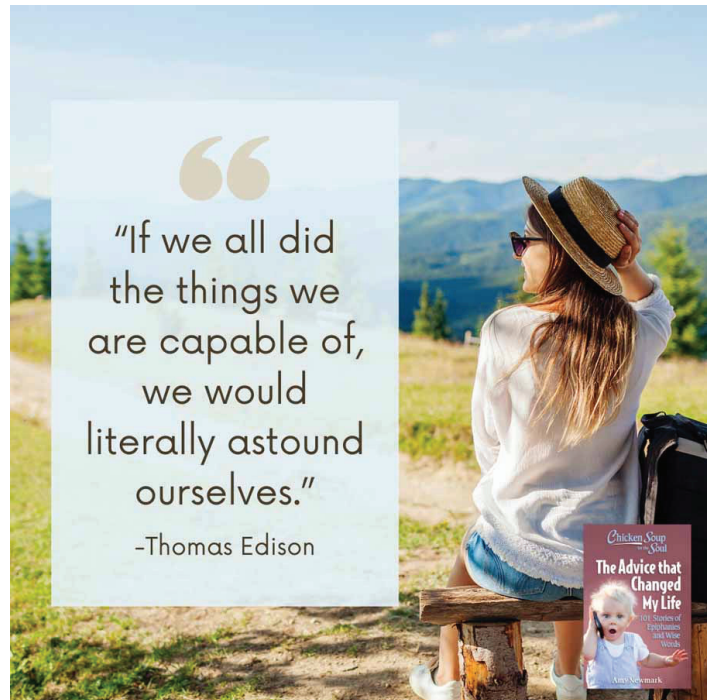


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The Groton Community Transit will be taking the bus to the following high school baseball games:

**Redfield on April 30
Elkton on May 7.**

**For ride information,
call 605-397-8661.**

Groton Community Calendar

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.

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

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

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.

Tuesday, April 25

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff noodles, squash, cookie, apple sauce.

School Breakfast: Egg omelets.

School Lunch: Meat balls, mashed potatoes.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Ag Fair in Aberdeen.

Cancelled: Groton Area Track Meet, 11 a.m.

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

an after-prom party in Jasper, Texas. None of the injuries are thought to be life-threatening, according to police.

- Indian police arrested separatist leader Amritpal Singh who had been on the run since March after hundreds of his supporters stormed a police station in Ajnala.
- Long-time Dancing With the Stars and Strictly Come Dancing judge Len Goodman has died. Goodman had been diagnosed with bone cancer. He was 78.
- Retail chain Bed Bath & Beyond has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy with plans to close all its stores and liquidate its assets.
- NBCUniversal Chief Executive Jeff Shell has left the company over an "inappropriate relationship" he had with a coworker.
- Twitter has been accused of adding blue checkmarks to the accounts of multiple dead celebrities, including Kobe Bryant, Chadwick Boseman and Anthony Bourdain.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukrainian forces have successfully established positions along the eastern bank of the Dnieper River in a sign that Russian forces are losing their defensive positions in the south, the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) has said.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

- President Joe Biden will meet with the three Tennessee Democratic legislators who faced expulsion over gun control protests — Justin Jones, Justin J. Pearson and Gloria Johnson at the White House. Republicans voted to remove Jones and Pearson, who are both Black, from the Legislature this month, while Johnson, who is white, survived her vote. Jones and Pearson were reinstated to the Legislature by local leaders.
- Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has begun a world tour with a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo, espousing a shared wish for a "strong Japan."
- Kim Potter, a white former police officer who fatally shot Daunte Wright, a Black driver, during a traffic stop in 2021 is expected to be released today from prison in Minnesota.

Princess Prom: Enchanted Forest



Trent Kurtz escorting Calli Wilkinson and Haley Erickson. (Photo #6088 by Paul Kosel)



Robert Kroger escorting Lennox Locke and Lexie Locke. (Photo #6089 by Paul Kosel)

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Adam Franken escorting Danielle and Hannah Franken. (Photo #6090 by Paul Kosel)



Tyler Oliver escorting Sloane Oliver. (Photo #6091 by Paul Kosel)

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Brian Bahr escorting Raven Bahr. (Photo #6092 by Paul Kosel)



Vern Johnson escorting Evie Johnson. (Photo #6093 by Paul Kosel)

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Jordan Bethke escorting Karter Merkel. (Photo #6094 by Paul Kosel)



Jeff Fliehs escorting Sophia Fliehs. (Photo #6095 by Paul Kosel)

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Mark Thompson escorting Taylor Thompson.
(Photo #6096 by Paul Kosel)



Eric Moody escorting Maycee and Mya Moody.
(Photo #6097 by Paul Kosel)

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Heath Giedt escorting Preslee, Emersyn and Hazel Giedt. (Photo #6098 by Paul Kosel)



Andrew Kappes escorting Sawyer Kappes. (Photo #6099 by Paul Kosel)

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Keith Wipf escorting River Wipf. (Photo #6100 by Paul Kosel)



