wrapped it up, took it to the post office, and mailed it back to the manufacturer, thinking, "They tried to cheat me!"

As he was returning home, he noticed that many trees were overturned with their roots in the air. Buildings were destroyed and power lines down. Damage and destruction were everywhere he looked. Finally, he turned onto the street where he lived and there, before his eyes, was his home. It had been completely destroyed. The barometer was right, he was wrong: a tornado had been approaching when he received his barometer.

Many of us fail to realize that there are serious consequences for each decision we make. Every choice does indeed, have its consequences. However, there is one choice that is more important than any other choice we will ever make: What will YOU do with Jesus?

Prayer: We thank You, Father, for Your salvation that can be ours through Christ. May we accept Your grace and accept Your salvation, now! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He called you to salvation when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.21.23

3 21 29 46 63 9

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$26,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.19.23

19 40 41 48 49 5

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,400,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 59 Mins
DRAW: 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.21.23

4 7 8 25 29 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 13 Hrs 29 Mins
DRAW: 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.19.23

6 10 11 17 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$32,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 59 Mins
DRAW: 49 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.19.23

9 17 22 24 31 5

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 58 Mins 49
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.19.23

4 11 21 38 64 11

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 13 Hrs 58 Mins 49
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

New wave of GOP candidates poised to join 2024 campaign

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The opening phase of the Republican presidential primary has largely centered on the escalating collision between former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

But a new wave of GOP White House hopefuls will begin entering the 2024 race as soon as this coming week after a monthslong lull. They include former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who will formally launch his campaign Wednesday.

Former Vice President Mike Pence has said he will finalize his plans in “weeks, not months.” He has kept a busy schedule of early state visits and policy speeches as aides have discussed details of an announcement including dates as early as May, but more likely in June. South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, who has formed a presidential exploratory committee, is expected to join the race in a similar time frame.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie has been meeting with former aides and he returned to New Hampshire this past week, where he said at a town hall in the first-in-the-nation primary state, “Tonight is the beginning of the case against Donald Trump.” Christie has said he will make a decision “in the next couple of weeks.”

The contenders will enter the race at a critical moment as DeSantis, who hasn’t officially announced a campaign, has struggled to live up to sky-high expectations among some early backers. He has been losing support among elected Republicans in his own state to Trump and is prompting concern among some in the party that his positions on abortion and LGBTQ rights, among other issues, could render him unelectable in a general election.

Trump in recent weeks has solidified his status as the early front-runner, even after he was indicted in New York. He remains the subject of intensifying investigations in Atlanta and Washington and persistent concerns about his electability after losing to Democrat Joe Biden in 2020.

Would-be rivals hope that dynamic leaves an opening for one of the fresh entrants to emerge as an alternative to the current polling leaders. Some strategists hope Trump and DeSantis will attack one another so viciously that they will turn off voters, who will search for an alternative.

“It’s not uncommon for a third candidate who’s not involved in the kerfuffle to rise,” said Bryan Lanza, a former Trump adviser, who has been informally advising Larry Elder, the conservative talk radio host who announced his campaign Thursday.

Lanza said he expects a robust race to be the “leader of the second tier” of candidates currently polling at under 10%.

Beyond Trump and Elder, the current field of official GOP presidential candidates includes Trump’s U.N. ambassador, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, and tech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. Both announced their bids in February.

Biden is expected to announce his 2024 campaign as soon as this coming week. He faces minimal competition for the Democratic nomination.

Among Republicans, the early debates that are slated to begin this summer could be crucial in determining who builds momentum, particularly given DeSantis’ expectations.

That means candidates may need to cement their planning soon, even if they would prefer to wait longer. The Republican National Committee has scheduled the first debate for August and is expected to set strict benchmarks that candidates must satisfy to participate, including amassing tens of thousands of individual donors.

“That takes a little time to do and so if you’re going to be serious about this — and I think you have to be on the stage to be serious about it — then you probably have to make the decision by May,” Christie said this past week during an interview with the media outlet Semafor.

Candidates-in-waiting have seen little reason to jump in sooner, particularly given Trump’s propensity

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to attack. Instead, they have been biding their time, visiting early voting states, delivering speeches and wooing donors as they assess the field. Pence, for instance, was in California this past week meeting with potential backers and will host another donor retreat for his nonprofit group in late May.

"If I was in their shoes, I would wait as long as possible," said former Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who was considered an early favorite for the Republican nomination when he ran against Trump in 2016. He remembers realizing, in those early weeks, how dramatically Trump had upended the race, dominating everything.

"There was no way around it then," he said. "And right now, anybody who thinks they're somehow going to go in and change that is missing the reality."

The rivalry between Trump and DeSantis has been turning uglier by the day, with political groups supporting both men already spending millions on attack ads.

While DeSantis has largely ignored Trump's jabs questioning his commitment to Social Security, his relationship with young girls as a teacher decades ago and even his sexuality, a pro-DeSantis super political action committee, Never Back Down, began to respond in its first round of paid ads last weekend.

"Trump should fight Democrats, not lie about Gov. DeSantis," the narrator says in an ad that ran on Fox News. "What happened to Donald Trump?"

The spot ran in conjunction with an online ad, which described Trump as "a coward" and a "gun grabber," that was aimed at those attending an RNC donor retreat in Indiana.

Trump's super PAC, MAGA Inc., has been airing its spots on cable news channels highlighting DeSantis' votes to cut Social Security and Medicare and raise the retirement age.

"The more you learn about DeSantis, the more you see he doesn't share our values. He's just not ready to be president," said the narrator in one. Another, seizing on a report that DeSantis once ate pudding with his fingers, urged the governor "to keep his pudding fingers off our money."

Trump and his campaign have long seen DeSantis as his only serious challenger and believed the more crowded the field, the better for Trump, as candidates split the anti-Trump vote. But a repeat of 2016's massive field hasn't materialized, with potential candidates such as former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan passing on campaigns.

There are still plenty of unknown dynamics, including whether governors such as Kristi Noem of South Dakota or Chris Sununu of New Hampshire will enter the contest. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin have not explicitly ruled out running.

Mike DuHaime, a Republican strategist and longtime Christie adviser, believes that Trump is the favorite but nonetheless beatable. He cautioned that races are complicated, with unexpected outcomes.

"I do think that DeSantis is right now firmly the alternative to Trump, but I don't know if it stays that way. There's still way too long to go," he said, arguing that a debate moment or news story could change the trajectory.

"Somebody's just got to get momentum," he said. "It's just so wide open even with Trump being the prohibitive favorite."

Associated Press writers Steve Peoples in New York and Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report.

For transgender kids, a frantic rush for treatment amid bans

By SAM METZ and AMANCAI BIRABEN Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — As a third grader in Utah, mandolin-playing math whiz Elle Palmer said aloud what she had only before sensed, telling a friend she planned to transfer schools the following year and hoped her new classmates would see her as a girl.

Several states northeast, Asher Wilcox-Broekemeier listened to punk rock in his room, longing to join the shirtless boys from the neighborhood playing beneath the South Dakota sunshine. It wasn't until menstruation started, and the disconnect with his body grew, that he knew he was one of them.

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Both kids' realizations started their families on a yearslong path of doctors, therapists and other experts in transgender medicine.

Now teenagers, their journeys have hit a roadblock.

Republican lawmakers across the country are banning gender-affirming care for minors. Restrictions have gone into effect in eight states this year — including conservative Utah and South Dakota — and are slated to in at least nine more by next year.

Those who oppose gender-affirming care raise fears about the long-term effects treatments have on teens, argue research is limited and focus particularly on irreversible procedures such as genital surgery or mastectomies.

Yet those are rare. Doctors typically guide kids toward therapy or voice coaching long before medical intervention. At that point, puberty blockers, anti-androgens that block the effects of testosterone, and hormone treatments are far more common than surgery. They have been available in the United States for more than a decade and are standard treatments backed by major doctors' organizations including the American Medical Association.

The new laws have parents scrambling to secure the care their kids need. They worry what will happen if they can't get the medications they've been prescribed, especially as their kids start puberty and their bodies change in ways that can't be reversed.

"My body's basically this ticking time bomb, just sitting there waiting for it to go off," said Asher Wilcox-Broekemeier, now 13. ____

Elle remembers her first day at the school after she transferred. Before leaving, she came downstairs in rainbow sparkle-embroidered cowboy boots her mother worried would only spur bullies. Taunts from kids at Elle's prior school drove her into depression so deep she had suicidal thoughts.

But on that first day, a boy told Elle he loved her boots. Some kids bullied her, but classmates and teachers were far more supportive than at her prior school. Elle discovered new passions in hip hop and drama class, and she settled into a new school and a truer version of herself. She started to see a therapist as her uncertainty about how she fit in the gender spectrum grew more pressing.

Elle came out as a transgender girl in fifth grade. Now in seventh, she planned to start hormone treatment this summer so potential side effects wouldn't interfere with her life during the school year, especially her team's extracurricular math competitions.

But then Utah's Republican Gov. Spencer Cox signed a gender-affirming care ban in January. In a compromise, the law let kids keep taking medications if they were already on them. So Elle's mom rushed to get her treatment months earlier than planned, as did other parents.

The waitlist at one Utah clinic swelled to six months. Doctors were confronted with difficult decisions about who to get in for appointments.

Elle's medication arrived in the mail just before Utah's law went into effect. A small stick implanted in Elle's forearm is slow-releasing hormone blockers to prevent the effects of male puberty from taking hold. Eventually she may be prescribed estrogen, and she and her parents will have to navigate the next steps, and whether they'll find doctors to continue her care.

At least for now, they have a reprieve.

"It feels like we can breathe again now," Cat Palmer said. ____

There's no relief for Asher Wilcox-Broekemeier's family — not yet.

When Asher began menstruating, he felt a terrifying disconnect between how his body was changing on the outside and how he felt inside.

Elizabeth began researching online to understand what was going on with her son, while Asher's father, Brian, looked to doctors for expertise. With referrals from his longtime pediatrician, Asher met with therapists and doctors who helped explore his history, personality and feelings over his whole life.

Nearly two years ago, doctors prescribed puberty blockers and birth control to slow breast development, regulate menstruation and lower the pressure of his disconnect with his body.

He's 13 now, and finds solace in music to ground him in a world of occasional bullying and constant

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mistaken pronouns. He practices Blink-182's "All the Small Things" on guitar, plays trumpet in the school band and is rehearsing various singing roles for the Cinderella school musical. When he's not thinking about testosterone to lower his voice or eventually getting top surgery, he looks forward to playing in the high school marching band next year.

Asher still struggles with moments of gender dysphoria. Friendships that were once strong fizzled after Asher came out as transgender. Parents have disinvited him from their houses out of fears he's a "bad influence."

But his parents have noticed his emotions stabilize through his treatment.

"From a parent's view, I see him as being able to be himself authentically, which is wonderful for him," Elizabeth said.

Now he and his parents worry they'll have to start over.

In February, South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem signed a law banning the medications and procedures that doctors have increasingly prescribed for transgender teens.

Asher's current doctors in South Dakota won't be able to prescribe his medications, so the family is looking for a new doctor in neighboring Minnesota, where the Democratic governor has signed an executive order explicitly protecting gender-affirming care for minors. They're hoping to find a clinic close enough they can drive to appointments and don't have to pay for hotel stays.

The planning has been time-consuming. Logistical questions to their current South Dakota doctors for referrals have gone unanswered. They want to beat whatever onslaught of patients from other states enacting similar bans will bring to providers in Minnesota, but also want to maintain as much normalcy for Asher as they can.

The sudden twists in Asher's trajectory makes him question why his health care is of concern to politicians.

"Even though trans people don't make up a big percent of the population doesn't mean that we're not part of it still," Asher said. _____

The full consequences of the bans on care for minors aren't yet clear.

Dr. Nikki Mihalopoulos, an adolescent medicine doctor in a Salt Lake City specialty clinic with transgender teens, worries the new laws will make families too scared to seek help and doctors too scared of losing their licenses to provide care.

In the middle are kids like Elle and Asher.

Multiple studies have shown that transgender youth are more likely to consider or attempt suicide and less at risk for depression and suicidal behaviors when able to access gender-affirming care.

Both sets of parents are trying to shelter their kids from the stress and anxiety caused by the recent changes in the laws.

After years of worrying about their kids' safety and mental health, they still fear what could happen if they can't find the drugs their kids have been prescribed.

"My kid being OK is my number one priority. I know what the suicide rate is. I do not want my child to be a statistic," Cat Palmer said of Elle.

_____ Biraben reported from Pierre, South Dakota.

Transgender, library, child care bills move in North Dakota

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

North Dakota House lawmakers passed three bills Friday that would restrict transgender people's access to bathrooms, remove sexually explicit materials from the children's section of libraries, and expand child care assistance in the hopes of combating the state's workforce shortage.

The trans bill and sexual materials bill passed the House and Senate with veto-proof majorities, so the bills could become law without Republican Gov. Doug Burgum's approval.

The child care bill passed after heated debate in the House and without a veto-proof majority. It still requires approval from the Senate and governor to become law.

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TRANSGENDER BILL

The legislation would limit access to bathrooms, locker rooms and shower rooms for transgender and gender-nonconforming people in several state facilities. That includes dorms and living facilities controlled by the state board of higher education, penitentiaries and correctional facilities for youths and adults.

Restrooms and shower rooms at these facilities would be designated for use exclusively for males or exclusively for females, according to the bill. Transgender or gender-nonconforming people would need to get approval from a staff member at the facility to use the restroom or shower room of their choice.

House lawmakers did not debate the bill. It passed with a 78-14 vote.

Three Republicans — Reps. Eric James Murphy of Grand Forks, David Richter of Williston, and Cynthia Schreiber-Beck of Wahpeton — defied their party and voted against the bill. In the other direction, Democratic Rep. Corey Mock, of Grand Forks, was the only person in his party to vote in support of the bill.

The American Civil Liberties Union has said that so far this year, more than 450 bills attacking the rights of transgender people have been introduced in state legislatures.

SEXUAL MATERIALS BILL

Public libraries would be prohibited from keeping sexually explicit material — which is defined as being “patently offensive” and lacking “serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value for minors” — in the children’s section, under this bill.

A librarian or anyone else who knowingly violates the rule could be charged with a felony, said Republican Rep. Lawrence Klemin, of Bismarck, speaking on the House floor before voting in support of the bill. The felony comes with up to five years in prison and \$10,000 in fines.

Following minimal discussion, the bill passed with a 70-22 vote. All 12 Democrats voted against it, along with 10 Republicans.

Attempted book bans and restrictions at school and public libraries have surged across the country, setting a record in 2022, according to the American Library Association last month.

CHILD CARE BILL

Following heated debate, House lawmakers passed a bill that would expand child care assistance for parents in the state.

Supporters said the bill would help the state combat its workforce shortage, whereas opponents said it would cost too much without the guarantee of bringing in more workers.

The program would cost \$65.6 million — which is “significantly less” than the other child care proposals lawmakers heard — and it would help thousands of children, said Republican Rep. Emily O’Brien, of Grand Forks, while speaking in support of the bill on the House floor.

Democratic Rep. Alisa Mitskog, of Wahpeton, added that New Mexico — a competing oil-producing state — has already invested in child care assistance to attract workers.

But opponents said the program would be a waste of money from the state’s general fund. “It’s also a very leftist, socialist idea,” Republican Rep. Jeff Hoverson, of Minot, said.

The bill passed with a 62-29 vote, with all 12 Democrats voting in support along with 50 Republicans.

Burgum, the second-term Republican governor and a staunch supporter of child care investments, said last year that the lack of affordable child care in North Dakota contributes to workforce shortages that have hurt the state’s economy. Adequate and affordable child care would help attract and retain companies in the state, he added.

Trisha Ahmed 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. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

Lawmakers war-game conflict with China, hoping to deter one

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's April 22, 2027, and 72 hours into a first-strike Chinese attack on Taiwan and the U.S. military response. Already, the toll on all sides is staggering.

It was a war game, but one with a serious purpose and high-profile players: members of the House select committee on China. The conflict unfolded on Risk board game-style tabletop maps and markers under a giant gold chandelier in the House Ways and Means Committee room.

The exercise explored American diplomatic, economic and military options if the United States and China were to reach the brink of war over Taiwan, a self-ruled island that Beijing claims as its own. The exercise played out one night last week and was observed by The Associated Press. It was part of the committee's in-depth review of U.S. policies toward China as lawmakers, especially in the Republican-led House, focus on tensions with President Xi Jinping's government.

In the war game, Beijing's missiles and rockets cascade down on Taiwan and on U.S. forces as far away as Japan and Guam. Initial casualties include hundreds, possibly thousands, of U.S. troops. Taiwan's and China's losses are even higher.

Discouragingly for Washington, alarmed and alienated allies in the war game leave Americans to fight almost entirely alone in support of Taiwan.

And forget about a U.S. hotline call to Xi or one of his top generals to calm things down — not happening, at least not under this role-playing scenario.

The war game wasn't about planning a war, lawmakers said. It was about figuring out how to strengthen U.S. deterrence, to keep a war involving the U.S., China and Taiwan from ever starting.

Ideally, the members of Congress would walk out of the war game with two convictions, the committee chairman, Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., told colleagues at the outset: "One is a sense of urgency."

The second: "A sense ... that there are meaningful things we can do in this Congress through legislative action to improve the prospect of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Gallagher said.

In reality, Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, the committee's top Democrat, told lawmakers, "we cannot have a situation where we are faced with what we are going to be facing tonight."

The "only way to do that is to deter aggression and to prevent a conflict from arising," said Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill.

The U.S. doesn't formally recognize the Taiwan government but is Taipei's most vital provider of weapons and other security assistance. Xi has directed his military to be ready to reclaim Taiwan in 2027, by force if necessary.

Asked about lawmakers' war game, Liu Pengyu, spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy, said China wants peaceful reunification with Taiwan but reserves "the option of taking all necessary measures."

"The U.S. side's so-called 'war game' is meant to support and embolden 'Taiwan independence' separatists and further fuel tensions in the Taiwan Strait, which we firmly oppose," Liu said.

In the war game, lawmakers played the blue team, in the role of National Security Council advisers. Their directive from their (imaginary) president: Deter a Chinese takeover of Taiwan if possible, defeat it if not.

Experts for the Center for a New American Security think tank, whose research includes war-gaming possible conflicts using realistic scenarios and unclassified information, played the red team.

In the exercise, it all kicks off with opposition lawmakers in Taiwan talking about independence.

With the think tank's defense program director Stacie Pettyjohn narrating, angry Chinese officials respond by heaping unacceptable demands on Taiwan. Meanwhile, China's military moves invasion-capable forces into position. Steps such as bringing in blood supplies for treating troops suggest this is no ordinary military exercise.

Ultimately, China imposes a de facto blockade on Taiwan, intolerable for an island that produces more than 60 percent of the world's semiconductors, as well as other high-tech gear.

While the U.S. military readies for a possible fight, U.S. presidential advisers — House committee members who are surrounding and studying the wooden tables with the map and troop markers spread out

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— assemble.

They lob questions at a retired general, Mike Holmes, playing the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, before deciding courses of action.

What are the economic consequences if the U.S. goes maximalist on financial punishments, one lawmaker asks.