Randy Lord escorting Jozie Lord. (Photo #6101 by Paul Kosel)

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John Withey escorting Chloe Withey. (Photo #6102 by Paul Kosel)



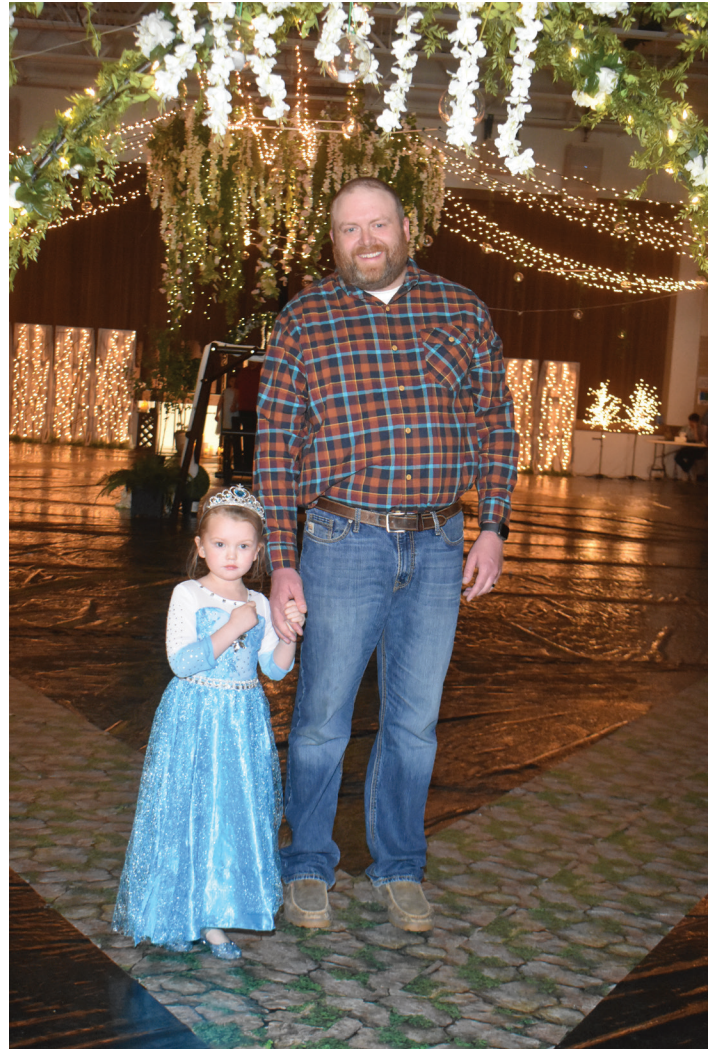
Cole Kampa escorting Andi Kampa. (Photo #6103 by Paul Kosel)

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John Florey escorting Atleigh Florey. (Photo #6104 by Paul Kosel)



Jeremy Nelson escorting Gabby Nelson. (Photo #6106 by Paul Kosel)

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Adam Borg escorting Gracie and Kylie Borg.
(Photo #6107 by Paul Kosel)



Joshua Cowan escorting Willow and Aspen Cowan.
(Photo #6108 by Paul Kosel)

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BJ Clocksene escorting Ella Clocksene. (Photo #6109 by Paul Kosel)



Scott Kampa escorting Dacey Kampa. (Photo #6110 by Paul Kosel)

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Scotty Hinman escorting Nori and Kodi Hinman. (Photo #6111 by Paul Kosel)



Jade Weig escorting Jernie Weig. (Photo #6112 by Paul Kosel)

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Jason Hill escorting Hazel Hill. (Photo #6113 by Paul Kosel)



Logan Huber escorting Avery and Liv Huber. (Photo #6114 by Paul Kosel)

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Shawn Hulbert escorting Rayna Loeschke.
(Photo #6115 by Paul Kosel)



Tony Mulder escorting Railey Mulder. (Photo #6116 by Paul Kosel)

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Travis Swisher escorting Molly Swisher. (Photo #6117 by Paul Kosel)



Dustin Stahl escorting Madilyn Stahl. (Photo #6118 by Paul Kosel)

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Ryan Tarpein escorting Kate Tarpein. (Photo #6119 by Paul Kosel)