"Catastrophic" is the response, for both the United States and China. China will hit back at the U.S. economy as well.

"Who's going to tell the president that he has to say to the American people, 'Say goodbye to your iPhones?'" Rep. Ashley Hinson, R-Iowa, asks.

Do American leaders have any way to communicate with their Chinese counterparts, lawmakers ask. No, China's leaders have a history of shunning U.S. hotline calls, and that's a problem, the exercise leaders tell them.

In the war game, U.S. officials are left trying to pass messages to their Chinese counterparts through China-based American business leaders, whose Dell, Apple, HP and other product operations China all subsequently seizes as one of its first moves in the attack.

Are potential military targets in China "near major metropolitan areas that are going to include millions and millions of people?" asks Rep. Mikie Sherrill, D-N.J.

Has Taiwan done all it can to try to calm the situation? All it can and will, lawmakers are told.

"It's not clear to me we've exhausted all our diplomatic options," Gallagher notes.

Then, on paper, U.S. and Chinese satellites, space weapons, drones, submarines, ground forces, warships, fighter squadrons, cyber warriors, communications experts, bankers, Treasury officials and diplomats all go to war.

At the end, before the lessons-learned part, the war-game operators reveal the toll of the first wave of fighting. Lawmakers study the tabletop map, wincing as they hear of particularly hard setbacks among U.S. successes.

U.S. stockpiles of very long-range missiles? Gone.

Global financial markets? Shaking.

U.S. allies? As it turns out, China's diplomats did their advance work to keep American allies on the sidelines. And anyway, it seems the all-out U.S. economic measures against China's economy have put allies off. They're sitting this one out.

In the "hot-wash" debrief at the end, lawmakers point to a few key military weaknesses that the war game highlighted.

"Running out of long-missiles is bad," said Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-S.D.

But the most glaring shortfalls appeared in diplomacy and in nonmilitary planning.

Becca Wasser, a think tank senior fellow who role-played a convincingly menacing Chinese official, pointed to lawmakers' recurring frustration in the war game at the lack of direct, immediate leader-to-leader crisis communication. It's something Beijing and Washington in the real world have never managed to consistently make happen.

"In peacetime, we should have those lines of communication," Wasser said.

The exercise also underscored the risks of neglecting to put together a package of well-thought out economic penalties, and of failing to build consensus among allies, lawmakers said.

"As we get closer to 2027, they're going to be trying to isolate us," Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., said of Xi's government.

Holmes, in the role of Joint Chiefs chairman, reassured lawmakers, after the first three days of fighting.

"We survived," he said.

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Sudan army: Rescue of foreign citizens, diplomats expected

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — The Sudanese army said Saturday it was coordinating efforts to evacuate American, British, Chinese and French citizens and diplomats from Sudan on military aircraft, as the bloody fighting that has engulfed the vast African nation entered its second week.

The military said that its chief, Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, had spoken to leaders of several countries who have requested safe evacuations of their citizens and diplomats from Sudan. The prospect has vexed officials as most major airports have become battlegrounds and movement out of the capital, Khartoum, has proven intensely dangerous.

Burhan "agreed to provide the necessary assistance to secure such evacuations for various countries," the military said.

Questions have swirled over how the mass rescues of foreign citizens would unfold, with Sudan's main international airport closed and millions of people sheltering indoors. As battles between the Sudanese army led by Burhan and a rival powerful paramilitary group rage in and around Khartoum, including in residential areas, foreign countries have struggled to repatriate their citizens — some of whom are running short on food and basic supplies while hunkered down.

Burhan said that some diplomats from Saudi Arabia had already been transferred by land to Port Sudan, the country's main seaport on the Red Sea, and airlifted back to the kingdom. He said that Jordan's diplomats would soon be evacuated in the same way. The port is in Sudan's far east, some 840 kilometers (520 miles) from Khartoum.

The Pentagon said earlier this week it was moving additional troops and equipment to a Naval base in the tiny Gulf of Aden nation of Djibouti to prepare for the evacuation of U.S. Embassy personnel. But the White House said Friday it had no plans for a government-coordinated evacuation of an estimated 16,000 American citizens trapped in Sudan.

Burhan told Saudi-owned TV station Al-Hadath on Saturday that Khartoum's airport would not handle any evacuations because of the ongoing fighting. He claimed that the military had regained control over all the other airports in the country, except for one in the southwestern city of Nyala.

"We share the international community's concern about foreign nationals," he said. "Living conditions are deteriorating."

Even as the warring sides said Friday they'd agreed to a cease-fire for the three-day Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, explosions and gunfire rang out across Khartoum on Saturday. Two cease-fire attempts earlier this week also rapidly collapsed. The turmoil has dealt a perhaps fatal blow to hopes for the country's transition to a civilian-led democracy and raised concerns the chaos could draw in its neighbors, including Chad, Egypt and Libya.

"People need to realize that the war has been continuous since day one. It has not stopped for one moment," said Atiya Abdalla Atiya, secretary of the Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate, which monitors casualties. The clashes have killed over 400 people so far, according to the World Health Organization. The bombardments, gunbattles and sniper fire in densely populated areas have hit civilian infrastructure, including many hospitals.

The international airport near the center of the capital has come under heavy shelling as the paramilitary group, known as the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, has tried to take control of the compound. In an apparent effort to oust the RSF fighters, the Sudanese army has pounded the airport with airstrikes, gutting at least one runway and leaving wrecked planes scattered on the tarmac. The full extent of damage at the airfield remains unclear.

On Saturday, Saudi Arabia and Jordan both announced that they had started arranging for the repatriation of their citizens stuck in Sudan. Officials did not elaborate on how the plans would unfold. Jordan said it was "taking into account the security conditions on the ground" and was coordinating its efforts with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The conflict has opened a dangerous new chapter in Sudan's history, thrusting the country into uncertainty.

"No one can predict when and how this war will end," Burhan told Al-Hadath. "I am currently in the command center and will only leave it in a coffin."

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The current explosion of violence came after Burhan and the chief of the RSF, Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, fell out over a recent internationally brokered deal with democracy activists that was meant to incorporate the RSF into the military and eventually lead to civilian rule.

The rival generals rose to power in the tumultuous aftermath of popular uprisings that led to the ouster of Sudan's longtime ruler, Omar al-Bashir, in 2019. Two years later, they joined forces to seize power in a coup that ousted the civilian leaders.

Both the military and RSF have a long history of human rights abuses. The RSF was born out of the Janjaweed militias, which were accused of atrocities in crushing a rebellion in Sudan's western Darfur region in the early 2000s.

Many Sudanese — trapped in their homes as food supplies dwindle — fear that despite the generals' repeated promises, the violence will only escalate as tens of thousands of foreign citizens prepare to escape Sudan.

"We are sure both sides of fighting are more careful about foreign lives than the lives of Sudanese citizens," Atiya said.

Extreme weather is nearly universal experience: AP-NORC poll

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An overwhelming majority of people in the United States say they have recently experienced an extreme weather event, a new poll shows, and most of them attribute that to climate change.

But even as many across the country mark Earth Day on Saturday, the poll shows relatively few say they feel motivated when they talk about the issue.

The findings from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll echo growing evidence that many individuals question their own role in combating climate change. Still, the poll suggests people are paying attention.

About half of U.S. adults say they have grown more concerned about the changing climate in the past year, and a growing number say they are talking about it.

Adriana Moreno said she feels like she's been talking about climate change for years, but it's only recently that the 22-year-old high school teacher has noticed her older family members bringing up the issue more and more — "almost every time I see them," said Moreno, a Democrat in New York.

Her family on the East Coast talks about how the seasons have changed while her family in El Salvador talks about how poorly some crops on their farm are faring. After years of hearing about Moreno's own interest in the issue, her parents have themselves become more interested.

It's not that they didn't believe in climate change before, Moreno said, but it was "out of sight, out of mind."

Overall, about 8 in 10 U.S. adults say that in the past five years they have personally felt the effects of extreme weather, such as extreme heat or drought, according to the poll. Most of them — 54% of the public overall — say what they experienced was at least partly a result of climate change. They're not wrong, said the head of the federal agency overseeing weather and climate issues.

"It is a reality that regardless of where you are in the country, where you call home, you've likely experienced a high impact weather event firsthand," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief Rick Spinrad said at a meteorological conference this year, noting that the United States has the most weather disasters that cost \$1 billion of any nation in the world.

NOAA uses weather disasters that cost \$1 billion as a measure of climate change and how it affects people. Last year there were 18 of those events, costing more than \$165 billion in total and killing 474 people. That included Hurricane Ian and an ongoing drought in the West.

These types of weather events hit the nation on average once every 82 days in the 1980s, but are now smacking the country at a rate of slightly more than once every two weeks, Spinrad said.

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"With a changing climate, buckle up," Spinrad warned. "More extreme events are expected."

The poll shows about three-quarters of U.S. adults say recent extreme weather events have had at least some influence on their beliefs about climate change.

After 2 1/2 years living in Agoura Hills, California, Rick Hoeft has noticed extreme weather events that make him concerned about climate change now more than ever before. He hadn't been face to face with the same weather whiplash when he lived for decades in Hawaii and Michigan, where he's moving back to this month.

"Hearing about the things like the fires and seeing the hills around here being brown and not getting any rain for three, four, five months in a row ... it's not something I'd ever thought of anywhere else because I've never been in such extreme drought," the 65-year-old Republican retiree said. Then, "when we finally do get rain, it's extreme."

He says his girlfriend, who had lived in California for 45 years, tells him "this isn't normal."

Extreme downpours, like the series of winter storms that flooded California, and large droughts are happening more frequently and with more intensity because of climate change, studies show. Tornadoes are moving further east and the supercells that spawn them are expected to get more frequent and move even further east as the world warms. Wildfires have been devastating for years, worsened by warming.

Half of U.S. adults say they have spoken with friends and family about climate change in the past year, compared with about 4 in 10 who said the same last June.

Still, many say they rarely or never talk about the issue.

John Laubacker, a 36-year-old truck driver from Lockport, New York, says climate is an important issue to him personally. But he doesn't find himself talking about it much.

Laubacker, a moderate Republican, says he finds the conversation on climate, like other issues, is dominated by those with extreme views on both sides of the aisle.

The poll finds people don't tend to talk about climate change with people they outright disagree with on the issue. Among those who talk with family and friends, about half say they mostly agree with those they talk to, while most of the remainder say they tend to equally agree and disagree.

A clear majority say they have learned new information in a conversation on the subject, but only 19% of U.S. adults say their minds have been changed because of a conversation about climate change.

The poll also finds few feel very hopeful or motivated when they talk about climate change; roughly half feel those at least somewhat. That's true of anxiety and sadness as well.

Anthony Thompson, a 74-year-old retiree and a Democrat, thinks climate change has accelerated, but he picks and chooses who he talks to about it in "ruby red" Jackson, Tennessee. But if it comes up when tornadoes or hailstorms tear through their area, he offers what he's learned as "food for thought."

To Thompson, changes in weather have become more severe – as has his concern.

"I'm more concerned now because I think people kind of take everything for granted and I don't think they really care, to be quite honest," he said. "Hopefully if we concentrate on some of this stuff we can at least slow it down."

AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein contributed to this report.

The poll of 1,230 adults was conducted April 13-17 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Jokic has triple-double, Nuggets beat T-wolves for 3-0 lead

By DAVE CAMPBELL AP Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets delivered the type of disciplined performance that's a prerequisite for lasting a long time in the NBA playoffs.

The Minnesota Timberwolves sure aren't there yet.

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Jokic had his seventh career triple-double in the playoffs with 20 points, 11 rebounds and 12 assists and the Nuggets beat the Timberwolves 120-111 on Friday night to take a 3-0 lead in the first-round series.

"We didn't want to give them life," said Jokic, the two-time reigning NBA MVP who led the league with 29 triple-doubles this season. "We wanted to be the aggressor. We wanted to punch them first."

Michael Porter Jr. had 25 points and nine rebounds and Jamal Murray added 18 points and nine assists as Denver withstood another dashing game by Minnesota's Anthony Edwards to send a loud crowd of white-shirt-wearing fans home from another frustrating postseason loss.

"Proud of the group," Nuggets coach Mike Malone said. "They handled their business like they're supposed to, like mature teams do."

Edwards scored 36 points to raise his series total to 95, Karl-Anthony Towns had 27 points after totaling only 21 points over the first two games and Rudy Gobert had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Wolves, but a defensive lapse here and a rushed 3-pointer there was enough to seal their fate against this Nuggets team finally healthy enough for another run at the NBA finals.

"Our decision-making on offense just kind of let us down," coach Chris Finch said.

Bruce Brown had 12 points to lead Denver's 29-10 edge in bench points, and the Nuggets shot a hard-to-beat 57% from the field.

Game 4 is here Sunday.

"No disrespect to the T-wolves, this is about us, but we don't want to go back to Denver," Malone said.

With the Nuggets holding their first 2-0 lead in nine playoff series under Malone, their message from the coach was to keep the throttle on full and not give the underdog Wolves extra confidence.

The Western Conference's top team shot like its seeding depended on it and outjumped the Wolves for just about every long rebound. The Nuggets had two 9-0 runs in the first half and started the second quarter by making 12 of their first 16 shots on their way to a 13-point lead.

Edwards, who had 41 points in Game 2 for the franchise playoffs record, single-handedly brought the Wolves back with the kind of starburst only players like him are capable of.

After a bad pass by Towns was picked off by Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, Edwards hustled for the block and quickly converted a Euro-step layup on the other end. The Wolves kept up the momentum and cut the lead to 61-55 right before halftime. They were still within six points at the end of the third quarter.

The Wolves won their play-in game here a week ago on the backs of Towns and Gobert, the unlikely big-man pairing they created when former Nuggets president of basketball operations Tim Connelly bolted for the same job in Minnesota and swung a blockbuster trade for Gobert.

The Wolves attacked the basket better than they did in the first two games, and Towns drew Jokic's fourth foul with 5:51 left in the third quarter, but the 7-foot Serb is just too skilled — and too much of a load — to get beat that way.

"The offense looks a little different when 'Joke' isn't out there, but we've been making it work," Porter said. "We've just got a lot of dudes who can do a lot of different things."

SCREEN SHOT

Finch, asked before the game about Jokic's impact on making space for Murray and his shot, took a subtle swipe at how he feels Jokic — who has 14 fouls in the series — is officiated.

"He does a really good job of screening, and moving and screening at the same time, those types of things," Finch said in his best deadpan.

Gobert made light at his introductory news conference last summer of Finch's allegations of his illegal screening with Utah.

TIP-INS

Nuggets: Caldwell-Pope had 11 of his 14 points in the second quarter. ... Murray, who went 10 for 20 from deep in the first two games, was 1 for 6.

Timberwolves: Towns, who shot 8 for 27 from the field in the first two games, went 10 for 17. He's 5 for 16 from 3-point range in the series.

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

Mexico migrant camp tents torched across border from Texas

By VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

MATAMOROS, Mexico (AP) — About two dozen makeshift tents were set ablaze and destroyed at a migrant camp across the border from Texas this week, witnesses said Friday, a sign of the extreme risk that comes with being stuck in Mexico as the Biden administration increasingly relies on that country to host people fleeing poverty and violence.

The fires were set Wednesday and Thursday at the sprawling camp of about 2,000 people, most of them from Venezuela, Haiti and Mexico, in Matamoros, a city near Brownsville, Texas. An advocate for migrants said they had been doused with gasoline.

"The people fled as their tents were burned," said Gladys Cañas, who runs the group Ayudandoles A Triunfar. "What they're saying as part of their testimony is that they were told to leave from there."

There were no reports of deaths or significant injuries. But about 25 rudimentary shelters made up of plastic, tarps, branches and other materials were torched in a sparsely populated part of the camp. Many who lived there also apparently lost clothing, documents and whatever other modest belongings may have been left inside.

Margarita, a Mexican woman staying at the camp, said Friday she saw migrants from Venezuela screaming during the previous day's blaze.

"They had their children with them and a few other things they had a chance to get," Margarita said. She spoke on the condition that her last name not be published due to fears for her safety.

Gangs recently threatened migrants who were wading across the river border illegally, as well as their guides, Margarita said, but the crossings had continued.

Criminal groups often prey upon migrants in the area and demand money in return for permission to pass through their territory.

However, Juan José Rodríguez, director of the Tamaulipas Institute for Migrants, a state agency coordinating with Mexico's federal government, said he had no information that a gang was responsible for the fires.

Rodríguez attributed them to a group of migrants and said some 10 tents that had already been abandoned were burned. He added that they apparently set the fires to express frustration with a U.S. government mobile app that assigns turns for people to show up at the border and claim asylum.

Migrants have been applying for 740 slots made available daily on the glitch-plagued app, CBPOne, which allows them to enter the U.S. legally at an official crossing.

There are far more migrants than available slots, exacerbating tensions in Mexican border cities that house them, often in shelters and camps like the one in Matamoros. Last year hundreds of migrants blocked a major pedestrian crossing between Tijuana and San Diego until authorities shut down the protest.

In Matamoros on Wednesday night, about 200 migrants gathered on the southern side of an international bridge and halted all U.S.-bound traffic, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported. Vehicles were able to resume crossing after about two hours and pedestrians were allowed to cross after about four hours.

CBP made no mention of fires at the Mexican camp in its statement about the bridge shutdown.

The tent fires in Matamoros come on the heels of a March 27 blaze that killed 40 men at a Mexican immigration detention center in Ciudad Juarez. The fire was allegedly started by a detained migrant to protest conditions at the facility in the city across from El Paso, Texas.

The U.S. government is increasingly turning to Mexico while preparing to end pandemic-era asylum restrictions, known as Title 42 authority, on May 11. Mexico recently began accepting people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela who cross the border irregularly and are turned back by the U.S.

The Biden administration also is putting final touches on a policy under which asylum would be denied to people who pass through another country, such as Mexico, to reach U.S. soil.

Associated Press writer Alfredo Peña in Ciudad Victoria, Mexico, contributed to this report.

Rural Maine town shaken by violence remembers slain friends

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

BOWDOIN, Maine (AP) — Tireless. Helpful. Deeply religious.

Those were some of the ways Patti Eger's friends remembered her Thursday in the small Maine town of Lisbon Falls, joining hands in prayer on a lawn outside a white church to say goodbye to a woman who stood alongside them to do charity work and attend services.

Patti Eger was one of four people killed in a violent rampage that shook the calm Maine community.

"I couldn't believe it at first," said Arlene Couture, a fellow member of the group. "We're going to miss her terribly.

The shootings of seven people brought the national spate of mass gunfire home to a rural community where violent crime is rare. In tiny Bowdoin, Maine, a town of rolling hills, sturdy farmhouses and only one store, the property where the four were killed has drawn friends, family members and neighbors to grieve. Police have charged Joseph Eaton, 34, with four counts of murder, and have said there could be more charges coming.

Killed were Eaton's parents, Cynthia Eaton, 62, and David Eaton, 66, along with homeowners Robert Eger, 72, and Patti Eger, 62. Police said Eaton later began firing on several cars along Interstate 295 in Yarmouth. Bullets struck a family in one of the vehicles, wounding Sean Halsey, 51; Justin Halsey, 29; and Paige Halsey, 25. Paige Halsey was critically wounded, police said.