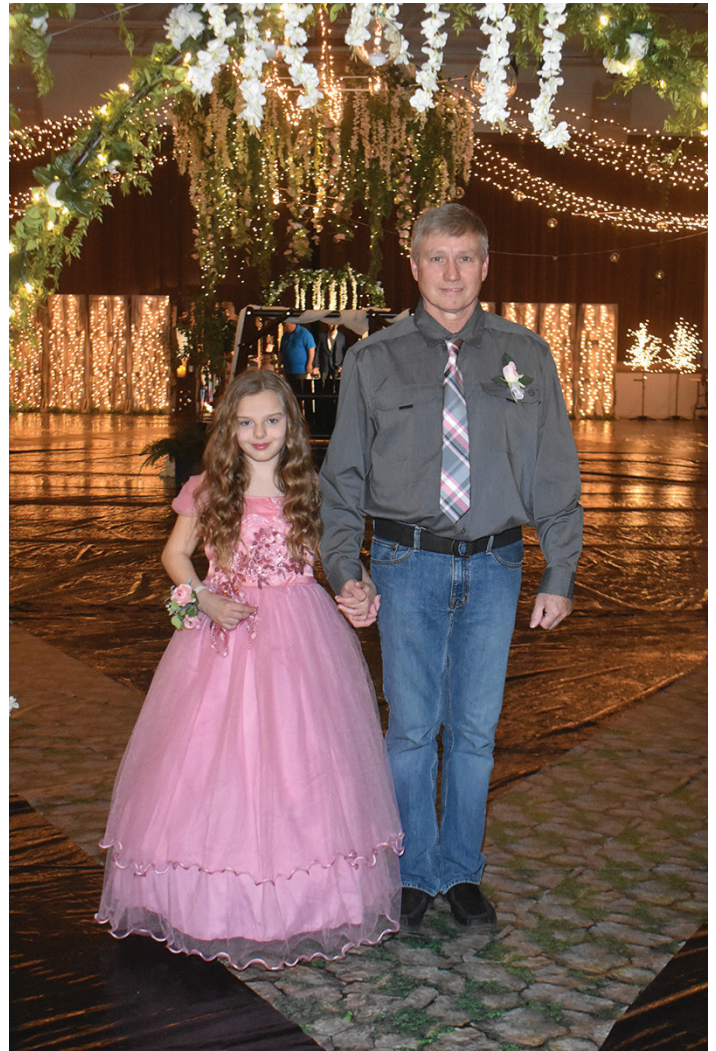
Trey Flihs escorting Taylor, Mya and Emme Flihs. (Photo #6120 by Paul Kosel)

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Brad Henderson escorting Eva and Ruby Henderson. (Photo #6121 by Paul Kosel)



John Sippel escorting Kaylee Sippel. (Photo #6122 by Paul Kosel)

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Bruce Babcock escorting Emery Blackwood.
(Photo #6123 by Paul Kosel)



Drake Patterson escorting Rowan Patterson.
(Photo #6124 by Paul Kosel)

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Grant Gilchrist escorting Shaelee and Sophie Gilchrist. (Photo #6125 by Paul Kosel)



Chris Raba escorting Kayleigh Raba. (Photo #6126 by Paul Kosel)

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Jeremy Dosch escorting Ruby Dosch. (Photo #6127 by Paul Kosel)



Michael Dunbar escorting Maci, Brielle and Collyns Dubar. (Photo #6128 by Paul Kosel)

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Cory Schuring escorting Harper Schuring.
(Photo #6129 by Paul Kosel)



Rosalie Ball escorting Jade and Kennedy Ball.
(Photo #6130 by Paul Kosel)

Reprints of the prom photos are available. To order, email or text the photo number to paperpaul@grotonsd.net or text Paul at 605-397-7460.
4x6 prints are \$5, 5x7 are \$7.

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Derick Furman escorting Harley Furman and Macee Benthin. (Photo #6131 by Paul Kosel)



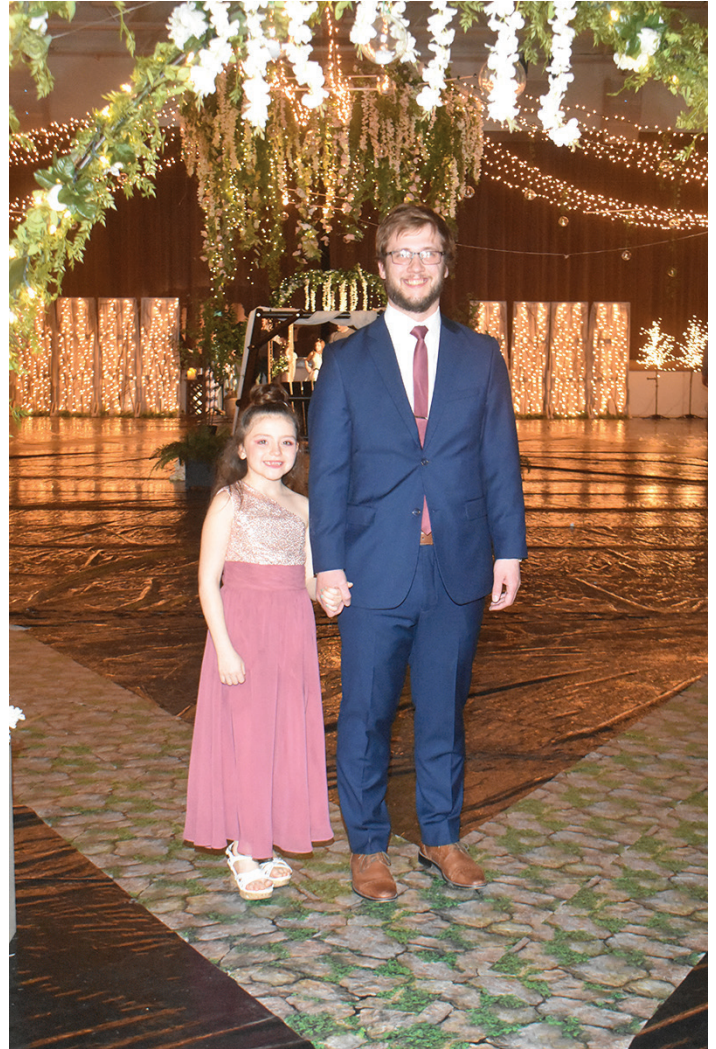
Chris Frost escorting Kinsey Frost. (Photo #6132 by Paul Kosel)