Police have yet to discuss what might have been a motive behind the shootings on the rural property and along the busy interstate highway about 12 miles (19 kilometers) from Maine's largest city, Portland. Police also have not discussed what gun or guns were used, or how Eaton obtained them. Eaton was prohibited from having guns because of his criminal past.

Eaton has been jailed since his arrest Tuesday near the chaotic highway, where traffic backed up as heavily armed law enforcement searched the area.

Eaton's parents were staying with their longtime friends after Cynthia Eaton picked him up from a Maine prison on April 14. The families' friendship endured even after the Eatons move away, eventually settling in Florida.

Friends of the Egers described them as a fixture in the community and a family that valued faith and charity.

Patti Eger was a scrapbooker who appreciated for her commitment to Lisbon Area Christian Outreach, a Lisbon Falls religious group. She was known for taking time with residents who sought service, and for greeting everyone she knew with a hug, even in the the grocery store, said Couture.

"The most I'm going to miss is she was always willing to give of herself. To everybody," said Barbara Feely, another volunteer at the outreach group.

Relatives of Cynthia and David Eaton said the fun-loving couple was most happy riding their Harley-Davidson motorcycle, often joining other relatives at biking events from Florida up to the Dakotas. Cynthia Eaton's Facebook page has posts on food, sunsets and her conservative political beliefs.

Paul Batten Jr., Cynthia Eaton's first cousin, said they camped together as children and later rode motorcycles. She could disarm a stranger with her smile and, in her words, she was a pool shark, he said.

Batten also recalled how the couple moved around to be close to Joseph Eaton during his prison stints. "She would do anything for Joey. He was her baby. She would do anything for him," he said.

Betty Fagan, Eaton's grandmother and the mother of Cynthia Eaton, said Joseph Eaton "was a good kid when he was young but we don't know what is going on with him now."

"It was terrible. It was his mom and his dad," Fagan said from her home in Ocala, Florida.

Fagan said Eaton's parents had been planning to move back to Kansas. They picked Joseph Eaton up from prison and brought him to a beach where, she said, he spent the weekend alone.

"After that, we don't know what happened. We don't know whether there was an argument or what,"

Fagan said.

Eaton had a criminal history in Maine, Kansas and Florida, all states where he'd lived. Charges included domestic violence assault, violating a protection order, aggravated assault, burglary, stalking, and drunken driving, among others.

Deputies in northeastern Florida were called to a Nassau County home in January 2018 on a report of an armed man having a mental breakdown, according to an incident report. Eaton's aunt had fled after he tore the home apart, breaking things and threatening to kill himself, she told police.

After serving time on the aggravated assault, he was returned to Maine to serve a two-year sentence for violating probation, state officials said.

Rob Capehart, Eaton's cousin who lives in North Carolina and corresponded with him while was in jail, said he was still trying to understand how a man who posted on Facebook Friday about being excited to get out of jail and posted a photo of eating at dinner could go on a killing rampage.

"If we knew there was a problem, we might have been able to prevent it," said Capehart.

On Friday, a man left a stuffed animal at a makeshift memorial outside the Bowdoin home of Robert and Patti Eger as a cleaning crew in hazmat suits brought trash bags out of the house.

At the edge of the driveway, the growing memorial included flowers and Patti Eger's favorite candy, Twizzlers.

Associated Press video journalist Rodrique Ngowi in Bowdoin and writer David Sharp in Portland contributed to this report from Maine. Michael Casey contributed to this report from Boston.

The Supreme Court fight over an abortion pill: What's next?

By MARK SHERMAN and JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nothing will change for now. That's what the Supreme Court said Friday evening about access to a widely used abortion pill.

A court case that began in Texas has sought to roll back Food and Drug Administration approval of the drug, mifepristone. Lower courts had said that women seeking the drug should face more restrictions on getting it while the case continues, but the Supreme Court disagreed.

The court's action almost certainly will leave access to mifepristone unchanged at least into next year, as appeals play out, including a potential appeal to the high court.

The new abortion controversy comes less than a year after the Supreme Court's conservative majority overturned *Roe v. Wade* and allowed more than a dozen states to effectively ban abortion outright.

The following is a look at the drug at issue in the new case, how the case got to the nation's highest court and what's next in the legal case.

WHAT IS MIFEPRISTONE?

Mifepristone was approved for use by the Food and Drug Administration more than two decades ago. It has been used by more than 5 million women to safely end their pregnancies, and today more than half of women who end a pregnancy rely on the drug, the Justice Department said.

Over the years, the FDA has loosened restrictions on the drug's use, extending from seven to 10 weeks of pregnancy when it can be used, reducing the dosage needed to safely end a pregnancy, eliminating the requirement to visit a doctor in person to get it and allowing pills to be obtained by mail. The FDA also approved a generic version of mifepristone that its manufacturer, Las Vegas-based GenBioPro, says makes up two-thirds of the domestic market.

Mifepristone is one of two pills used in medication abortions, along with misoprostol. Health care providers have said they could switch to misoprostol only if mifepristone is no longer available or is too hard to obtain. Misoprostol is somewhat less effective in ending pregnancies.

HOW DID THE CASE GET STARTED?

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A lawsuit over mifepristone was filed in Amarillo, Texas, late last year. Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative Christian legal group, represents the pill's opponents, who say the FDA's approval of mifepristone was flawed.

Why Amarillo? U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, who was nominated by then-President Donald Trump, is the sole district court judge there, ensuring that all cases filed in the west Texas city land in front of him. Since taking the bench, he has ruled against President Joe Biden's administration on several other issues, including immigration and LGBTQ protections.

On April 7, Kacsmaryk issued a ruling that would completely revoke the FDA's approval of mifepristone, but he put the decision on hold for a week to allow an appeal.

Complicating matters, however, on the same day Kacsmaryk issued his order, a court in Washington state issued a separate ruling in a lawsuit brought by liberal states seeking to preserve access to mifepristone. The Washington judge, Spokane-based Thomas O. Rice, whom then-President Barack Obama nominated, ordered the FDA not to do anything that might affect the availability of mifepristone in the suing states. The Biden administration had said it would be impossible to follow both judges' directives at the same time.

HOW DID THE CASE GET TO THE SUPREME COURT?

The Biden administration responded to Kacsmaryk's ruling by asking the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to prevent it from taking effect for now.

The appeals court didn't do that, but it narrowed Kacsmaryk's ruling so that the initial approval of mifepristone in 2000 wouldn't be revoked. And it agreed with him that changes the FDA made to relax the rules for prescribing and dispensing the drug should be put on hold. It said those rules, including expanding when the drug could be taken and allowing for the drug's delivery through the mail, should be on hold while the case continued.

The appeals court acted by a 2-1 vote. The judges in the majority, Kurt Engelhardt and Andrew Oldham, are both Trump picks.

The Biden administration and the maker of mifepristone, New York-based Danco Laboratories, appealed to the Supreme Court, saying that allowing the appeals court's restrictions to take effect would cause chaos. At first, facing a tight deadline, the Supreme Court gave itself some breathing room and issued an order suggesting it would act by Wednesday evening. But no decision came Wednesday and the court instead just gave itself an extension until just before midnight Friday. It wasn't clear why.

The court did make its second self-imposed deadline, issuing its brief decision around 6:30 p.m. in Washington. Two conservative justices, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, said they disagreed with the court's action but no other justice commented.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The case is on a fast track. Now that the high court has set out the rules that will govern access for now, the case can continue on its path through the courts.

The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has already announced it will hear arguments in the case in less than a month, on May 17. Both sides as well as interest groups will submit written briefs ahead of those arguments. And a three-judge panel of the court will hear the case, though the court has not yet said who those three judges will be. The group won't issue a decision from the bench but instead hear arguments and ask questions. That will give the public a sense of what they're thinking. Their decision will be made privately after oral arguments, and at some point they'll issue a written decision announcing it.

Both sides then have an opportunity to appeal, taking the case to all the judges of the appeals court or directly to the Supreme Court. The justices take a break for the summer, however, and don't start hearing cases again until October.

Follow the AP's coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court at <https://apnews.com/hub/us-supreme-court>.

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Knicks romp past Cavaliers 99-79, take 2-1 series lead

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Back when the NBA playoffs were always part of the springtime schedule at Madison Square Garden, this is what they looked like.

Tough to score. Even a little tough to watch.

And on Friday night, the fans loved it.

Jalen Brunson scored 21 points, RJ Barrett broke out of a slump with 19 and the New York Knicks held the Cleveland Cavaliers to the lowest point total in the NBA this season, rolling to a 2-1 lead in the first-round playoff series with a 99-79 victory.

The Knicks emphatically bounced back from a loss in Game 2 and moved halfway to their first series victory since 2013. They led by 27 points in the fourth quarter, when a sold-out crowd of 19,812 was so loud there was little chance of hearing much of what the public address announcer was saying — especially as seldom-used veteran Derrick Rose was checking into the game to a huge ovation.

"It was what I expected for sure," Knicks All-Star Julius Randle said. "A lot of, lot of energy and we were able to feed off it, so I love it."

Josh Hart added 13 points for the fifth-seeded Knicks, who host Game 4 on Sunday. They became the first team to allow fewer than 80 points during the regular season or postseason.

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 points for the Cavaliers, who never gave themselves a chance with their most inept offensive performance of the season, rattled perhaps by the Knicks on the court and the fans surrounding it.

"Not being able to make shots definitely hurts as well, but it's one of those things where we'll be good," Mitchell said. "Like, kind of breathe and relax and calm down."

Darius Garland, who scored 32 points in Game 2, managed just 10 on 4-for-21 shooting. Caris LeVert, moved into the starting lineup after scoring 24 in that 107-90 victory, missed all six shots in the first half before coming on late for 17 points.

Barrett was 6 for 25 in the first two games but his shot was falling and he aggressively drove to the basket to get himself going. Plus, some of the Cavs' 21 turnovers sent Barrett and the Knicks off to easy transition baskets.

It was just the second time the playoffs came to Madison Square Garden in the last 10 years and it looked like something played by the beloved 1990s Knicks, who had the Garden rocking deep in many springs with their rugged brand of basketball.

"As a basketball player you kind of grow up thinking about moments like these," Barrett said. "It was electric in there and happy we get to come back Sunday."

Bodies crashed to the floor or into each other, and once in a while the ball went into the basket.

The Cavs had 13 baskets and 12 turnovers at halftime, when the Knicks' 4-for-19 shooting from behind the arc looked practically hot compared to the Cavs' 2-for-19 effort.

The teams combined to miss 20 of 23 3-pointers in a first quarter that ended tied at 17, and Garland (0 for 8) and Randle (0 for 5) couldn't hit from anywhere. The Cavs' worst previous effort this season was also against the Knicks, 81 points on Dec. 4.

"It was nasty, like a lot of games have been with them this season," LeVert said.

The Knicks ran off six straight points in the second to open a 38-27 lead when Brunson stole the ball from Mitchell and dunked it, then got the final five of the half on a 3-pointer by Immanuel Quickley and another dunk off a Mitchell turnover, this one by Barrett, to make it 45-32.

The offenses got going in the third quarter, with both teams shooting above 50% and LeVert scoring 11 points. The Cavs got within single digits before the Knicks closed the period on an 8-0 run to take a 72-55 lead.

It was a rough first playoff game back home for Mitchell, who was born in Elmsford, New York, not far from where the Knicks practice, and thought he might be a Knick last summer before Utah instead traded him to Cleveland.

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He said he cut off communication with some friends who were Knicks fans and left some group chats so there would be no distractions. Usually warmly received in the arena, the fans even turned on the All-Star guard, loudly chanting "airball! airball!" when he was well off on a 3-pointer in the second quarter.

TIP-INS

Cavaliers: Garland left the game for a time in the fourth quarter after hurting his ankle when he stepped on a photographer behind the basket. ... The Cavs matched their worst first half in a playoff game, also scoring 32 in an 81-76 loss to the Knicks in Game 3 of 1996 playoffs. ... Isaac Okoro was benched for LeVert after shooting 1 for 7 in the two games in Cleveland.

Knicks: Randle and Quickley each scored 11 points. ... Backup big man Jericho Sims was out with a sore right shoulder. He hasn't played in the series.

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

House Republicans, Manhattan DA end fight over Trump inquiry

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg agreed Friday to let Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee question an ex-prosecutor about the criminal case against former President Donald Trump.

Under the agreement, committee members will be able to question Mark Pomerantz under oath next month in Washington. The deal resolves a lawsuit in which Bragg had sought to block Pomerantz from testifying, ending a legal dispute that escalated to a federal appeals court just weeks after Trump's historic indictment.

Pomerantz will be accompanied by a lawyer from Bragg's office, an accommodation the committee said it would have allowed even without Friday's agreement.

Bragg's office and the Judiciary Committee reached the agreement after the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals issued a stay Thursday that temporarily halted enforcement of a House subpoena which had called for Pomerantz to testify.

The appeals court had been scheduled to hear oral arguments in the dispute on Tuesday.

Bragg's office said the agreement, delaying Pomerantz's testimony until May 12, preserves the district attorney's "privileges and interests" in his ongoing Trump prosecution.

"Our successful stay of this subpoena blocked the immediate deposition and afforded us the time necessary to coordinate with the House Judiciary Committee on an agreement that protects the District Attorney's privileges and interests," Bragg's office said in a statement.

"We are pleased with this resolution, which ensures any questioning of our former employee will take place in the presence of our General Counsel on a reasonable, agreed upon timeframe. We are gratified that the Second Circuit's ruling provided us with the opportunity to successfully resolve this dispute," Bragg's office said.

Bragg had appealed to the 2nd Circuit after a lower court judge ruled Wednesday that there was no legal basis to block the Judiciary Committee's subpoena and that Pomerantz's deposition must go forward as scheduled.

Under the agreement, Bragg withdrew his appeal.

Russell Dye, a spokesperson for committee chair Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican, said in a statement, "Mr. Pomerantz's deposition will go forward on May 12, and we look forward to his appearance."

Pomerantz once oversaw the yearslong Trump investigation but left the job after clashing with Bragg over the direction of the case. He recently wrote a book about his work pursuing Trump and discussed the investigation in interviews on "60 Minutes" and other shows.

Bragg, a Democrat, sued Jordan and the Judiciary Committee last week seeking to block the subpoena. His lawyer, Theodore Boutrous, argued that seeking Pomerantz's testimony was part of a "transparent campaign to intimidate and attack" Bragg and that Congress was "invading a state" to investigate a local

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prosecutor when it had no authority to do so.

Boutros said House Republicans' interest in Bragg amounted to Congress "jumping in and haranguing the D.A. while the prosecution is ongoing."

The Judiciary Committee started scrutinizing Bragg's investigation of the former president in the weeks that preceded his indictment. Jordan sent letters seeking interviews with Bragg and documents before subpoenaing Pomerantz. U.S. District Judge Mary Kay Vyskocil, a Trump appointee, said in her ruling Wednesday that she would handle any legal fights that may arise from other subpoenas in the committee's investigation of Bragg.

A committee lawyer, Matthew Berry, said at that hearing that Congress has legitimate legislative reasons for wanting to question Pomerantz and examine Bragg's prosecution of Trump, citing the office's use of \$5,000 in federal funds to pay for Trump-related investigations.

Congress is also considering legislation, offered by Republicans in the wake of Trump's indictment, to change how criminal cases against former presidents unfold, Berry said. One bill would prohibit prosecutors from using federal funds to investigate presidents, and another would require any criminal cases involving a former president be resolved in federal court instead of at the state level.

House Republicans, Berry said, want to protect the sovereignty and autonomy of the presidency, envisioning a scenario where the commander in chief could feel obligated to make certain decisions to avoid having local prosecutors in politically unfavorable jurisdictions charge them with crimes after they leave office.

For those reasons, Berry argued, Congress is immune from judicial intervention, citing the speech and debate clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Pomerantz could refuse to answer certain questions, citing legal privilege and ethical obligations, and Jordan would rule on those assertions on a case-by-case basis, Berry said, but he shouldn't be exempt from showing up. If Jordan were to overrule Pomerantz and he still refused to answer, he could then face a criminal referral to the Justice Department for contempt of Congress, but that wouldn't happen immediately, Berry said.

Trump was indicted last month on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records related to hush-money payments made during the 2016 campaign to bury allegations of extramarital sexual encounters. He has denied wrongdoing and pleaded not guilty.

On Twitter, follow Michael Sisak at twitter.com/mikesisak and Larry Neumeister at twitter.com/lneumeister and send confidential tips by visiting <https://www.ap.org/tips/>

Frequent shootings put US mass killings on a record pace

By STEFANIE DAZIO and LARRY FENN Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The U.S. is setting a record pace for mass killings in 2023, replaying the horror on a loop roughly once a week so far this year.

The carnage has taken 88 lives in 17 mass killings over 111 days. Each time, the killers wielded firearms. Only 2009 was marked by as many such tragedies in the same period of time.

Children at a Nashville grade school, gunned down on an ordinary Monday. Farmworkers in Northern California, sprayed with bullets over a workplace grudge. Dancers at a ballroom outside Los Angeles, massacred as they celebrated the Lunar New Year.

In just the last week, four partygoers were slain and 32 injured in Dadeville, Alabama, when bullets rained down on a Sweet 16 celebration. And a man just released from prison fatally shot four people, including his parents, in Bowdoin, Maine, before opening fire on motorists traveling a busy interstate highway.

"Nobody should be shocked," said Fred Guttenberg, whose 14-year-old daughter, Jaime, was one of 17 people killed at a Parkland, Florida, high school in 2018. "I visit my daughter in a cemetery. Outrage doesn't begin to describe how I feel."

The Parkland victims are among the 2,842 people who have died in mass killings in the U.S. since 2006, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today, in partnership with North-

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eastern University. It counts killings involving four or more fatalities, not including the perpetrator, the same standard as the FBI, and tracks a number of variables for each.

The bloodshed represents just a fraction of the fatal violence that occurs in the U.S. annually. Yet mass killings are happening with staggering frequency this year: an average of once every 6.53 days, according to an analysis of The AP/USA Today data.

The 2023 numbers stand out even more when they are compared to the tally for full-year totals since data was collected. The U.S. recorded 30 or fewer mass killings in more than half of the years in the database, so to be at 17 less than a third of the way through is remarkable.

From coast to coast, the violence is sparked by a range of motives. Murder-suicides and domestic violence; gang retaliation; school shootings and workplace vendettas. All have taken the lives of four or more people at once since Jan. 1.

Yet the violence continues and barriers to change remain. The likelihood of Congress reinstating a ban on semi-automatic rifles appears far off, and the U.S. Supreme Court last year set new standards for reviewing the nation's gun laws, calling into question firearms restrictions across the country.

The pace of mass shootings so far this year doesn't necessarily foretell a new annual record. In 2009, the bloodshed slowed and the year finished with a final count of 32 mass killings and 172 fatalities. Those figures just barely exceed the averages of 31.1 mass killings and 162 victims a year, according to an analysis of data dating back to 2006.

Gruesome records have been set within the last decade. The data shows a high of 45 mass killings in 2019 and 230 people slain in such tragedies in 2017. That year, 60 people died when a gunman opened fire over an outdoor country music festival on the Las Vegas Strip. The massacre still accounts for the most fatalities from a mass shooting in modern America.