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Thomas Schuster escorting Victoria Schuster. (Photo #6133 by Paul Kosel)



Greyson Cutler escorting Aryanna Cutler. (Photo #6134 by Paul Kosel)

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Justin Morehouse escorting Kaelee and Jaeden Morehouse. (Photo #6135 by Paul Kosel)



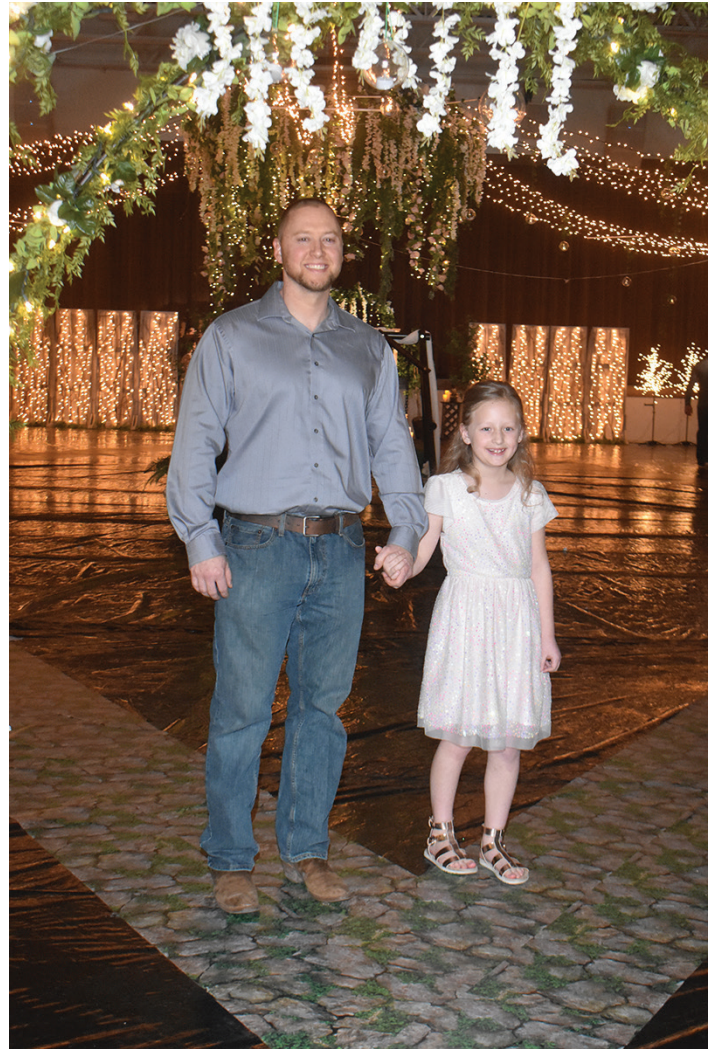
Cody Roettele escorting Avery Roettele. (Photo #6136 by Paul Kosel)

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Wes Graff escorting Amara and Alandra Graff. (Photo #6138 by Paul Kosel)



Ross Taylor escorting Baylin Taylor. (Photo #6139 by Paul Kosel)

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Sam Furman escorting KayLynn and Kinzleigh Furman. (Photo #6140 by Paul Kosel)



John Kroll escorting Kendyll Kroll. (Photo #6141 by Paul Kosel)

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Perryn Dobbins escorting Rachel Dobbins.

(Photo #6142 by Paul Kosel)



Jayme Boerger escorting Harper Boerger.

(Photo #6143 by Paul Kosel)

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Thomas Bentz escorting Jaclyn Rudebusch.

(Photo #6144 by Paul Kosel)



Brock Sandness escorting Kinley Sandness.

(Photo #6145 by Paul Kosel)

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Gene Johnson escorting Libby Johnson. (Photo #6146 by Paul Kosel)



Trent Traphagen escorting Collins and Aubrie Traphagen. (Photo #6147 by Paul Kosel)

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Matt Johnson escorting Faith and Paisley Johnson. (Photo #6148 by Paul Kosel)



Jacob Lasse escorting Ellie Lasse. (Photo #6149 by Paul Kosel)

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Blake Anderson escorting Maya Anderson.

(Photo #6150 by Paul Kosel)



Taylor Anderson escorting River Anderson.

(Photo #6151 by Paul Kosel)

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Mike Feist escorting Ambrielle and Layla Feist. (Photo #6152 by Paul Kosel)



Brian Sanderson escorting Miakoda Neigel. (Photo #6153 by Paul Kosel)

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Tyler Neigel escorting Destry Neigel. (Photo #6154 by Paul Kosel)



Kristopher Harry escorting Annie and Harper Harry. (Photo #6155 by Paul Kosel)

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David Heilman escorting Hadley Heilman.
(Photo #6156 by Paul Kosel)



Jeff Harry escorting Regan and Madison Harry. (Photo #6157 by Paul Kosel)

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Cody Neu escorting Hazel and Laura Neu.
(Photo #6158 by Paul Kosel)



Dan Washenburger escorting Sunny and Nova Washenburger. (Photo #6159 by Paul Kosel)



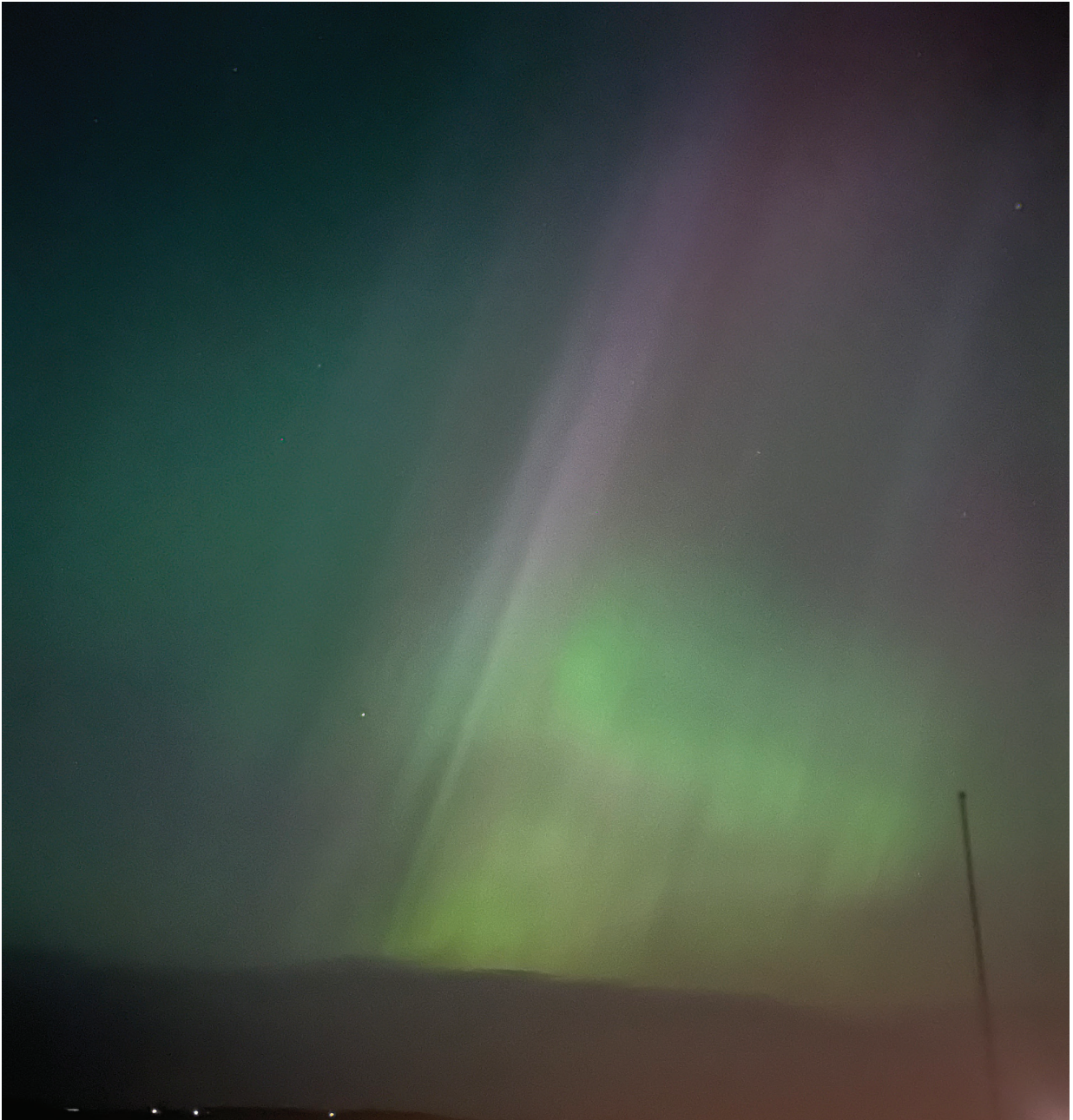
Aurora Borealis

It was a most spectacular display of the Aurora Borealis, or the Northern Lights Sunday night. This photo taken by Jeslyn Kosel shows the various colors of the lights on display as they danced through the sky.