"Here's the reality: If somebody is determined to commit mass violence, they're going to," said Jaclyn Schildkraut, executive director of the Rockefeller Institute of Government's Regional Gun Violence Research Consortium. "And it's our role as society to try and put up obstacles and barriers to make that more difficult."

But there's little indication at either the state or federal level — with a handful of exceptions — that many major policy changes are on the horizon.

Some states have tried to impose more gun control within their own borders. Last week, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed a new law mandating criminal background checks to purchase rifles and shotguns, whereas the state previously required them only for people buying pistols. And on Wednesday, a ban on dozens of types of semi-automatic rifles cleared the Washington state Legislature and is headed to the governor's desk.

Other states are experiencing a new round of pressure. In conservative Tennessee, protesters descended on the state Capitol to demand more gun regulation after six people were killed at the Nashville private elementary school last month.

At the federal level, President Joe Biden last year signed a milestone gun violence bill, toughening background checks for the youngest gun buyers, keeping firearms from more domestic violence offenders and helping states use red flag laws that enable police to ask courts to take guns from people who show signs they could turn violent.

Despite the blaring headlines, mass killings are statistically rare, perpetrated by just a handful of people each year in a country of nearly 335 million. And there's no way to predict whether this year's events will continue at this rate.

Sometimes mass killings happen back-to-back — like in January, when deadly events in California occurred just two days apart — while other months pass without bloodshed.

"We shouldn't necessarily expect that this — one mass killing every less than seven days — will continue," said Northeastern University criminologist James Alan Fox, who oversees the database. "Hopefully it won't."

Still, experts and advocates decry the proliferation of guns in the U.S. in recent years, including record sales during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have to know that this isn't the way to live," said John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun

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Safety. "We don't have to live this way. And we cannot live in a country with an agenda of guns everywhere, every place and every time."

The National Rifle Association did not respond to the AP's request for comment.

Jaime Guttenberg would be 19 years old now. Her father now spends his days as a gun control activist. "America shouldn't be surprised by where we are today," Guttenberg said. "It's all in the numbers. The numbers don't lie. But we need to do something immediately to fix it."

Fenn reported from New York.

U.S. Marine gets 12 years for cross-border drug smuggling

SAN DIEGO (AP) — A former Marine who for years helped smuggle drugs from Mexico into the United States and even tried to get a song written to glorify his exploits was sentenced Friday to 12 years in federal prison.

Roberto Salazar II, 26, of San Diego was sentenced for importing fentanyl and for conspiracy to distribute heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and fentanyl, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office.

Salazar, who pleaded guilty last October, could have faced up to life in prison.

He was stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego. Prosecutors said that before joining the corps and while on active duty, he and couriers he recruited made dozens of smuggling trips across the border.

Salazar would obtain cars that were driven to Mexico, where drugs were loaded into the engine compartments. Couriers would then drive them back across the border into the U.S., prosecutors said.

The scheme began around 2015, authorities said.

By the time of his arrest last year, "Salazar had become so involved in drug trafficking that he was commissioning a Mexican songwriter to write a drug ballad known as a 'narcocorrido' about him," the U.S. attorney's office said.

"In one line that Salazar suggested to the songwriter, he boasted: 'I wanted to study and become a soldier, but I liked the fast life better,'" the office said.

Some of the couriers recruited by Salazar were former Marines or classmates at Southwestern College in Chula Vista.

"This case involved a Marine who was supposed to protect and defend our country, but instead brought great harm to Americans by trafficking fentanyl and other dangerous drugs," U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman said. "He also betrayed his solemn oath by recruiting other Marines to do the same."

Montana transgender lawmaker silenced: What to know

By AMY BETH HANSON and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — The latest high-profile example of state legislative leadership deciding who can be heard during statehouse debates is playing out in Montana where a transgender lawmaker was silenced by Republican leaders for a second day Friday.

Rep. Zoey Zephyr, who was deliberately referred to using male pronouns by conservative colleagues, says she won't apologize for telling lawmakers they would have "blood on their hands" if they voted for a bill banning gender-affirming care. The measure has passed and is in the hands of the governor, who has indicated he will sign it.

Montana is among a wave of states passing legislation that opponents say could put transgender teens in jeopardy.

Montana's House speaker said he won't let Zephyr speak on the chamber floor until she apologizes.

Here's what you need to know about the situation:

WHO IS THE TRANSGENDER LAWMAKER AT THE CENTER OF THIS?

Last year, Zephyr became the first openly transgender woman elected to the Montana Legislature —

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putting her among a record number of transgender lawmakers who began serving across the U.S.

The 34-year-old Democrat is from the left-leaning college town Missoula, where she's been a staffer at the University of Montana. She has spent much of her life advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and worked behind the scenes during the 2021 legislative session to help block efforts to ban gender-affirming health care.

Following her November election, she expressed hope that her presence in the Legislature would help people understand what it means to be a trans adult. Zephyr also wanted to enlist moderate Republicans to push back on what she called "extreme and dangerous attacks."

Instead, she and fellow members of the Democratic minority have been powerless to stop Republicans from passing bills to ban gender-affirming care for transgender children and another that says misgendering or deadnaming students is not illegal discrimination unless it rises to the level of bullying. Deadnaming refers to using the name a transgender person used prior to transitioning.

WHAT STARTED THIS DISPUTE?

On Tuesday as the House was debating Republican Gov. Greg Gianforte's proposed amendments to a measure banning gender-affirming care for minors, Zephyr spoke up in reference to the body's opening prayer.

"I hope the next time there's an invocation, when you bow your heads in prayer, you see the blood on your hands," she said.

House Majority Leader Sue Vinton, a Republican, immediately called Zephyr's comments inappropriate and disrespectful. That evening, a group of conservative lawmakers known as the Montana Freedom Caucus demanded her censure and deliberately referred to Zephyr using male pronouns in their letter and a Tweet. That's known as misgendering — using pronouns that don't match a person's gender identity.

Zephyr had upset legislative leaders with emotional testimony previously this session.

She made a similar "blood on your hands" comment the first time the House heard the bill and has also given emotional testimony indicating bills that attack LGBTQ+ rights will lead to suicide.

"When there are bills targeting the LGBTQ community, I stand up to defend my community," Zephyr told The Associated Press after she was silenced Thursday. "And I choose my words with clarity and precision, and I spoke to the real harms that these bills bring."

Montana Human Rights Network organizer Shawn Reagor said the act of misgendering Zephyr was disrespectful and would encourage physical violence against the trans community.

"The fact that this is happening by legislators in the Montana state Capitol is incredibly disturbing," Reagor said.

WHO IS LEADING THE CHARGE TO SILENCE HER?

Conservatives formed the Montana Freedom Caucus in January, and it includes at least 21 of the Legislature's 102 GOP lawmakers.

Its ideological leader is U.S. Rep Matt Rosendale, a hardline conservative who backed former President Donald Trump's false statements about fraud in the 2020 election and was among a core group of Republicans who opposed electing U.S. Rep. Kevin McCarthy as speaker of the House.

The caucus members said Zephyr's comments displayed a "hateful rhetoric" and called for a "commitment to civil discourse."

Two days after the caucus' letter, Speaker Matt Regier refused to allow Zephyr to speak against a bill Thursday that would put a binary definition of male and female into state code. She was blocked from speaking again Friday during discussion of a bill to prevent minors from seeing pornography online.

Regier said he silenced Zephyr after discussions with other lawmakers. Democrats objected, but the decision was upheld by Republican lawmakers on party-line votes both days.

SO, HAS SHE BEEN CENSURED?

Formally, no, but practically, yes.

A censure in the Montana Legislature is a public reprimand. The House did not go through that process. However, Regier used his authority under House rules to decide questions of order, privilege and recognition.

IS THIS RELATED TO THE TENNESSEE LAWMAKERS BEING EXPELLED?

Not directly, but the dispute is emblematic of tensions and harsh rhetoric around culturally divisive issues

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— including firearms, racial justice and rights for the LGBTQ+ community — that are dominating much of America's political discourse.

The Tennessee expulsions stemmed from a dispute over gun control. It drew accusations of racism after Republicans removed two Black lawmakers following their participation in a protest but retained a third lawmaker involved who was white.

This week alone, state legislatures advanced numerous measures aimed at the trans community.

Florida's House passed bills on gender-transition treatments, bathroom use and keeping children out of drag shows. North Carolina lawmakers approved a ban on transgender athletes. And North Dakota's governor signed a bill limiting trans health care.

Other measures have been stalled or blocked.

Kansas's Democratic governor vetoed on Thursday bills restricting bathrooms for transgender people and gender-affirming care for minors, but GOP lawmakers appeared to have the votes to override her. Earlier this month in North Dakota, lawmakers failed to override the Republican governor's veto of a bill that would have prohibited public school teachers and employees from acknowledging the pronouns a transgender student uses, unless they received permission from the student's parents and an administrator.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Nobody knows for sure. Regier is expected to stick to his stance that Zephyr can't speak on the floor until she apologizes. Zephyr has said she stands by her statements. It remains unknown if the conservative group will keep pushing for formal censure. The Montana Legislature is scheduled to end in early May.

Brown reported from Billings.

Supreme Court preserves access to abortion pill for now

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday preserved women's access to a drug used in the most common method of abortion, rejecting lower-court restrictions while a lawsuit continues.

The justices granted emergency requests from the Biden administration and New York-based Danco Laboratories, maker of the drug mifepristone. They are appealing a lower court ruling that would roll back Food and Drug Administration approval of mifepristone.

The drug has been approved for use in the U.S. since 2000 and more than 5 million people have used it. Mifepristone is used in combination with a second drug, misoprostol, in more than half of all abortions in the U.S.

The court's action Friday almost certainly will leave access to mifepristone unchanged at least into next year, as appeals play out, including a potential appeal to the high court. The next stop for the case is at the New Orleans-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, which has set arguments in the case for May 17.

Two of the nine justices — Samuel Alito, the author of last year's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and Clarence Thomas — voted to allow restrictions to take effect, and Alito issued a four-page dissent. No other justices commented on the court's one-paragraph order, and the court did not release a full vote breakdown.

President Joe Biden praised the high court for keeping mifepristone available while the court fight continues.

"The stakes could not be higher for women across America. I will continue to fight politically-driven attacks on women's health. But let's be clear — the American people must continue to use their vote as their voice, and elect a Congress who will pass a law restoring the protections of *Roe v. Wade*," Biden said in a statement.

Alliance Defending Freedom, representing abortion opponents challenging the FDA's approval of mifepristone, downplayed the court's action.

"As is common practice, the Supreme Court has decided to maintain the status quo that existed prior to

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our lawsuit while our challenge to the FDA's illegal approval of chemical abortion drugs and its removal of critical safeguards for those drugs moves forward," ADF lawyer Erik Baptist said in a statement.

The justices weighed arguments that allowing restrictions contained in lower-court rulings to take effect would severely disrupt the availability of mifepristone.

The Supreme Court had initially said it would decide by Wednesday whether the restrictions could take effect while the case continues. A one-sentence order signed by Alito on Wednesday gave the justices two additional days, without explanation.

The challenge to mifepristone is the first abortion controversy to reach the nation's highest court since its conservative majority overturned *Roe v. Wade* 10 months ago and allowed more than a dozen states to effectively ban abortion outright.

In his majority opinion last June, Alito said one reason for overturning *Roe* was to remove federal courts from the abortion fight. "It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people's elected representatives," he wrote.

But even with their court victory, abortion opponents returned to federal court with a new target: medication abortions, which make up more than half of all abortions in the United States.

Women seeking to end their pregnancies in the first 10 weeks without more invasive surgical abortion can take mifepristone, along with misoprostol. The FDA has eased the terms of mifepristone's use over the years, including allowing it to be sent through the mail in states that allow access.

The abortion opponents filed suit in Texas in November, asserting that the FDA's original approval of mifepristone 23 years ago and subsequent changes were flawed.

They won a ruling on April 7 by U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, revoking FDA approval of mifepristone. The judge gave the Biden administration and Danco Laboratories a week to appeal and seek to keep his ruling on hold.

Responding to a quick appeal, two more Trump appointees on the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the FDA's original approval would stand for now. But Judges Andrew Oldham and Kurt Engelhardt said most of the rest of Kacsmaryk's ruling could take effect while the case winds through federal courts.

Their ruling would have effectively nullified changes made by the FDA starting in 2016, including extending from seven to 10 weeks of pregnancy when mifepristone can be safely used. The court also would have halted sending the drug in the mail or dispensing it as a generic, and patients who seek it would have had to make three in-person visits with a doctor. Women also might have been required to take a higher dosage of the drug than the FDA says is necessary.

The administration and Danco have said that chaos would ensue if those restrictions were to take effect while the case proceeds. Potentially adding to the confusion, a federal judge in Washington has ordered the FDA to preserve access to mifepristone under the current rules in 17 Democratic-led states and the District of Columbia that filed a separate lawsuit.

The Biden administration has said the rulings conflict and create an untenable situation for the FDA.

Alito questioned the argument that chaos would result, saying the administration "has not dispelled doubts that it would even obey an unfavorable order in these cases."

And a new legal wrinkle threatened even more complications. GenBioPro, which makes the generic version of mifepristone, filed a lawsuit Wednesday to preemptively block the FDA from removing its drug from the market, in the event that the Supreme Court doesn't intervene.

The Supreme Court was only being asked to block the lower-court rulings through the end of the legal case.

The appeals court has sped up its review, but there is no timetable for a ruling.

Any appeal to the Supreme Court would follow within three months of a ruling, but with no deadline for the justices to decide whether to review the case.

Associated Press writers Jessica Gresko, Geoff Mulvihill and Matthew Perrone contributed to this report. Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

NFL suspends 5 players for violating gambling policy

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

Three NFL players were suspended indefinitely Friday for betting on NFL games in the 2022 season, while two other players, including the 12th overall draft pick a year ago, received six-game suspensions for betting on non-NFL games at a league facility.

Detroit Lions wide receiver Quintez Cephus, Lions safety C.J. Moore and Washington Commanders defensive end Shaka Toney are sidelined for the entire 2023 season and may petition for reinstatement afterward.

Lions wide receivers Stanley Berryhill and Jameson Williams each received a six-game suspension, though they will be able to participate in offseason and preseason activities, including preseason games. Their suspensions will start at the final roster cutdown.

The NFL said that a "league review uncovered no evidence indicating any inside information was used or that any game was compromised in any way."

Gambling incidents have been relatively rare for the NFL. Most recently, wide receiver Calvin Ridley was suspended for the entire 2022 season for gambling on NFL games; he was later traded from Atlanta to Jacksonville and was reinstated. In November 2019, Arizona Cardinals cornerback Josh Shaw was suspended for gambling on an NFL game; he has not played in the league since.

"I don't think it's a trend yet," said Chris Altruda, a senior analyst for Sports Handle. "I do think the league has to do a better job messaging, and I think the teams have to do a better job of relaying that message as well."

The Lions immediately released Cephus, who caught 37 passes in three seasons, and Moore, who started one game in four years.

Detroit executive vice president and general manager Brad Holmes said the two "exhibited decision-making that is not consistent with our organizational values and violates league rules."

Williams was the 12th overall pick in last year's draft but he played in just six games after returning from knee surgery. Alliance Sports, which represents Williams, said in a statement the player is "apologetic to the NFL, his teammates and the fans and city of Detroit." It also noted Williams' suspension was for a "technical rule regarding the actual location in which the online bet was placed — and which would otherwise be allowed by the NFL outside of the club's facility."

Berryhill played in four games without a catch in his only season. Holmes said the Lions will work with both Berryhill and Williams "to ensure they understand the severity of these violations and have clarity on the league rules moving forward."

Toney started one game in two seasons with the Commanders, who said they have "cooperated fully with the NFL's investigation since receiving notice and support the league's findings and actions."

With the rise of sports betting across the U.S., some pro teams have a sportsbook in their stadiums — like the Washington Nationals (MLB) and the Phoenix Suns (NBA) as well as the NHL's Washington Capitals. Others, like the Arizona Cardinals, have a sportsbook on the grounds of the stadium and many fans bet on their phones while attending games. Sports betting ads also permeate breaks during NFL games.

The NFL, along with other pro leagues, this week formed the Coalition for Responsible Sports Betting Advertising, a group described as a voluntary alliance to control how consumers see advertising and to rein in "excessive" advertising.

Until recently, gambling incidents had not surfaced often for the NFL. In 1963, the NFL handed out perhaps its most famous discipline: Then-commissioner Pete Rozelle suspended star running back Paul Hornung of Green Bay and defensive tackle of Alex Karras of Detroit — both of whom became Hall of Famers. Each was sidelined for that season, with Rozelle citing bets on league games and associating with gamblers or "known hoodlums."

Twenty years later, Rozelle suspended Colts quarterback Art Schlichter, who was in just his second pro season. Schlichter was reinstated and played in 1984 and '85. But he couldn't kick the gambling habit and eventually wound up in prison for a multimillion-dollar ticketing scam.

In the 1940s, Frank Filchock and Merle Hapes of the New York Giants were suspended by then-commis-

sioner Bert Bell for not reporting attempted bribes, particularly for the 1946 championship game. Filchuck played in that game, which the Giants lost 24-14 to the Bears, but Hapes was not allowed to take the field.

Both were eventually suspended; Filchuck didn't return to the NFL until 1950 with Baltimore, though he played parts of four seasons in Canada. Hapes never played another NFL game.

AP Sports Writers Larry Lage in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Steve Megargee in Milwaukee and Stephen Whyno in Washington contributed to this report.

AP NFL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nfl> and https://twitter.com/AP_NFL

Chile's plan for state control in lithium dismays business

By EVA VERGARA and DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — The Chilean government's newly announced plan to have the state take a majority stake in the lithium industry disconcerted business leaders, though analysts cautioned that the proposal appears to try to strike a middle ground between competing interests.

President Gabriel Boric announced in a national broadcast Thursday night that private companies will have to partner with the government in exploiting Chile's lithium, a metal used to make rechargeable batteries.

Boric said the state would take a controlling interest in each partnership, leading some to call it a nationalization of the industry, while others disagreed.

"Phrasing it as nationalization is too strong ... it's a quasi-nationalization in that the playing field will now be leveled in favor of the state," said Nicolás Saldías, senior analyst at the Economist Intelligence Unit for Latin America and the Caribbean. "There is no level playing field for the private sector in Chile."

Chile is the second largest producer of lithium and holds the world's third largest reserves of the metal. Demand for lithium is expected to soar amid the transition to renewable energy around the world and the growth in electric vehicles that are powered by lithium batteries.

The South American country has recently been losing ground to others in the race to exploit the metal so there was much anticipation over what Boric, a leftist, would announce as the country's strategy for the industry.

"There were no great surprises, which doesn't mean that it isn't a very important change in the model," said Mariano Machado, principal analyst for the Americas at Verisk Maplecroft, a global risk intelligence firm.

Under the plan, all companies wanting to work in Chile's lithium sector will have to take on the yet-to-be created National Lithium Company as a partner and the "state will have control," Boric said Thursday. Existing contracts will be honored, but Boric expressed optimism they could find a way to boost state participation in their operations before they expire.

"It's not a theft of the concessions, it's a changing of the rules rather than abruptly breaking them," said Emily Hersh, CEO of Luna Lithium, a lithium exploration company with projects in the Americas.

Two companies currently mine lithium in Chile, Albemarle Corp. of the United States and local company SQM with concessions set to expire in 2043 and 2030, respectively. Shares in the two companies plunged Friday following Boric's announcement.

Creation of the new company would require approval from Congress, which has already shot down several of Boric's key initiatives.

Until then, two other state-owned companies, Codelco, the world's largest copper producer, and state mining company Enami will figure out how the private-public partnerships will operate.

Chile's president traveled Friday to Antofagasta, some 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) from the Chilean capital to deliver more details about his proposal to local authorities.

"We're calling for a dialogue and participation process to gather visions and knowledge regarding the new governance of lithium and salt flats," Boric said.

But Chile's business sector expressed concern.

"We were quite disconcerted" by Boric's announcement, said Ricardo Mewes, head of the Confederation of Production and Trade, an association that represents Chile's business community.

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Mewes said business leaders had expected there would be a “great private sector participation” in the lithium sector and now the “state will be the one that will control” the industry.

Several analysts said those concerns may go too far.

Saldías, at the Economist Intelligence Unit, said the proposal “actually provides the private sector more opportunity than the existing framework because ... there would be more ability to partake in projects than currently exists.”

He cautioned, though, that environmental restrictions on the way lithium is produced and the push for more consultation with local communities could lead to “an increase in the costs of doing business” in Chile.

Machado at Verisk Maplecroft said that “Chile appears to have gone for a model that is in the middle in which the state has the upper hand, given that it’s a resource that is considered strategic.”

That is a different model from neighboring Bolivia, in which the state has full control of the sector, and Argentina, in which the state simply grants concessions for companies to operate.

Finance Minister Mario Marcel called for calm in the business community. He said that under the plan, private companies will contribute capital, technological knowledge and experience, while the state provides “financing” and at the same time safeguards environmental conditions of the salt flats and the “relationship with the Indigenous peoples” of the affected area.

It remains unclear whether the government would contribute capital in direct proportion to its ownership stake.

Boric also said the government will go beyond just being involved in mining lithium, saying it will promote the development of lithium products with added value as it strives to become the world’s leading lithium producer.

Boric’s plan is in line with the “direction that the world is going,” said Hersh at Luna Lithium.

“The push to have more added value where minerals are produced and to have a greater share of revenues from the mining activities are understandable long term trends,” she said.

For Hersh the real concern isn’t necessarily Chile, a country with a robust mining industry and existing lithium production. She worries about what message this sends to others in the region that are trying to build up nascent industries, considering Mexico already nationalized its lithium sector.

“You kind of have a rush to the party, you can’t be seen as the uncool president who isn’t doing it,” Hersh said.

Politi reported from Buenos Aires, Argentina.

New this week: ‘Judy Blume,’ Rodrigo y Gabriela, Minecraft

By The Associated Press undefined

Here’s a collection curated by The Associated Press’ entertainment journalists of what’s arriving on TV, streaming services and music and video game platforms this week.

NEW MOVIES TO STREAM

— In her young, flourishing career, Ana de Armas has already made three films with Chris Evans. Following “Knives Out” and “The Gray Man” — both of which positioned them as foes, either in family squabbles or assassin melees — they’re more closely aligned in “Ghosed.” In the Apple TV+ release, premiering Friday, “Rocketman” director Dexter Fletcher pairs them in a film that fuses rom-com with action thriller. After a promising first date between Cole (Evans) and Sadie (de Armas), Cole pursues the unreachable Sadie and becomes ensnared in an international spy adventure.

— One of 2022’s best films arrives Tuesday on the Criterion Channel. For years, Iranian director Jafar Panahi has been finding intrepid ways to make films that cleverly reflect Iranian society despite government control. In “No Bears,” Panahi — who has made acclaimed movies from within his apartment or the confines of a car — again plays a fictionalized version of himself, this time while he endeavors to remotely direct a film. When his collaborators’ unwittingly capture a moment some locals don’t want documented, scrutiny and pressure falls on Panahi. When “No Bears” opened in theaters, Panahi was in prison in Tehran.

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After declaring a hunger strike, he was freed on bail in February.

— Davina Pardo and Leah Wolchok's lively bio-doc "Judy Blume Forever" profiles an author who's had a lasting impact on generations of young readers. The film, which debuts Friday on Prime Video, mixes interviews with Blume, now 85, and her many fans, ranging from kids to Lena Dunham and Molly Ringwald. The documentary, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, debuts just as a big-screen adaptation of one of Blume's most beloved books, "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," hits theaters.

— AP Film Writer Jake Coyle

NEW MUSIC TO STREAM

— Guitar virtuosos Rodrigo y Gabriela — Rodrigo Sanchez and Gabriela Quintero — return with a new album, "In Between Thoughts... A New World," out Friday. It's the pair's first collection since their 2019 Grammy -winning "Mettavolution," which melded the power of thrash metal with fiery Spanish melodies. Self-produced by Rodrigo y Gabriela at their studio in Ixtapa, Mexico, the new album sees the duo "expanding their traditional approach to include inventive electronic and orchestral elements." Superb single "Descending to Nowhere" even has a little funk and danceability.

— U.K. group Everything But the Girl will make a comeback this spring with their first studio album since 1999, when "The Matrix" came out. The duo of Tracey Thorn and Ben Watt — known for the dreamy hit "Missing" — will release "Fuse" on Friday. Work on the 10-track project began in the spring of 2021 at the couple's home. "Of course, we were aware of the pressures of such a long-awaited comeback, so we tried to begin instead in a spirit of open-minded playfulness, uncertain of the direction, receptive to invention," Thorn says. First single "Nothing Left to Lose" is an electronic flashback that feels modern filled with thick slabs of synth.

— Have you been praying for some old-school punk and garage rock? Then say "Amen," the new album from The Heavy, their first in four years. The band — known for the song "How You Like Me Now?" — return with their humor intact as one of the singles shows — "Stone Cold Killer," a song about guitarist Dan Taylor's new kitten. "We got a new cat, a female Burmese. She's the cutest thing you've ever seen, but an absolute enemy of every living thing in the garden," he explains. The 10 new songs also include "I Feel the Love" and "Hurricane Coming."

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

NEW TELEVISION TO STREAM

— Galey Alix used to work on Wall Street in finance and dabble in interior design and renovations on the side. She would post about her projects on social media and amassed millions of followers. She's now doing design full-time and has her own HGTV show, "Home in a Heartbeat." Alix chooses a social follower and takes a weekend to renovate their home and provide positive change. "Home in a Heartbeat" debuts Wednesday.

— Netflix already used the title "Warrior Nun" so in Peacock's new series about a nun out for vengeance they went with "Mrs. Davis." The quirky, sci-fi show stars Betty Gilpin ("Nurse Jackie," "GLOW") as Simone, a nun determined to destroy a powerful artificial intelligence, known as the innocuous-sounding Mrs. Davis. The algorithm, is viewed by society as a whole as a way technology makes life easier but Simone sees it as a big problem infringing on people's individual freedoms. Jake McDorman and Margo Martindale also co-star. "Mrs. Davis" is co-created by Damon Lindelof ("Lost", "The Watchmen.") "Mrs. Davis" premieres Thursday, with the first four episodes on Peacock.

— Keri Russell returns to TV in the Netflix series "The Diplomat," as Kate Wyler, a career envoy with a passion for Mideast affairs who randomly gets reassigned as the new U.S. ambassador in the UK. It's a major change for Wyler because diplomacy in the UK is much lower stakes than her previous post. She's placed in an estate that resembles Downton Abbey, complete with butlers and maids, and is now expected to be more of a social figurehead. The job ends up being more complicated than expected, and Kate must establish relationships and trust with those around her, plus navigate the red tape and bureaucracy that comes with a government job. Another daily obstacle she must navigate is her husband Hal, (Rufus Sewell) who was also a career diplomat (until he was fired). "The Diplomat" drops its eight-episode season

on Thursday.

— Alicia Rancilio

NEW VIDEO GAMES TO PLAY

— Ten years ago, it seemed like every kid I knew was playing Minecraft. It's still hugely popular, but some of those kids have graduated to more complex games. Enter Minecraft Legends, in which developer Mojang turns its blocky sandbox into a battleground. The idyllic Overworld has been invaded by nasty piglins from the hellish Nether. Your mission is to unite the assorted Overworld mobs of golems, zombies, skeletons and such while building defensive structures and attacking enemy outposts. There's also a competitive mode in which you and your friends can try to destroy each other's fortresses. Dig in Tuesday on Xbox X/S/One, PlayStation 5/4, Nintendo Switch and PC.

— The online battle arena League of Legends is an esports phenomenon, but it's somewhat daunting for newcomers. So publisher Riot Games has been expanding the franchise with the well-received Netflix series "Arcane" as well as a line of single-player games. The Mageseeker: A League of Legends Story takes place in a kingdom where sorcery has been banned; the protagonist, Syllas, is a mage who is determined to liberate his spell-wielding cohorts. It's a lively-looking 2D role-playing adventure that could be just the thing to ease you into the sprawling LoL universe. Mageseeker arrives Tuesday on Xbox X/S/One, PlayStation 5/4, Nintendo Switch and PC.

— Dead Island 2 is set in Los Angeles — which, as of the last time I checked, is not an island. If that sort of deliberate knuckleheadedness amuses you, this long-awaited sequel may be your cup of blood. The zombie infection that plagued a tropical paradise in the 2011 original has landed stateside, but you can build an arsenal, from baseball bats to machine guns, to fend off the undead hordes. Publisher Deep Silver promises loads of gory, squishy ultraviolence, and who wouldn't want some brainless fun when you're about to get your brains eaten? The mayhem begins Friday on Xbox X/S/One, PlayStation 5/4 and PC.

— Lou Kesten

Catch up on AP's entertainment coverage here: <https://apnews.com/apf-entertainment>.

Minnesota officer who fatally shot Daunte Wright to be freed

By STEVE KARNOWSKI and JIM SALTER Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A white former police officer convicted of manslaughter after mistaking her handgun for a Taser and fatally shooting Black motorist Daunte Wright in suburban Minneapolis in 2021 is set to be released from prison Monday.

Minnesota Department of Corrections spokesman Andy Skoogman announced Friday that former officer Kim Potter was to be released after serving about 16 months of her two-year sentence. He said the exact timing of her departure Monday from Minnesota Correctional Facility-Shakopee won't be disclosed for security reasons.

"Our criminal investigative analysts are working closely with law enforcement to monitor the situation to ensure Kim Potter, like all incarcerated persons, is safe as she leaves our facility," Skoogman said in a statement.

The shooting happened April 2021 as Derek Chauvin was on trial in Minneapolis on murder charges in George Floyd's killing. Wright's death sparked several days of protests.

Judge Regina Chu had said at Potter's sentencing that she would be required to serve two-thirds of her sentence — 16 months — then spend the rest on probation.

Potter, now 50, appears much thinner in a new photo released by the Department of Corrections. Her attorney, Earl Gray, said he had "no idea" why her appearance changed.

"It just shows it's rough doing time," Gray said. "I don't know many mug shots that show somebody in a good light."

A message left with civil rights attorney Ben Crump, the lawyer for Wright's family, wasn't immediately returned.

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Wright, a 20-year-old father, was killed on April 11, 2021, after Brooklyn Center officers pulled him over for having expired license tags and an air freshener hanging from his rearview mirror. Officers discovered he had a warrant for a misdemeanor weapons possession charge and he was shot during a struggle as officers tried to arrest him.

Civil rights advocates say laws against hanging objects from rearview mirrors have been used as a pretext for stopping Black motorists.

Potter is heard on video yelling "Taser" several times just before she fires her pistol as Wright tried to drive away from the traffic stop.

The state attorney general's office had sought a sentence recommended by state guidelines of just over seven years in prison. Wright's family and Crump denounced the two-year sentence as too lenient and accused the judge of giving more consideration to the white officer than the Black victim.

Wright's mother, Katie Wright, said after the sentencing that Potter "murdered my son," adding: "Today the justice system murdered him all over again."

Chu said at the time that the case wasn't the same as other high-profile killings, including George Floyd's death that resulted in a 22 1/2-year sentence for Chauvin. "This is a cop who made a tragic mistake," she said.

Defense attorneys argued at the sentencing hearing that Potter deserved leniency because Wright was trying to drive away and Potter had the right to defend herself.

Potter, a 26-year police veteran, apologized to Wright's family at sentencing and spoke directly to his mother: "Katie, I understand a mother's love. I'm sorry I broke your heart ... my heart is broken and devastated for all of you."

Confusion as Musk's Twitter yanks blue checks from agencies

By MATT O'BRIEN and KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Twitter has long been a way for people to keep track of tornado watches, train delays, news alerts or the latest crime warnings from their local police department.

But when the Elon Musk-owned platform started stripping blue verification check marks this week from accounts that don't pay a monthly fee, it left public agencies and other organizations around the world scrambling to figure out a way to show they're trustworthy and avoid impersonators.

High-profile users who lost their blue checks Thursday included Beyoncé, Pope Francis, Oprah Winfrey and former President Donald Trump. But checks were also removed from accounts for major transit systems from San Francisco to Paris, national parks like Yosemite, official weather trackers and some elected officials.

Twitter had roughly 400,000 verified users under the original blue-check system. In the past, the checks meant that Twitter had verified that users were who they said they were.

While Twitter is now offering gold checks for "verified organizations" and gray checks for government organizations and their affiliates, it was not always clear why some accounts had them Friday and others did not.

Fake accounts claiming to represent Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, the city's Department of Transportation and the Illinois Department of Transportation all began sharing messages early Friday falsely claiming that Chicago's Lake Shore Drive — a major thoroughfare — would close to private traffic starting next month.

A critical eye could spot obvious hints of the fraud. The account handles are slightly different from the authentic ones representing Lightfoot and the transportation agencies. The fakes also had far fewer followers.

But the fakes used the same photos, biographical text and home page links as the real ones.

The genuine accounts for Lightfoot and the transportation agencies did not have a blue or gray check mark as of Friday. Lightfoot's office said the city is aware of the fake accounts and "working with Twitter to resolve this matter." At least one was suspended Friday.

A number of agencies said they were awaiting more clarity from Twitter, which has sharply curtailed

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its staff since Musk bought the San Francisco company for \$44 billion last year. The confusion has raised concerns that Twitter could lose its status as a platform for getting accurate, up-to-date information from authentic sources, including in emergencies.

As a tornado was about to strike central New Jersey earlier this month, a go-to account for information was run by the National Weather Service branch in Mount Holly, New Jersey. It had a blue check at the time. It no longer has any check, though the main NWS account and some other regional branches now sport a gray check marking them as official accounts.

Susan Buchanan, director of public affairs for the weather service, said the agency is in the process of applying to get the gray check mark for government agencies. She declined to answer why some regional NWS branches lost their marks and others have them.

The costs of keeping the marks range from \$8 a month for individual web users to a starting price of \$1,000 monthly to verify an organization, plus \$50 monthly for each affiliate or employee account. But the meaning of the blue check has changed to symbolize that the user bought a premium account that can help their tweets be seen by more people. It also includes other features such as the ability to edit tweets.

"It essentially becomes a system where those with the most ability to economically participate in this pay-to-play system essentially rise to the top," said Brooke Erin Duffy, a professor at Cornell University who studies social media.

She added that while there's been a lot of debate about what algorithmic curation means for how people see information on social media — versus a simple chronological timeline — Twitter's blue check system introduces a third category of "economic curation."

The removal of the old verification system, Duffy said, "essentially dismantles these journalistic ideals of legitimacy and authority, but at the same time reinforces Twitter's status as a pay-to-play platform."

Facebook parent Meta also recently introduced a paid verification system aimed at content creators, influencers and other high profile accounts, which Duffy said will have a similar "pay-to-play" effect on what users see in their timeline as Twitter.

Celebrity users, from basketball star LeBron James to author Stephen King and Star Trek's William Shatner, have balked at joining — although all three still had blue checks on Friday after Musk said he paid for them himself.

For users who still had a blue check, a popup message indicated that the account "is verified because they are subscribed to Twitter Blue and verified their phone number." Verifying a phone number simply means that the person has a phone number and they verified that they have access to it — it does not confirm the person's identity.

Fewer than 5% of legacy verified accounts appear to have paid to join Twitter Blue, according to an analysis by Travis Brown, a Berlin-based developer of software for tracking social media.

Musk's move to end what he's called the "lords & peasants system for who has or doesn't have a blue check mark" has riled up some high-profile users and pleased some right-wing figures and Musk fans who thought the marks were unfair. But it is not an obvious money-maker for the social media platform that has long relied on advertising for most of its revenue.

Promised for weeks, the mass removal of thousands of blue checks was paired with a surprise move to drop labels describing some media organizations as government-funded or state-affiliated. Musk at first defended a policy that lumped public radio and TV stations in the U.S. and other democracies with state-affiliated media in Russia and China, and then abruptly changed the language, but now Twitter has removed the labels entirely without explanation. The changes came after National Public Radio and other outlets have already stopped using Twitter.

While a few prominent users said they would stop using Twitter over blue checks, many public agencies appeared to be staying with the service.

Asked Friday about the German government's continued use of Twitter, spokesperson Christiane Hoffmann said: "Of course we are watching very closely what's happening on Twitter and we continually ask ourselves if it's right to have channels there and how they should continue."

Hoffmann said the government was concerned about developments on Twitter in recent weeks and months, adding that the ministries, spokespeople and Chancellor Olaf Scholz now have gray ticks "for which nothing is paid."

City officials in Minneapolis applied about three weeks ago for a gray check on the city's main Twitter account and received approval for it Thursday.

Jordan Gilgenbach, the city's digital communications coordinator, said he's planning to seek the same for other city-run accounts including the health department — which had no check mark as of Friday — but said Twitter's system of assessing and deciding which accounts qualify "has never really been clear."

"From an active shooter situation or a weather-related event, or even the more routine stuff like snowstorms, it's always a challenge even with verification to combat misinformation and rumors," Gilgenbach said. "This is just going to make that harder."

O'Brien reported from Providence, Rhode Island. AP Technology Writer Barbara Ortutay in San Francisco and Frank Jordans in Berlin contributed to this report.

In Florida, Harris announces \$562M for climate resilience

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

Returning to Florida to discuss climate change, Vice President Kamala Harris announced Friday that \$562 million will be spent on 149 projects around the country aimed at improving resilience to threats such as rising seas and the kinds of coastal flooding that recently slammed the southeast part of the state.

Harris outlined the funding plan during an appearance at the University of Miami, where she also toured a lab immersed in coral restoration work and a hurricane simulator capable of generating Category 5-strength winds of more than 157 mph (253 kph).

Harris, who appeared in March at a Miami Beach climate summit, said the projects, which are spread across 30 states, are an example of how climate investments boost job creation and manufacturing while tackling a major environmental issue.

"When we invest in climate, we not only protect our environment, we also strengthen our economy," Harris said in a tweet during her Miami visit.