The sun had a solar flare erupt on Friday that was directed toward Earth, according to the NOAA's Space Weather Prediction Center. As a result, 30 states had the chance to see the aurora borealis, stretching from Washington to Maine, and as far south as Kansas, the Space Weather Watch says.

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Another picture of the Northern Lights taken by Jeslyn Kosel.

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Another picture of the Northern Lights taken by Jeslyn Kosel.

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This photo taken by Paul Kosel.

GDILIVE.COM

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

April 24, 2023 – 7:00 PM – GHS Library Conference Room

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3 CONSENT AGENDA:

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.

2. Program Overview Presentations

a. Food Service...B. Clocksene

b. Transportation/Custodial...D. Bahr/M. Nehls

c. Wellness & Health Services...B. Gustafson

3. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Consider request from Groton Wrestling program for additional coaching staff [Coach Zoellner]

2. Approve resignation from Rose Long-Buechler, 6th grade teacher, effective at the end of the 2022-23 school

year.

3. Approve hiring Brooke Malsom as 6th grade teacher and JH track coach for the 2023-24 school year.

4. Adopt resolution authorizing membership in the South Dakota High School Activities Association for the 2023-24

school year.

5. Issue 2023-24 teacher contracts with return date of Monday, May 1, 2023.

6. Executive Session pursuant SDCL 1-25-2(1) personnel and SDCL 1-25-2(4) negotiations.

ADJOURN

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EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What are some examples of citizen science in efforts to monitor and combat global warming? \ -- Candace C., Tallahassee, FL

The world is getting warmer each year, and people worldwide want to do their bit to help. Many of us already are. We turn thermostats, bike to get around, recycle, and urge elected officials to make our cities greener. But there is one more thing any of us can do to fight global warming: it's called citizen science.

Citizen science is the involvement of the general public—you, your communities, anyone who is not a professional scientist—in collecting data to support scientific research. Citizen science has actually existed for decades. For example, the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count began in 1900 to promote conservation. With the gigantic leap in 21st century technology, citizen science is now truly invaluable in dealing with the climate crisis. Ordinary people can record and share vast amounts of data on smartphones, and identify thousands of animal and plant species through apps. They can even connect from remote places to share information about the effects of global warming on their local ecosystems.

In citizen science there's something for everyone. Those concerned about climate can record the timing of flowering for Project Budburst. Those interested in oceans can monitor beach debris for the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team (COASST), which studies how global warming has hurt coastal ecosystems and their wildlife inhabitants. By listening to frog calls for the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP), recording glacial melts in rural Alaska for the Indigenous Sentinels Network, or photographing mountain smog for the Appalachian Mountain Club, citizen scientists provide valuable data from all over the world that scientists couldn't otherwise obtain.

With climate change a worldwide concern, citizen science, too, is a global phenomenon, especially useful in poor or remote areas where accurate meteorological data are hard to come by. In such places, citizen scientists are the best way to collect data useful for local needs. In Bangladesh, farmers record temperature and humidity for the Transforming Climate Knowledge with and for Society (TRACKS) project to monitor how global warming harms the crops upon which they depend. In South Africa, villagers collect data on needed groundwater supplies via the Diamonds on the Soles of their Feet project.

Another promising aspect of citizen science is that it is being integrated into school curricula, introducing students worldwide to standardized measurements of climate change. Through Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE), citizen scientist students have collected data to study how climate change has affected the earth's energy balance and the spread of mosquito-borne diseases.

Regardless of location, age or nationality, citizen scientists are heroes in the worldwide effort to combat global warming. There is a wealth of information online that can help anyone find citizen science projects by location and project type so that they can get involved. SciStarter.org or CitizenScience.gov are good places to start the search.



Smartphone apps help rural Alaskans monitor the effects of global warming on their far north ecosystems and beyond. Credit: Bernard Spragg.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

Without open primaries, taxpayers are shut out of elections they pay for

DANA HESS

If there is a growth industry in South Dakota politics, it's the primary election. Specifically, the Republican primary election.

Incumbent Republicans are facing frequent, often grueling, intra-party challenges. In the 2022 election, Gov. Kristi Noem, Sen. John Thune and Rep. Dusty Johnson all faced challengers from within their own party.

In the Legislature, there were Republican primary challenges in 15 of the 35 Senate districts. In the House, there are 37 districts with two of them being single-member districts. In those 37 districts there were 24 Republican primaries. Not to be left out entirely, Democrats had primary challenges in two House districts.

Incumbent Republicans, both at the state and national level, would routinely be considered conservative. That's not good enough for an ultra-conservative wing of the party that inspired many of these primary challenges.

The problem with the primary system is that it is a closed political activity paid for with taxpayer dollars. The only people who can vote in the Republican primary are registered Republicans. Yet all taxpayers, regardless of party affiliation, get to pay for the primary elections.

(Democrats, bless their hearts, have opened up their primary to registered Democrats as well as voters who have registered as independent. It almost sounds like something out of "Blazing Saddles:" "We'll take the Democrats and the independents, but we don't want the Libertarians!")