The funding is part of what the Biden administration calls its Climate-Ready Coasts initiative. Of the \$562 million total, about \$477 million is to help towns and cities respond better to extreme weather events, restore wildlife coastal habitats and focus more attention on assistance for underserved communities in tackling climate and storm threats, according to a White House news release.

Florida would get about \$78 million for projects ranging from oyster habitat restoration in Pensacola Bay to flood protection in Jacksonville to removal of 200,000 tires from Tampa Bay and the Gulf of Mexico that were submerged decades ago as artificial reefs.

Harris toured the University of Miami's Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Sciences — location of the hurricane simulator — where researchers have been studying the slowing down of ocean currents, building aquaculture to replenish and protect fisheries and examining how to repopulate dying coral reefs.

The vice president's visit comes as Fort Lauderdale and its suburbs have been recovering from an April 12 deluge that dumped up to 2 feet (0.6 meters) of rain, flooding homes and businesses while forcing the closure of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and disrupting gas distribution operations at Port Everglades that led to vehicle fuel shortages for days afterwards across the southern part of Florida.

Climate scientists say these once-rare extreme rain events will occur more frequently as temperatures warm, made worse in coastal regions such as Florida due to sea level rise.

"These heavy rainfall events coupled with sea level rise on the Florida coast need to serve as significant 'wake up calls' for the residents of South Florida about the severe risks that climate change poses to them," said University of Oklahoma meteorology professor Jason Furtado.

Harris' quick trip to Miami came the same day as President Joe Biden signed an executive order that

would create the White House Office of Environmental Justice. The goal is to ensure that poverty, race and ethnic status do not lead to worse exposure to pollution and environmental harm.

Lyft gears up to make 'significant' layoffs under new CEO

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Lyft is preparing to lay off hundreds of employees just days after new CEO David Risher began steering the ride-hailing service with a eye of driving down costs to help bring its fares more in line with its biggest rival, Uber.

Risher, a former Amazon executive, informed Lyft's workforce of more than 4,000 employees in an email posted online Friday that a "significant" number of them will lose their jobs. It came at end of his first week as Lyft's CEO.

The note didn't specify how many people would be jettisoned, but The Wall Street Journal reported that at least 1,200 employees will be laid off. The report cited unidentified people familiar with the cost-cutting plans.

San Francisco-based Lyft declined to provide additional details Friday, but said more information will be released next week.

Risher, who had been a Lyft board member before being recruited to replace co-founder Logan Green, cited expense control as one of his top priorities during a interview with The Associated Press shortly after his hiring was announced. By ensuring Lyft is "super efficient," Risher said the company would be in a better position to lower its fares to lure back passengers who had shifted to using Uber more frequently because that service was offering lower prices for the same trips.

It was a theme Risher emphasized again in his Friday email explaining why he decided to slash the payroll, which doesn't include Lyft's drivers — a group that is classified as independent contractors.

"We need to bring our costs down to deliver affordable rides, compelling earnings for drivers, and profitable growth," Risher wrote.

Lyft intends to start notifying employees who will be laid off on Thursday when the company plans to close its offices.

It will mark the second round of recent job cuts for Lyft after shedding 700 workers last year.

Recurring waves of layoffs are emerging as a new phenomenon in the tech industry, reversing more than a decade of mostly unbridled growth.

Both Facebook owner Meta Platforms and e-commerce giant Amazon have gone through two rounds of major layoffs during the past year, largely because the pandemic fueled booming demand for digital services and products that resulted in hiring sprees that they and other tech companies began to regret as the COVID-19 threat waned and growth tapered off.

The pandemic initially walloped Lyft by drying up demand for ride-hailing services, a blow Uber was able to soften through an aggressive expansion in food delivery. That gave people a reason to continue using Uber's app even when they were stuck at home while Lyft fell out of favor.

During the past year, it has become even clearer that consumers fell out of the Lyft habit as Uber's ridership bounced back to pre-pandemic levels and Lyft's losses mounted. Those struggles have caused Lyft's stock price to plunge 69% during the past year, prompting the decision to bring in a new CEO to shake things up.

Lyft's shares surged 6% after news of its cost-cutting plans came out to close Friday at \$10.44.

Judge stays on Catholic bankruptcy despite church donations

By JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal judge refused Friday to recuse himself from the New Orleans Roman Catholic bankruptcy after an Associated Press report that he donated tens of thousands of dollars to archdiocese charities and consistently ruled in favor of the church in the contentious case involving nearly 500 clergy sex abuse victims.

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U.S. District Judge Greg Guidry told attorneys in the high-profile case that a panel of federal judges he asked to review the possible conflict determined no "reasonable person" would question his impartiality despite his contributions and longstanding ties to the archdiocese.

Guidry read from the opinion of the Washington-based Committee on Codes of Conduct, which noted that none of the charities he donated to "has been or is an actual party" in the bankruptcy and that Guidry's eight years on the board of the archdiocese's charitable arm ended more than a decade before the bankruptcy.

"Based upon that advice and based upon my certainty that I can be fair and impartial, I have decided not to recuse myself," said Guidry, who oversees the bankruptcy in an appellate role.

Guidry's announcement came hours after AP published its report and more than a week after it confronted him with its findings.

Several ethics experts told AP the 62-year-old jurist should step aside from the case to avoid the appearance of conflict, even if it threatened to send the complex, three-year bankruptcy into disarray with a slew of new hearings and appeals of his decisions.

"It would create a mess and a cloud of suspicion over every ruling he's made," said Keith Swisher, a professor of legal ethics at the University of Arizona, describing the judge's donations as "more like fire than smoke."

AP's reporting on Guidry and other judges in the New Orleans bankruptcy underscores how tightly woven the church is in the city's power structure, a coziness perhaps best exemplified when executives of the NFL's New Orleans Saints secretly advised the archdiocese on public relations messaging at the height of its clergy abuse crisis.

It also comes at a fraught moment when attorneys in the bankruptcy are seeking to unseal a trove of thousands of secret church documents produced by lawsuits and an ongoing FBI investigation of clergy abuse in New Orleans going back decades. Guidry had rebuffed at least one such request to unseal some of the documents.

AP's review of campaign-finance records found that Guidry, since being nominated to the federal bench in 2019 by then-President Donald Trump, has given nearly \$50,000 to local Catholic charities from leftover contributions he received after serving 10 years as a Louisiana Supreme Court justice.

Most of that giving, \$36,000 of it, came in the months after the archdiocese sought Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in May 2020 amid a crush of sexual abuse lawsuits. That included a \$12,000 donation to the archdiocese's Catholic Community Foundation in September 2020 on the same day of a series of filings in the bankruptcy, and a \$14,000 donation to the same charity in July of the following year.

But the advisory opinion Guidry cited Friday noted that his contributions to the Catholic charities amounted to less than 25 percent of the campaign funds he had available to donate. It also said "simply participating as a faithful participant in the life of your parish and the archdiocese of which it is a part cannot amount to a reasonable basis for questioning impartiality in litigation involving the church."

Guidry's philanthropy over the years also appears to include private donations. Newsletters issued by Catholic Charities of New Orleans, the charitable arm of the archdiocese, recognized Guidry and his wife among its donors for unspecified contributions, in 2017 listing both the judge and his campaign. The judge previously provided pro bono services and served as a board member for Catholic Charities between 2000 and 2008, a time when the archdiocese was navigating an earlier wave of sex abuse lawsuits. Catholic Charities was involved in at least one multimillion-dollar settlement to victims beaten and sexually abused at two local orphanages.

Within a year of his most recent contributions, Guidry began issuing rulings that altered the momentum of the bankruptcy and benefited the archdiocese.

Guidry upheld the removal of several members from a committee of victims seeking compensation from the church. Those plaintiffs repeatedly complained about a lack of transparency in the case and argued that the archdiocese's primary reason for seeking the legal protection was to minimize payouts. The Moody's rating agency found that the archdiocese sought bankruptcy despite having "significant financial reserves,

with spendable cash and investments of over \$160 million.

And just last month, Guidry affirmed a \$400,000 sanction against Richard Trahan, a veteran attorney for clergy abuse victims who was accused of violating a sweeping confidentiality order when he warned a local principal that his school had hired a priest who admitted to sex abuse. Trahan, who declined to comment, has become a prominent adversary of the archdiocese, drawing attention to what he calls a conspiracy by top church officials in New Orleans to cover up clergy abuse.

Charles Geyh, a professor at Indiana University who studies judicial ethics, said Guidry's generous donations and close ties to the church are clearly reasons to question his ability to be a fair referee.

"Not only has the judge made significant financial contributions to a church whose archdiocese is a party in litigation before him, but those contributions are inextricably linked to his status as a judge," Geyh said. "The judge chose to donate the overflow of campaign funds generated to further his professional life as a judge to further his religious life in the church, which implies a connection in the judge's mind between his religious and professional identities."

In heavily Catholic New Orleans, Guidry is far from the only federal judge with longstanding ties to the archdiocese. Several of Guidry's colleagues have recused themselves from the bankruptcy or related litigation. They include U.S. District Judge Wendy Vitter, who for years worked as general counsel for the archdiocese, defending the church against a cascade of sex abuse claims before Trump nominated her to the federal bench in 2018. Another federal judge, Ivan Lemelle, serves on the board of the Catholic Community Foundation.

Yet another, U.S. District Judge Jay Zainey recused himself from cases related to the bankruptcy after publicly acknowledging the role he played in the behind-the-scenes media relations campaign that executives of the New Orleans Saints did for the archdiocese in 2018 and 2019. At the time, Zainey told The Times-Picayune he would recuse himself from future church-related cases.

But less than a year ago, Zainey quietly struck down a Louisiana law, vigorously opposed by the archdiocese, that created a so called look-back window allowing victims of sexual abuse to sue the church and other institutions no matter how long ago the alleged abuse took place. Zainey didn't respond to a request for comment.

"These are federal judges who are incredibly active in different ministries throughout the archdiocese," said James Adams, a past president of the Catholic Community Foundation who was abused by a priest as a fifth-grader in 1980. "I'm not saying they don't do good works, but it certainly raises an eyebrow when they then have cases involving the Archdiocese of New Orleans."

Jason Berry, an author who has written several books on clergy abuse and most recently a history of New Orleans, said the influence of the church on the court system in the city "stinks to high heaven."

"The larger question here is whether justice has been compromised," he said. "You're talking about 500 people whose lives have been plundered, and that's one thing many people don't have a grasp of."

Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

Music to Trump's ears: Whitewashing Jan. 6 riot with song

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The song is simple and tinny, but that hasn't stopped it from being embraced by former President Donald Trump and his allies in their campaign to rewrite the history of the deadly Capitol riot.

The tune, "Justice for All," is the Star-Spangled Banner, and it was sung by a group of defendants jailed over their alleged roles in the January 2021 insurrection. Recorded over a prison phone line, the national anthem sounds more like a dirge than celebration and is overlaid with Trump reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Despite its low fidelity, "Justice for All" has garnered a lot of fans. Trump, a Republican, played it at a recent rally in Waco, Texas, as images of Capitol rioters flashed behind him on a big screen, and the \$1.29

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song last month briefly vaulted to No. 1 on iTunes, supplanting such recording artists as Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift.

Experts on extremism and propaganda say the song is another example of how Trump and his most ardent allies are trying to gloss over an avalanche of evidence proving the Capitol riot was anything but an act of patriotic resistance.

And it shows how such revisionists have dug deep into authoritarian playbooks that rely heavily on the use of national identity to sway public opinion. In this case, Trump and his allies are ironically relying on America's most patriotic song in their efforts to whitewash an insurrection that contributed to five deaths and left more than 120 police officers injured, experts said.

"We should not be surprised that this propaganda is effective, but it is shocking to see this in this country," said Federico Finchelstein, chair of the history department at the New School for Social Research in New York, an expert in authoritarian disinformation. "What they are demanding is that reality be put aside for the loyalty of the leader. And that leader in this case is Donald Trump."

Law enforcement officials who battled rioters are aghast, calling the song a cynical effort to mislead Americans about the truth of what transpired during the Jan. 6 attack.

"Some of these people are trying to get a rise out of people, and some of these people are just using it to make a buck," said Capitol Police Officer Harry Dunn, who received the Presidential Citizens Medal for his actions on Jan. 6. "People can believe whatever they want to believe, but this is real life."

Polls show Americans remain divided by ideology when it comes to their views of Jan. 6. A survey last year from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about half believe Trump's involvement warranted criminal charges. A second poll revealed that only about 4 in 10 Republicans recall the attack as very violent or extremely violent.

Those doubts have been fueled by cable television hosts and far-right podcasters who have spent two years pushing outlandish theories to mitigate the horror of that deadly day.

Jan. 6 defendants, who issued tearful apologies and expressions of remorse in court, are now boasting of their participation or seeking to profit from it. Groups have sprung up to sell T-shirts emblazoned with "Free the Jan. 6 Protesters" and other merchandise that seeks to portray the rioters as principled demonstrators. Many say they are trying to raise money for the Jan. 6 defendants and their families.

That is the case with the groups behind "Justice for All," or at least what they claim. Just as in other commercial ventures involving diehard Trump supporters and conspiracy theorists, it is difficult to pin down even basic facts about the song's production and profits.

The song's producers won't say how much the song has raised, say how the proceeds will be split among Jan. 6 defendants or identify the vast majority of 20 or so participants on the recording. They have, however, been eager to tout the song's success.

"Buh Bye Miley, Taylor, Rihanna, and all the rest who spent Millions trying for the coveted Number 1 spot," one of the producers, Kash Patel, wrote on Trump's social media platform, Truth Social, on March 21. "Hello new Music Mogul @realDonaldTrump. We just took a flame thrower to the music industry."

Claiming the top spot may provide bragging points, but conquering the iTunes chart isn't the achievement it once was, as the number of people downloading music has plummeted given the popularity of streaming services like Spotify.

Aside from the \$1.29 download, vinyl records of the song are sold online in different color schemes — prices range from \$99.99 to \$199.99.

Released in early March, the song is associated with The Justice for All Project, Inc., a nonprofit registered the same month with an address in Sarasota, Florida. Ed Henry, a former Fox News personality, is listed as a director of the organization and is credited with Patel as being a producer of "Justice for All."

Another director of the nonprofit is Tom Homan, former head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement under Trump. He is also the CEO of The America Project, a Florida group that has spent millions of dollars on efforts to undermine faith in U.S. elections. The group has sponsored conferences for election deniers, helped bankroll the partisan and flawed review of Arizona ballots following the 2020 election. It now has

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chapters in several states.

The America Project was founded in 2021 by Michael Flynn, a former Army general who briefly served as Trump's national security advisor, and Patrick Byrne, the founder of the online retailer Overstock.com. In a series of text messages, Byrne confirmed to The Associated Press that The America Project helped create the song.

Further obscuring the song's genesis: Its record label is listed as Mailman Media, a for-profit company that was only registered in Florida in February. It's unclear which organization receives proceeds from the song. Mailman Media's involvement was first reported by Forbes.

A spokeswoman for Patel and Henry declined to respond to questions about the song or the irony in using it in such a way. The Star-Spangled Banner was penned by Francis Scott Key after the bombardment of Ft. McHenry by the British in the War of 1812. Just weeks earlier, redcoats had burned the U.S. Capitol to the ground; that was the last time the building had been the scene of such a violent attack.

Others who are working to assist Capitol riot defendants and their families said they also have few insights into how the song will help their cause.

"None of the organizations that are working on this are aware" of how the money will be spent, or how it will help Jan. 6 defendants, said Trennis Evans, a Jan. 6 participant who operates a legal advocacy group for other defendants known as Condemned USA. Evans pleaded guilty last year to a federal misdemeanor for illegally entering the Capitol.

The 20 inmates singing in the J6 Prison choir make up a tiny fraction of the 1,000 people who have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. More than 600 have pleaded guilty or been convicted, and more than 450 have been sentenced, with over half receiving prison terms ranging from seven days to 10 years.

Just one choir member has been identified: Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, now serving four years in prison for his actions during Jan. 6. Hale-Cusanelli is a family friend of Cynthia Hughes, a New Jersey woman who leads a separate organization raising money for Jan. 6 defendants. A spokeswoman for Hughes confirmed Hale-Cusanelli's participation on the song but said Hughes was too busy to respond to questions.

Before he joined the mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol, Hale-Cusanelli was an Army reservist who sometimes styled his mustache like Hitler and who alarmed coworkers with his comments about women and Jews.

Prosecutors alleged the 33-year-old New Jersey man urged other rioters to "advance"; video footage captured him yelling profanities at police and screaming "the revolution will be televised!"

On the witness stand during his trial, Hale-Cusanelli testified he didn't realize that Congress met in the Capitol or that it was in session that day, to certify Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election victory over Trump.

"I know this sounds idiotic, but I'm from New Jersey," Hale-Cusanelli said. "In all my studies, I didn't know there was an actual building that was called the 'Capitol.' It's embarrassing and idiotic."

The judge said Hale-Cusanelli's claim was "highly dubious." Prosecutors called it a lie. A jury convicted him of felony obstruction of an official proceeding and four related misdemeanors. An attorney for Hale-Cusanelli did not return messages seeking comment.

At his sentencing in September, like many Jan. 6 defendants, Hale-Cusanelli expressed regret for his role in the attack.

"My behavior that day was unacceptable, and I disgraced my uniform and I disgraced the country," he told the judge before being sentenced to four years in federal prison.

"If there's any kind of service that I can provide to rectify the damage done to the Capitol building or to injuries or anything done to the Capitol or Metro Police," he told the judge, "I stand by to perform whatever that duty might be."

He has become a performer, of sorts — on a song that seeks to recast himself as a patriot, not a rioter.

Associated Press writer Michelle R. Smith contributed to this report.

Minister: Ukraine will beat Russia in war of technologies

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — As Ukrainian and Russian troops fight conventional battles on the front lines, Europe's first major war of the internet age has also sparked a war of technology as both sides vie for the advantage with their drones and satellite communications.

While the two sides have kept pace with one another thus far, Ukraine's minister in charge of technology told The Associated Press in an interview Friday that he was confident his country had the motivation and abilities to out-innovate Russia in the end.

Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine's Minister of Digital Transformation, said unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, electronic warfare, satellite communications and other technologies had been a fundamental part of the war with Russia that began more than a year ago.

"Technologies allow traditional and modern artillery to be more accurate, and they help save the lives of our soldiers," he said.

"When you have 'eyes' over you, you can make more effective decisions about managing your troops."

He acknowledged that Russia was also aware of the importance of technology on the battlefield, and was actively developing and improving its own.

"Every day, there are new UAVs on the battlefield from our side and from Russia's side," Fedorov said. "We see what kind of drones they have. We receive, disassemble and study them."

He said the government was planning investments in new technology projects to encourage further competition and innovation.

"In this technology war we will surely win," he said. "Even if fewer than 50-60% of supported projects will give some result, it can be decisive on the battlefield."

In recent weeks, anticipation of a possible Ukrainian counteroffensive this spring has risen. Fedorov said it was impossible to imagine any efficient operations without technologies on the battlefield.

Ukraine has not mounted a major operation to liberate occupied territories since it retook the city of Kherson and part of the surrounding province last November. However, the frequency of reported drone attacks in Russia has increased.

Over the past months, a spate of drone strikes has targeted areas in southern and western Russia, reflecting the growing reach of the Ukrainian military. After each strike, Russian authorities blamed Ukraine, but Ukrainian officials stopped short of openly claiming responsibility. Instead, they emphasized the right to attack any target in response to the Russian aggression.

Fedorov said the effect of Ukraine's drone warfare could be seen in Russia's actions, noting that Russia has now started moving armored equipment further from the front line.

"There have been certain events that have changed the situation, but we continue to scale this useful experience," he said, but refused to be drawn on the details.

Commenting on the battle for the city of Bakhmut, the longest of the war so far, Fedorov said that the "use of technologies is invaluable in such situations."

"When you have limited artillery resources, weapons, ammunition, and strike drones, you need to be as accurate as possible," he said. This accuracy can be achieved in particular by drones.

However, with a front line thousands of kilometers long, the heavy weapons and armored equipment traditional for warfare remained essential, Fedorov said. Technology could help Ukraine locate potential targets, but the army could not hit them all because it lacked the necessary artillery and ammunition, he added.

The delivery of promised aid from partner countries remained "critical," said the minister in charge of technologies.

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

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It's Met Gala time again — here's what we know so far

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Last year, it took 275,000 bright pink roses to adorn the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the Met Gala, the biggest night in fashion and one of the biggest concentrations of star power anywhere.

It remains to be seen how the museum's Great Hall will be decorated come the first Monday in May, but one thing is not in question: those entering it will look spectacular. The theme centers on the late designer Karl Lagerfeld, who made an indelible mark on luxury fashion in his long career at Chanel, Fendi and elsewhere. It is a theme not without controversy — Lagerfeld was known for contentious remarks about everything from #MeToo to curvy bodies.

Want to know what to expect as the big day approaches? Not to worry. We've dusted off our annual guide for you here, with some key updates.

WHAT IS THE MET GALA ANYWAY?

It started in 1948 as a society midnight supper, and wasn't even at the Met.

Fast forward 70-plus years, and the Met Gala is something totally different, one of the most photographed events in the world for its head-spinning red carpet — though the carpet isn't always red.

We're talking Rihanna as a bejeweled pope. Zendaya as Cinderella with a light-up gown. Katy Perry as a chandelier morphing into a hamburger. Also: Beyoncé in her "naked dress." Billy Porter as an Egyptian sun god, carried on a litter by six shirtless men. And Lady Gaga's 16-minute striptease. And, last year, host Blake Lively's Versace dress — a tribute to iconic New York architecture — that changed colors in front of our eyes.

Then there's Kim Kardashian, bringing commitment to a whole other level. (It's reasonably safe to expect her again this year, because why wouldn't she be coming?) One year, she wore a dress so tight, she admitted she had to take breathing lessons beforehand. Two years ago, she wore a dark bodysuit that covered even her face. But then last year she truly stole the carpet, showing up in Marilyn Monroe's actual, rhinestone-studded "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" dress (borrowed from Ripley's Believe It or Not! museum), changing the minute she got inside to protect it. There was controversy later over suspicions, denied by Ripley's, that she'd caused some damage. But still — that was an entrance.

It's important to note that the party has a purpose — last year, the evening earned \$17.4 million for the Met's Costume Institute, a self-funding department. Yes, that's a heckuva lot for a gala. It also launches the annual spring exhibit that brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to the museum.

But it's the carpet itself that draws the world's eyes, with the guest list — strategically withheld until the last minute — featuring a collection of notables from movies, music, fashion, sports, politics and social media that arguably makes for the highest celebrity wattage-per-square-foot of any party in the world.

WHO'S HOSTING THIS YEAR?

This year's five hosts are drawn from television (Emmy-winning writer, actor and producer Michaela Coel); the movies (Oscar-winning actor Penélope Cruz, who has worked with Chanel for more than 20 years); sports (recently retired tennis superstar Roger Federer); and music (Grammy-winning songstress Dua Lipa). Finally there is Vogue's Anna Wintour (do we need to tell you she's in fashion?) running the whole thing as usual.

IS THERE ALWAYS A THEME?

Yes. As mentioned above, the theme is Karl Lagerfeld, and the exhibit, "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty," looks at "the designer's stylistic vocabulary as expressed in aesthetic themes that appear time and again in his fashions from the 1950s to his final collection in 2019." Once again, it has been created by the Met's star curator, Andrew Bolton.

DOES EVERYONE FOLLOW THE THEME?

Not really. Some eschew it and just go for big and crazy. But expect some guests to carefully research the theme and come in perfect sync. It was hard to beat the carpet, for example, when the theme was tied to "Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination" and Rihanna came as the pope, Zendaya channeled Joan of Arc, and Perry navigated the crowd with a set of enormous angel wings. For Lagerfeld,

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the clothes may be a bit more, er, down to earth.

HOW MUCH DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR A MET GALA TICKET?

Wrong question. You cannot just buy a ticket. The right question is: If I were famous or powerful and got invited, how much would it cost?

OK, IF I WERE FAMOUS OR POWERFUL AND GOT INVITED, HOW MUCH WOULD IT COST?

Well, you might not pay yourself. Generally companies buy tables. A fashion label would then host its desired celebrities. This year, the cost has gone up, as it does every few years due to rising expenses: It's now \$50,000 for an individual ticket, and tables start at \$300,000.

SO WHO GETS INVITED?

This year, there will be roughly 400 guests — similar to recent years but still lower than pre-pandemic highs of 500-600. Wintour and her team still get to approve every guest.

Trying to predict? Take out your pen and jot down some of your favorite names, the buzzier the better. Newly minted Oscar winners, for example, are a good bet. Broadway is a special favorite of Wintour's. She also loves tennis — this is not fashionable Federer's first Met Gala. Now, cross everyone off your list except the very top. At this gala, everybody's A-list.

THAT MUST BE AN EXAGGERATION.

Not really. Ask Tina Fey. She went in 2010 and later described walking around trying to find somebody "normal" to sit and talk with. That ended up being Barbara Walters.

HOW CAN I WATCH?

You can watch the whole carpet unfold on a Vogue livestream. If you're in New York, you can also join fans across the street, behind barricades, on Fifth Avenue or even further east on Madison. Timothée Chalamet has been known to greet fans.

DO WE KNOW WHO'S COMING? AND WHO ISN'T?

It's secret. But reports slip out, often about who is not coming and why. You can count on various celebrity Chanel ambassadors showing up. Watch this space.

WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE?

Entering the museum, guests walk past what is usually an impossibly enormous flower arrangement in the lobby, with perhaps an orchestra playing nearby, and over to cocktails. Or, they head to view the exhibit. Cocktails are 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., but the most famous — or those who plan to make the biggest entrance — sometimes come (fashionably) later.

Around 8 p.m., guests are summoned to dinner — perhaps by a team of buglers ("Are they going to do that between every course?" actor Gary Oldman asked aloud one year).

IS IT FUN FOR EVERYONE?

Occasionally, someone says no. Fey, in a comic rant to David Letterman in 2015, described the gala as a "jerk parade" and said it included everyone you'd ever want to punch, if you had millions of arms. Amy Schumer left early in 2016 and said later she felt awkward and like it was "a punishment."

SO THEY NEVER CAME BACK, RIGHT?

Wrong. Schumer was back in 2017. And then last year again.

Hey, this is the Met Gala.

For more coverage of the 2023 Met Gala, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/met-gala>

Drive-by shooting wounds 3, kills 12-year-old bystander

By DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Bullets sprayed out from a speeding car in Connecticut's capital, killing an innocent 12-year-old bystander and wounding three other people who have rap sheets that include gun crimes, authorities said Friday.

The suspects in the drive-by shooting appeared to target three males who were standing on a sidewalk on a residential street not far from downtown Hartford shortly after 8:30 p.m. Thursday, city police said.

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Secret Pierce, a seventh grader at Milner Middle School, became Hartford's seventh homicide victim of the year. She was sitting in a parked car when she was shot in the head, police said. She died Friday morning. The three other victims, males ages 16, 18 and 23, were expected to survive.

"This is a painful day in our community," Mayor Luke Bronin said at a morning news conference outside police headquarters. "I don't have the words. I want to say to Secret's mom and loved ones that we all are so deeply sorry. That we are with them today in grief, in prayer and with love. ... A tragedy like this ripples outward in a community and affects so many."

Police Lt. Aaron Boisvert said Secret was an innocent bystander. "Very tragic. Very unfortunate. Sickening," he said.

Investigators searched for the suspects Friday. The shooting was captured on surveillance video, but the footage was grainy and police were trying to identify the suspected vehicle, Boisvert said. Authorities believe there were two people in the car.

It was not immediately clear why the three males were targeted.

Bronin said all three were known to police because they had extensive criminal histories that included firearms arrests. He said it appeared one of the surviving victims was on probation, and another was awaiting adjudication for a firearm offense.

The mayor urged the three victims to cooperate with police.

"I believe they know who fired the bullets that killed a 12-year-old girl," Bronin said. "And it is not acceptable not to cooperate with investigators. ... That's not fair to her family. That's not fair to her loved ones. It's not fair to her memory, It's not fair to our community."

City schools Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez said at the news conference that counseling and other support services were being offered at Secret's school and other schools across the district.

"When a tragedy happens such as this one, it does have wide ripples," she said. "And to us, Secret was one of our beautiful and very capable students. And we have activated all of our crisis support teams.

"Trauma is not foreign to us in Hartford and in Hartford public schools," Torres-Rodriguez said. "So it's really hard for us to compartmentalize or separate when events happen. And so while we are going to galvanize all of our support and our partners, dealing with the trauma is an extended process."

Several children, nearly all of them teens, have been fatally shot in Hartford over the past several years. Two years ago, 3-year-old Randell Jones was shot to death while in a car with family members during a drive-by shooting. Police believe a man in Randell's car was the intended target. The court cases of two teens charged in Randell's death remain pending.

White House: No evacuation plans for all Americans in Sudan

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, MATTHEW LEE and TARA COPP Associated Press

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany (AP) — The Pentagon has deployed forces and is developing options to assist in the possible evacuation of U.S. Embassy personnel from Sudan, but the White House said Friday there are no plans for now for a broader pullout of the potentially thousands of other Americans from the African country where warring factions are in a violent conflict.

The troop moves by the U.S. military are intended "to ensure that we provide as many options as possible, if we are called on to do something. We haven't been called on to do anything yet," Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at a news conference in Germany. Austin and U.S. Army Gen. Mark Milley, the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, held meeting meetings with defense leaders from other countries to discuss additional support for Ukraine.

An estimated 16,000 private U.S. citizens are registered with the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum as being in Sudan. The State Department has cautioned that that figure probably is inaccurate because there is no requirement for Americans to register nor is there a requirement to notify the embassy when they leave.

"It's absolutely imperative that U.S. citizens in Sudan make their own arrangements to stay safe in these difficult circumstances," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said in Washington.

He added that "Americans should have no expectation of a U.S. government coordinated evacuation at

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this time. And we expect that that's going to remain the case."

For embassy staff, according to an American official, a small number of U.S. troops have begun arriving in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti, where the U.S. is pre-positioning forces and equipment to assist in any potential evacuation. The official said Army soldiers are being tapped for the task.

The U.S. troops are being moved to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. Evacuation planning for Sudan got underway in earnest on Monday after a U.S. Embassy convoy was attacked in Khartoum, the Sudanese capital.

The conflict between Sudan's military and a rival paramilitary force is worsening. The military has ruled out negotiations and said it would only accept surrender as a temporary cease-fire ended, raising the likelihood of a renewed surge in the nearly weeklong violence that has killed hundreds.

The U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe private deliberations, said Milley discussed the situation with defense officials from Germany, Italy and Canada, among others. One topic was ensuring that any potential evacuation efforts did not conflict.

The U.S. State Department said Friday that an American citizen had died in Sudan, but did not have further details.

"We are in touch with the family and offer our deepest condolences to them on their loss. Out of respect for the family during this difficult time, we have nothing further to add," the department said in a statement.

Lee and Copp reported from Washington. Associated Press writer Aamer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

Emily in Paris: Parisians face influx of Netflix hero's fans

By JEFFREY SCHAEFFER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The immense success of the Netflix series "Emily in Paris" has transformed a quiet, untouched square in the French capital into a tourist magnet.

In the historic Latin Quarter and just a short walk from the magnificent, domed Pantheon, tucked so deeply away that you could easily miss it, lies the Place de l'Estrapade. For diehard, beret-wearing fans of the show, this sliver of a neighborhood has become a landmark of its own.

That's because this is where the fictional character Emily Cooper, a 20-something American portrayed by Lily Collins, lives, dines and savors French pastries from the local bakery.

The newfound attention can be disruptive for the real people who live and work here, but the show is also igniting a new passion for Paris — and even anti-Emily graffiti has become part of the attraction.

The romantic comedy, whose third season was released in December, traces Emily's adventures and misadventures in her Parisian career and love life.

On a sunny weekday, the square bustles with tourists from the U.S. and far beyond, taking photos, video and selfies.

It's all here: Emily's apartment building at 1 Place de d'Estrapade, where she lives next to would-be love interest Gabriel. The restaurant where Gabriel — portrayed by French actor Lucas Bravo — is the chef. And, of course, the bakery she loves.

Dancer Riskya Octaviana from Jakarta, Indonesia, came directly to Paris after performing in Germany because of how much she loves the show. After twirling on the square, Emily-style, she said, "Emily is my big friend."

Elizabeth and Ruben Mercado celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary in Paris and visited Emily's neighborhood as part of their trip. Elizabeth Mercado said she prepared by binge-watching the show just before they left.

"We've been trying to practice the small bits of French that we picked up during the show," she said.

Tourists make a point of stopping and snacking at Boulangerie Moderne, the Modern Bakery featured in the series. The tourist infusion has boosted profits, acknowledges owner Thierry Rabineau.

But the flipside to fame has come in online comments. Some people, many posting anonymously, have

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slammed the quality of his bakery. Rabineau thinks the show has mistakenly given viewers the impression that he's running a luxury pastry shop instead of a standard local bakery selling croissants at 1.30 euros (\$1.43) each.

"People are writing comments, saying it's overpriced, it's not good. It's disgusting. This baffles me," Rabineau said. "It's a modern bakery, a small neighborhood bakery."

He's aware how lucky he is that the show came along. "We are profiting from a current situation. ... But in two or three years, there won't be any more tourism and we will have to be here to survive," he said.

Stephanie Jamin, who lives on the square and crosses paths with the throngs of tourists on a daily basis, has had to adjust to residing in a go-to place on the tourist map. She says the people themselves aren't a nuisance, but the crowds can be imposing.

"We have become an ultra-touristy district, whereas it was a small square still a bit preserved from tourism," she said.

Another resident emerging from Emily's apartment building said they were allergic to the show. "Emily Not Welcome" is even scrawled in red graffiti on part of the facade.

But the graffiti, too, is drawing fans, with visitors taking pictures of themselves pointing to the disparaging remark. Among them was Abdullah Najjarri, a medical internist from Berlin who calls the series "entertaining."

"I got to see a lot of Paris through that series, actually, and the lifestyle and and the clichés — partly true, partly not, so that it's nice," he said.

Croatian digital creator Sladana Grzincic, touring Paris wearing a white beret, sunglasses and a striped blue and white sweater, was photographed taking a jump and a twirl in front of Emily's apartment.

Seeing the real neighborhood makes her eager for the next season, which she said she will watch "a bit differently because I was here and on the same spots where she's filming that."

Season four is in the works, but the release date remains unknown.

Resident Jamin remains philosophical about the fascination with her neighborhood.

"It is as ephemeral as the series is," she said. After the Emily frenzy subsides, "there are people like all the shopkeepers of the district who will have benefited enormously from it, and it allowed them to start up again after COVID. They needed that."

"There will inevitably be an end. Emily is not Victor Hugo. She will not be inducted into the Pantheon," Jamin said. "She will go home and everything will be fine."

Follow AP's entertainment coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/entertainment>

Russia's air force accidentally bombs own city of Belgorod

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's military acknowledged that a bomb accidentally dropped by one of its warplanes caused a powerful blast in a Russian city not far from Ukraine's border, injuring two and scaring local residents.

Belgorod, a city of 340,000 located about 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the Russia-Ukraine border, has faced regular drone attacks during Russia's current military operation in Ukraine. Russian authorities blamed the earlier strikes on the Ukrainian military, which refrained from directly claiming responsibility for the attacks.

The explosion late Thursday was far more powerful than anything Belgorod residents had experienced before. Witnesses reported a low hissing sound followed by a blast that made nearby apartment buildings tremble and shattered their windows.

It left a 20-meter (66-foot) -wide crater in the middle of a tree-lined avenue flanked by apartment blocks, damaged several cars and threw one vehicle onto a store roof. Two people were injured, and a third person was later hospitalized with hypertension, authorities said.

Immediately after the explosion, Russian commentators and military bloggers were abuzz with theories about what weapon Ukraine had used for the attack. Many of them called for strong retribution.

But about an hour later, the Russian Defense Ministry acknowledged that a weapon accidentally released

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by one of its own Su-34 bombers caused the blast. The ministry did not provide any further details, but military experts said the weapon likely was a powerful 500-kilogram (1,100-pound) bomb.

Military experts charged that the weapon appeared to have been set to explode with a small delay after impact that would allow it to hit underground facilities.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said local authorities decided to temporarily resettle residents of a nine-story apartment building while it was inspected to make sure it hadn't suffered structural damage that rendered it unsafe to live in.

In an editorial gaffe, an anchor on Russian state television followed the news about the local authorities dealing with the explosion's aftermath by declaring that "modern weapons allow Russian units to eliminate extremists in the area of the special military operation from a minimal distance." The anchor looked visibly puzzled by the text that he had just read.

Russian commentators questioned why the warplane flew over Belgorod and urged the military to avoid such risky overflights in the future.

Some alleged that the bomb that was accidentally dropped on Belgorod could be one of a batch of modified munitions equipped with wings and GPS-guided targeting system that allows them to glide to targets dozens of kilometers (miles) away. The Russian air force has started using such gliding bombs only recently, and some experts say that they could be prone to glitches.

In October, a Russian warplane crashed next to a residential building in the port city of Yeysk on the Sea of Azov, killing 15 people. Yeysk hosts a big Russian air base with warplanes that fly missions over Ukraine.

Military experts have noted that as the number of Russian military flights have increased sharply during the fighting, so have crashes and misfires.

In another deadly incident in the Belgorod region, two volunteer soldiers fired at Russian troops at a military firing range, killing 11 and wounding 15 others before being shot dead.

White House recruits Edward Lee as state dinner guest chef

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chef Edward Lee says food, at its best, tells a story. And the story he wants told with the meal he's whipping up for next week's White House state dinner is of the deep connection between the United States and its ally South Korea.

President Joe Biden is hosting South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Wednesday for a state visit, including a glitzy state dinner, and the White House invited Lee, a Korean American chef and restaurateur, to help prepare the meal.

The White House gave The Associated Press an exclusive preview of its plans to use Lee as a "guest chef" for the meal and of its high-wattage lineup for the after-dinner entertainment: Broadway stars Norm Lewis, Lea Salonga and Jessica Vosk.

In an interview with the AP, Lee said "Korean food and American food can merge together and create this beautiful hybrid that is unique and delicious."