All of this may change if an open primaries ballot initiative is successful in 2024. An outfit called South Dakota Open Primaries is working to have voters decide on a constitutional amendment that would change the way we vote.

The open primary system that's likely headed for the ballot would place all candidates for an office, regardless of party affiliation, on the primary ballot. At the end of the June primary, the two candidates who got the most votes, regardless of party affiliation, would meet in the November general election. In races for the state House, where two candidates are elected in most districts, the top four candidates from the primary would be on the general election ballot.

The effort to get open primaries on the 2024 ballot does not expand the field of candidates selected by primaries. Currently those who can be challenged in primaries are candidates for governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, the Legislature and county offices. State candidates for attorney general, secretary of state, treasurer, auditor, school and public land commissioner and public utilities commissioner will still be chosen by party convention.

There was an unsuccessful effort to change that in the recently completed legislative session. Senate Bill 40 would have moved the candidates currently selected at party conventions to the primary ballot. The bill sponsors were quick to point out that their legislation to get all candidates into the primary, and away from the convention, was not a result of the last Republican Party convention. At that convention, the aforementioned ultra-conservative wing of the party was in full attendance.

Because of their unified and vocal presence, Gov. Noem had to make a personal plea for the conven-

tion to allow her to keep Larry Rhoden on the ticket as lieutenant governor over an effort to replace him with her primary election opponent, Rep. Steven Haugaard. Marty Jackley, the party's eventual candidate for attorney general, almost lost to a holdover who had worked for Jason Ravnsborg. In one of the more stunning and ironic pieces of political theater, Republicans cast aside the incumbent candidate for secretary of state, instead choosing to put the state's elections under the care of an election denier.

If the open primaries initiative makes it onto the ballot, it will be interesting to see how the various state political parties react. Obviously, there was already some portion of the Republican Party trying to shy away from using the political convention to pick candidates. With so many primaries in the last election, it's hard to tell how Republicans would react to having everyone vote in the primary rather than just the party faithful.

Democrats and Libertarians, when they field candidates for office, have a pretty easy path to the general election ballot. That would change with an open primary that includes all the candidates for a particular office. It's a change likely to make primaries more interesting for the public as well as more expensive for candidates and their political parties.

Soon the South Dakota Open Primaries group will be circulating petitions to get their constitutional amendment on the 2024 general election ballot. Their success in this effort would mean that after years of being shut out of the primary process, the citizens who pay for primaries would also get to cast their ballots, regardless of their party affiliation or their lack of party affiliation.

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

With decarbonization, advocates see a bright future for nuclear after decades of dormancy

BY: ROBERT ZULLO - APRIL 24, 2023 12:30 AM

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — At the sprawling array of laboratories and test facilities in the southeastern Idaho desert where the U.S. nuclear power industry was born more than 70 years ago, past, present and future are converging.

Not far from where the first reactor to ever produce usable electricity made history in 1951, Idaho National Laboratory nuclear engineer Yasir Arafat and his team have been working to design, build and fire up what they hope will be the world's first modern "microreactor."

The MARVEL (Microreactor Applications Research Validation and Evaluation) project, expected to be built by the end of 2024, is part of a new wave of advanced nuclear technology that energy start-ups, electric utilities and state and federal policymakers are eyeing to maintain reliability in a decarbonizing grid, power hydrogen production, replace jobs and tax revenue in struggling towns where coal power plants are closing and bring zero-emissions electricity to remote areas of the globe.

"Think about one energy source that can give you 24/7 reliable carbon-free electricity on demand regardless of geographical location — that's nuclear," said Arafat, who is pushing to achieve "criticality" (when the fission reaction is self-sustaining) in the small 100-kilowatt reactor. "My hope is that companies would actually take this, leverage this technology and actually come up with commercial versions that can be cost competitive with solar and wind and oil and gas and be able to deploy them everywhere."

At the lab and among boosters across the country, expectations are high for new nuclear reactors. But critics question whether nuclear power, historically slow and expensive to build, will be left behind by the rapid deployment of cheaper renewables and development in battery storage and other technologies.

"We should have a very clear-eyed view of what the costs of these prototypes are, what their attributes are, what their flaws are and whether or not it has a viable place in a competitive and low carbon power market," said Geoffrey Fettus, senior attorney in the nuclear, climate and clean energy program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, which is skeptical of the hype around the nuclear industry. "And it's going to take a lot of years to figure that out."

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'The decarbonization imperative'

Representatives from 23 states have joined a new collaborative organized by the National Association of Regulatory Utility Officials and the National Association of State Energy Officials intended to help state leaders and regulators answer questions surrounding new nuclear power generation. Some states may have never had a nuclear power plant within their borders and, even in the states that do, some utility commissions may not have any staff left who dealt with a reactor project, since almost all of them were built decades ago, staffers from the national organizations said in an interview.

"There's a certain proactiveness to this. The state energy offices and public utility commissions are interested in understanding the technology while it's not yet deployed," said Kirsten Verclas, senior managing director at NASEO, adding that states want to "get ahead" of some of the information before a utility comes to regulators for approval of a new nuclear project.