He said any iconic American food, if spiked with a "little Korean flavor or Korean spice," will still be familiar, but it will just be different and unique. Real food for thought, he said.

"Your mind becomes curious about more than just the flavors," Lee said. "When food is at its best, it tells a story."

A state visit is the highest diplomatic honor the U.S. reserves for its closest allies, and Biden so far has extended just two such invitations. The first went to France last December.

Every component of a state visit, from the booming 21-gun salute for the leader's arrival, to the glitz and glamour on display at the black-tie state dinner, is designed to highlight ties between the U.S. and its ally. Yoon's visit will mark 70 years of U.S.-South Korea relations.

White House social secretary Carlos Elizondo reached out to the New York City-born chef about two months ago to seek his help with the dinner. Lee's cooking style is one that meshes two cuisines: Korean food and food from the Southern U.S.

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Lee recently spent two days at the White House testing recipes and plating meals, offering tastes to first lady Jill Biden and her staff, who are responsible for the dinner and who helped develop the menu. He worked with White House executive chef Cristeta Comerford and her staff.

The experience was nerve-wracking.

"I've been on 'Top Chef,' where I've had to cook for some very high-powered chefs who were critiquing my food, and this was probably more pressure than the TV show," Lee said of having the first lady be the judge of his kitchen creations.

The 50-year-old husband and father couldn't say what's on the menu. The White House will be releasing those details on Monday. But the menu has been finalized, Lee said, practically breathing a sigh of relief during Thursday's telephone interview.

Lee started working in restaurants when he was 14 years old. He attended culinary school after graduation from New York University but dropped out after a week. A restaurant he opened in lower Manhattan folded after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

He took a break to travel around the United States and visit places he'd only wondered about while growing up in New York. He was able to scratch the Kentucky Derby from his bucket list — and while there he fell in love with Louisville and its Southern culture.

It's where, Lee said, "I found my culinary voice."

He has one restaurant, 610 Magnolia, in Louisville, and is weeks away from opening another. He lives part time in Washington, D.C., where he is culinary director for a third restaurant, Succotash. He won a James Beard Award for his book "Buttermilk Graffiti."

Lee says Southerners and Koreans are alike in how they eat — big tables, plenty of food, side dishes, grazing and barbecue. Different spices, flavors and techniques, he said, "but the philosophy is the same, the sensation is the same."

The decision to recruit Lee to be the guest chef revives a practice that Michelle Obama often used when she arranged state dinners as first lady. Marcus Samuelsson, Mario Batali and Anita Lo were among the celebrity chefs she enlisted to add a splash of pizzazz.

Jill Biden chose Lee because of his Korean-influenced American cuisine, her office said.

After dinner, Broadway stars Lewis, Salonga and Vosk will entertain guests with a mix of solo, duet and trio performances.

Lewis' career spans film, television and theater. He made history in 2014 as Broadway's first Black phantom in "The Phantom of the Opera," which recently closed after a record 35-year run. He currently stars in the national tour of the Tony Award-winning production of "A Soldier's Play."

Salonga is known for her award-winning role of Kim in "Miss Saigon." In Disney films, she was the singing voice of Princess Jasmine in "Aladdin" and Fa Mulan for "Mulan" and "Mulan II." She also had roles in "Les Miserables" on Broadway.

Vosk is a singer and actor who has appeared in "Wicked" and in the most recent revival of "Fiddler on the Roof," both on Broadway.

UN's weather agency: 2022 was nasty, deadly, costly and hot

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Looking back at 2022's weather with months of analysis, the World Meteorological Organization said last year really was as bad as it seemed when people were muddling through it.

And about as bad as it gets — until more warming kicks in.

Killer floods, droughts and heat waves hit around the world, costing many billions of dollars. Global ocean heat and acidity levels hit record highs and Antarctic sea ice and European Alps glaciers reached record low amounts, according to the United Nations' climate agency's State of Global Climate 2022 report released Friday.

While levels have been higher before human civilization, global sea height and the amount of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and methane in the air reached highest modern recorded amounts. The key glaciers that

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scientists use as a health check for the world shrank by more than 1.3 meters (51 inches) in just one year and for the first time in history no snow survived the summer melt season on Switzerland's glaciers, the report said.

Sea level is now rising at about double the rate it did in the 1990s, WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said in a news conference. Oceans can rise another half a meter to a meter (20 to 39 inches) by the end of century as more ice melts from ice sheets and glaciers and warmer water expands, he said.

"Unfortunately these negative trends in weather patterns and all of these parameters may continue until the 2060s" despite efforts to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gases because of the pollution already spewed, Taalas said. "We have already lost this melting of this glaciers game and sea level rise game. So that's bad news."

Last year was close to but not quite the hottest year on record, ranking fifth or sixth hottest depending on measuring techniques. But the past eight years are the hottest eight years on record globally. The world kept that warm despite the rare third year of a La Nina, a natural temporary cooling of parts of the Pacific Ocean that changes weather worldwide.

The United Kingdom, France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and New Zealand had their hottest years on record.

Global heat and other weather records go back to 1850.

"In 2022, continuous drought in East Africa, record breaking rainfall in Pakistan and record-breaking heat waves in China and Europe affected tens of millions, drove food insecurity, boosted mass migration, and cost billions of dollars in loss and damage," Taalas said.

China's heat wave was its longest and most extensive in that country's record with its summer not just hottest on record but smashing the old record by more than 0.5 degrees Celsius (0.9 degrees Fahrenheit), the 55-page report said.

Africa's drought displaced more than 1.7 million people in Somalia and Ethiopia, while Pakistan's devastating flooding — which put one-third of the nation under water at one point — displaced about 8 million people, the report said.

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Earth's warriors, young and old, keep battling and hoping

By SETH BORENSTEIN, WANJOHI KABUKURU, FABIANO MAISONNAVE and SIBI ARASU Associated Press
They fight for Earth.

Young and old, famous and not so well known, there are many people from around the globe who make it their mission to try to save the planet, especially from the ravages of climate change. They find themselves often pitted against powerful forces.

One group is the generations that will live for decades with what Earth will become and are trying to keep it from getting overheated. Another is from a generation partly responsible for what's happened and trying to clean up what they are leaving behind for those younger generations that they helped teach.

Here are some of those planetary warriors as people commemorate Earth Day. Even though 40, 50, 60 and even 70 years separate them, they have something in common: Hope. It keeps them battling.

ERIC NJUGUNA

"I became a climate justice activist out of necessity," the 20-year-old from Kenya says. "Having seen first-hand the impacts of the climate crisis, I joined the youth climate movement."

"As I get older, the impacts of the climate crisis will be even worse," Njuguna says. "I am doing this work because it must be done."

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Njuguna admits to getting dejected frequently, pointing to failed efforts to get countries to agree to halting new oil and gas exploration and investment.

When looking at the oldest generation, Njuguna says it's not really about age or blame for those who were in charge before – even though heat-trapping emissions are at their highest. Instead the activist says it is often about richer North countries that caused the pollution and poorer South countries that get hit.

"As the climate crisis gets worse and its impacts become even more devastating, it's hard not to lose hope," Njuguna says. "But I get hope from being in the movement to see young people, Indigenous people who are on the frontlines of the climate crisis lead the fight for justice."

BILL NYE

"I'm so old. I was at the first Earth Day. I grew up in the city of Washington, D.C.," says engineer-turned science communicator-turned climate activist Bill Nye, 67. "I rode my Schwinn bicycle to the Washington to the National Mall."

Despite government and industry scientists knowing, predicting and warning about the dangers of human-caused climate change, "we haven't done anything about this problem in 60 years, 50 years. So let's get to work. Yes it's frustrating," Nye says.

"There's certainly plenty of things to be doomy about," Nye says. "I mean just look around at just how lame global efforts have been to address climate change the last few decades."

Nye says he's borrowing a page from the playbook of "conservative media" and "so we made six one-hour things to scare people so that people might do something about things" in a streaming TV series called *The End is Nye*.

Yet Nye says, "you have to be optimistic. If you are not optimistic, you're not going to get anything done. ... When young people are running the show, they're not going to put up with this stuff. They're going to make changes."

DISHA RAVI

"Hope is a sewer rat," says Disha Ravi, a 24-year-old Indian climate activist with Fridays for Future and a vocal proponent of linking various environmental and people's rights issues in India with climate-related activism.

Quoting Ohio-based poet, Caitlin Seida, Ravi says she feels the same. "I don't think hope is some flowery thing. Like the poem, I believe it is a sewer rat that fights against all odds even if it gets ugly." Ravi said, "We are all like sewer rats, fighting for a better world."

Ravi was in the spotlight in 2021 when she was arrested on sedition charges by Indian police but released on bail soon after. She was purportedly arrested for supporting secessionists, but Ravi asserted that she was helping spread the word about the large scale protests by farmers in India.

For Ravi, it started with an Instagram post about climate change saying, "Hey, I want to do something. I don't know what to do. Does anyone else want to do something with me?"

Ravi feels Earth Day has become a greenwashing exercise in recent years. "But the positive aspect is that people remember there is something called the Earth and they connect with nature to some degree," she says.

DAVID SUZUKI

For more than half a century, David Suzuki has advocated for Earth, but looking back he fears "the environmental movement has fundamentally failed." And what's worse, he says, "my message at the end of my career is that we've run out of time."

Suzuki, 87, was studying the smallest of things as a professor in 1962: the genetics of fruit flies. Then he read Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" and he asked himself, "but what about the bigger picture?"

And that bigger picture is where he says society has gone astray, thinking Earth is there to serve humans instead of people being part of an intricate web of life, where plants, animals, humans, air, water and soil are connected. Suzuki says he and other environmentalists have been too focused on "incremental change that doesn't threaten the system. ... We're all trapped within the system now."

Over the decades, "I've said to my wife 'that's it; forget it; it's too hard; we can't do it,'" Suzuki recalls, but he never quit. "You have no choice. If you have children or grandchildren, you can't ever talk about

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giving up.”

He tells the younger generation that “however despairing the situation, you have no choice but to fight and try. We don’t have time to despair. That’s a luxury.”

VANESSA NAKATE

At 26, Vanessa Nakate of Uganda is one of the older and better known of youth climate activists. She’s spoken at international climate negotiations, written a book and won awards.

What really has been the high point of her activism is concrete results she can see. In 2019, she started the Vash Green schools project to bring solar electricity to schools in Africa. She’s got installations in 45 schools, helping about 16,000 children.

“For me, seeing the joy of children and teachers and parents being able to study and have access to clean sources of electricity, being able to access clean cooking, I think that is one of the things that is a huge highlight and really a place of transformation,” she said.

Nakate said her activism has been compared to prostitution and she has been accused of attention-seeking to find a husband by “people who carry so much negativity and so much hatred,” but then Nakate looks back at the schools. “If that was the price I had to pay to reach more schools with solar and ecofriendly stoves, then I guess it was worth it.”

“I really don’t care what kind of negativity comes in,” Nakate says. “I’m really looking at what I would say is the bigger picture.”

MARIA MARSHALL

Environmentalism came naturally to Maria Marshall.

She grew up with her grandmother’s farm, her mother’s garden in Barbados and her parents talked about taking care of the planet and acted accordingly. So Marshall decided to join in. She was 11.

She made a video on recycling and reuse, “Little Thoughts on Big Matters,” that became a series, and then she was chosen as a UNICEF youth advocate, the youngest at the time she was appointed. And when two years ago she met Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, herself a force in trying to change the world financial powers deal with climate change, the prime minister gave her what may be one of the highest compliments possible on the island nation. Mottley compared her to superstar Rihanna.

“When my message is shared with so many people around the world that makes me feel very happy that people are inspired by what I’m doing,” Marshall, now 14, says. It’s “not like I’m an attention-seeker or anything along those lines, but because I like when good things happen, especially for something as important as our planet and the environment.”

“The fact still remains,” she says as she gets ready to go, “we still have only one environment we’ve got to protect.”

DOROTHEE HILDEBRANDT

Dorothee Hildebrandt found the inspiration to focus her lifelong activism toward the climate change effort because of the younger generation, and in particular the 20-year-old activist Greta Thunberg.

“She was talking about climate change, and I was thinking she is so right,” says the 72-year-old. “We have to care about stopping climate change ... it’s not only personal, my children, I’m thinking about the children of the world.”

She started by striking on Fridays in the town of Katrineholm in Sweden, where she lives, with just a handful of others.

Since then, Hildebrandt has cycled – only occasionally taking the necessary ferry – to the last two international climate conferences in Scotland and Egypt.

She hopes her cycling journeys can set a good example, believing that she needs “to do all I can, and if I don’t do that, I won’t have a good conscience.”

Younger and older generations carry the climate fight, Hildebrandt says, with middle generations too “occupied by daily life.”

Despite a lifetime of activism for various causes, she doesn’t have much hope for the future, but she does maintain a bit. “I don’t know what I would do” otherwise, she says.

NICKI BECKER

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The 22-year-old from Argentina started her journey in climate activism after she was struck by the youth-led movement, Fridays for Future, back in 2019.

She realized then that climate change was not off in the distance but already affecting her daily life, she says, but very few people in her country were paying attention to the issue.

"A country like Argentina should not be indifferent to it just because it is facing an economic crisis, but rather the opposite. We have fewer resources to deal with a crisis that is already attacking us today," she says.

Becker co-founded Youth for Climate, a movement of over 200 young people from across Argentina who are pushing for laws to combat climate change and support "cartoneros" who gather and recycle waste. She believes that activism is essential, even when it can be frustrating.

Becker says her generation's activism is not just a fad, and will remain with them as they grow older. "Many business partners say that young people of my generation, when looking for a job, don't just look for the salary, but also consider many other factors that influence their decision," she says. "They look for companies that are at the forefront of environmentalism."

NAKEEYAT DRAMANI SAM

At just 10 years old, Nakeeyat Dramani Sam made a name for herself when she gave a powerful speech about who pays for climate damages at last year's United Nations climate conference.

She says the experience was "a high point" because "the climate message reached all the world." However, she acknowledges that campaigners' calls sometimes fall on deaf ears.

Now 11, Sam is critical of the older generation, saying that "when they had all the power and authority, they didn't do much to stop global warming," but "at least some of them have listened," she says. In her native Ghana, some have contributed to tree-planting efforts, which is how Sam's climate activism began four years ago.

Sam has written a children's book on trees and has planted "so many trees that I have lost count," she says.

She says the younger generations are "the future leaders and there are others coming after us. We must protect the Earth for them."

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Today in History: April 22, Oklahoma Land Rush

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, April 22, the 112th day of 2023. There are 253 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 22, 2000, in a dramatic pre-dawn raid, armed immigration agents seized Elian Gonzalez, the Cuban boy at the center of a custody dispute, from his relatives' home in Miami; Elian was reunited with his father at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington.

On this date:

In 1889, the Oklahoma Land Rush began at noon as thousands of homesteaders staked claims.

In 1915, the first full-scale use of deadly chemicals in warfare took place as German forces unleashed chlorine gas against Allied troops at the start of the Second Battle of Ypres (EE'-preh) in Belgium during World War I; thousands of soldiers are believed to have died.

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In 1937, thousands of college students in New York City staged a "peace strike" opposing American entry into another possible world conflict.

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. forces began invading Japanese-held New Guinea with amphibious landings at Hollandia and Aitape.

In 1954, the publicly televised sessions of the Senate Army-McCarthy hearings began.

In 1970, millions of Americans concerned about the environment observed the first "Earth Day."

In 1993, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum was dedicated in Washington, D.C., to honor victims of Nazi extermination.

In 1994, Richard M. Nixon, the 37th president of the United States, died at a New York hospital four days after suffering a stroke; he was 81.

In 2004, Army Ranger Pat Tillman, who'd traded in a multi-million-dollar NFL contract to serve in Afghanistan, was killed by friendly fire; he was 27.

In 2005, Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee) pleaded guilty in a federal courtroom outside Washington, D.C., to conspiring with the Sept. 11 hijackers to kill Americans. (Moussaoui is serving a life prison sentence.)

In 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil platform, operated by BP, sank into the Gulf of Mexico two days after a massive explosion that killed 11 workers.

In 2016, leaders from 175 countries signed the Paris Agreement on climate change at the United Nations as the landmark deal took a key step toward entering into force years ahead of schedule.

Ten years ago: A seriously wounded Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (joh-HAHR' tsahr-NEYE'-ehv) was charged in his hospital room with bombing the Boston Marathon in a plot with his older brother, Tamerlan (TAM'-ehr-luhn), who died after a fierce gunbattle with police. Richie Havens, 72, the folk singer and guitarist who was the first performer at the 1969 Woodstock festival, died in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Five years ago: A nearly naked gunman carrying an assault rifle stormed a Waffle House restaurant in Nashville, Tennessee, shooting four people to death before a customer rushed him and wrestled the weapon away; after a manhunt lasting more than 24 hours, Travis Reinking was arrested on charges including four counts of criminal homicide. (After being ordered to receive treatment for schizophrenia, Reinking was convicted on four counts of murder and sentenced in February 2022 to life in prison without the possibility of parole.) An Islamic State suicide bomber attacked a voter registration center in the Afghan capital, killing 60 people and wounding 130 others.

One year ago: Russia shifted a dozen crack military units from the shattered port of Mariupol to eastern Ukraine and pounded away at cities across the region as the two sides hurtled toward what portended to be an epic battle for control of the country's industrial heartland. Israeli police in full riot gear stormed a sensitive Jerusalem holy site sacred to Jews and Muslims after Palestinian youths hurled stones at a gate where they were stationed. The renewed violence at the site, sacred to Jews and Muslims, came despite Israel temporarily halting Jewish visits, which were seen by the Palestinians as a provocation. Hockey Hall of Famer Guy Lafleur, who helped the Montreal Canadiens win five Stanley Cup titles in the 1970s, died at age 70.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jack Nicholson is 86. Singer Mel Carter is 84. Author Janet Evanovich is 80. Country singer Cleve Francis is 78. Movie director John Waters is 77. Singer Peter Frampton is 73. Rock singer-musician Paul Carrack (Mike and the Mechanics; Squeeze) is 72. Actor Joseph Bottoms is 69. Actor Ryan Stiles is 64. Baseball manager Terry Francona is 64. Comedian and entertainment executive Byron Allen is 62. Actor Chris Makepeace is 59. Rock musician Fletcher Dragge (Pennywise) is 57. Actor Jeffrey Dean Morgan is 57. Actor Sheryl Lee is 56. Actor-talk show host Sherri Shepherd is 56. Country singer-musician Heath Wright (Ricochet) is 56. Country singer Kellie Coffey is 52. Actor Eric Mabiuis is 52. Actor Ingo Rademacher (RAH'-deh-mah-ker) is 52. Rock musician Shavo Odadjian (System of a Down) is 49. Rock singer-musician Daniel Johns (Silverchair) is 44. Actor Malcolm Barrett is 43. Actor Cassidy Freeman is 41. Actor Michelle Ryan is 39. Actor Zack Gottsagen is 38. Actor Amber Heard is 37. Singer-songwriter BC Jean (Alexander Jean) is 36. Drummer Tripp Howell (LANCO) is 34. Rapper/singer Machine Gun Kelly is 33.