Utility commissions, in particular, have "a lot of questions" about cost, spent fuel and waste management and translating that into "just and reasonable" electric rates, said Kiera Zitelman, a technical manager at NARUC.

"They're really concerned with how to do that," she said. But some state officials also see opportunity, from staving off reliability worries as wind and solar become larger parts of the electric generation mix to the jobs and revenue new nuclear power plants can bring.

"There's a lot of interest in how advanced nuclear can provide economic development and workforce development," said Kelsey Jones, a senior program manager at NASEO.

In January, the Nuclear Energy Institute, a nuclear industry policy group, said there were 16 advanced nuclear projects in the planning or consideration stages in 10 states.

And many states have adopted or are considering legislation or regulations creating zero-emission credits for carbon-free electric generation, incorporating nuclear power into clean energy requirements and state energy plans, as well as pushing for carbon pricing, tax exemptions and other policies that could benefit the nuclear industry. Last year's federal Inflation Reduction Act contains production tax credits to keep existing reactors — which provide about half of the nation's carbon-free power — running, major tax incentives for new advanced reactors and \$700 million to develop a domestic supply chain for the high-assay low-enriched uranium fuel the advanced reactors will need.

A federal Department of Energy report from March says that modeling suggests that, "regardless of level of renewables deployment" the U.S. will need between 550 and 770 gigawatts of additional "clean, firm capacity" to reach the Biden administration's net-zero carbon goals. Right now there's about 100 gigawatts of nuclear power generation in the nation.

"Nuclear power is one of the few proven options that could deliver this at scale, while creating high-paying jobs with concentrated economic benefits for communities most impacted by the energy transition," the report says.

That all amounts to a lot of momentum for an American industry that in many respects had largely gone dormant for decades. New nuclear power plants have been vanishingly rare over the past 30 years, and the few projects that have been attempted have been plagued by massive cost overruns, scandal and failure.

"You're seeing interest in new nuclear for a number of reasons. But foremost among them is the decarbonization imperative," said John Kotek, senior vice president of policy development and public affairs at the Nuclear Energy Institute. More than 80% of U.S. electric customers are served by a utility that's pledged to go largely carbon free, Kotek said. Wind, solar and battery storage at present can only get you so far, which makes nuclear an attractive option to offset the intermittency of renewable power, which is reliant on the wind and the sun, he added.

'The question is going to be whether they can compete'

In particular, small modular reactors — which are expected to be able to be built in factories and shipped to sites for shorter construction times and theoretically reduced costs and have the ability to be scaled up to meet different power demands (from tens of megawatts to hundreds) — are seen as an attractive option to replace coal plants and potentially pair with renewables.

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Another recent Department of Energy report said that hundreds of coal plant sites could convert to nuclear, availing themselves of the grid connections and perhaps even some of the plant equipment to shave costs. The federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission certified the first small modular reactor design, for Portland, Oregon-based company NuScale Power, earlier this year.

NuScale sees a wide range of applications for its VOYGR power plant design, which can contain up to 12 power modules for a maximum capacity of more than 900 megawatts, including taking the place of the scores of U.S. coal power plants that may retire by 2035, complementing intermittent renewable power generation and providing power to critical infrastructure like hospitals, military bases, data storage centers and industry. NuScale says the plant will use just a fraction of the land (.05 square miles, as opposed to 94 square miles for wind and 17 for solar) that a comparable output wind or solar development requires.

"The NuScale plant is the only near-term deployable and commercially viable advanced nuclear generation solution for states across the country that seek a reliable, safe, and carbon-free solution," said Diane Hughes, NuScale's vice president of marketing and communications.

But there's also some doubt about whether an industry that's struggled so much can rise to the challenge of meeting intense design, licensing and cost challenges.

"Right now, SMRs don't exist," Fettus said. "There is not one that is producing power for the domestic grid. ... We don't see deployment happening until the 2030s at the earliest."

Fettus noted that it took NuScale more than six years to get NRC approval. It is the first small modular reactor design approved by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"This is not about the NRC being slow. That's about changes in the design and the serious process of getting a design approved when you're fissioning atoms," he said, noting that new nuclear reactors will be competing with emerging low or zero-carbon technology like long duration battery storage, natural gas plants with carbon capture and others. "There's no evidence that they'll get cheaper at scale. ... We'll build a few on subsidies. The question is going to be whether they can compete in the energy markets."

NuScale says its first American plant will be the Carbon Free Power Project, a 462-megawatt nuclear project that will be owned by Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems — which provides whole electricity to community-owned power systems throughout the Intermountain West— and built on Idaho National Laboratory land. More than \$1 billion in U.S. Department of Energy funding has gone to development and the plant is expected to be fully operational by 2030. However, construction cost estimates for the project have also climbed, from roughly \$5 billion in 2021 to \$9.3 billion. Per UAMPS, the project will get \$4.2 billion in Department of Energy cost-sharing funds and benefits from the Inflation Reduction Act.

'There's a lot going on in nuclear right now'

Nevertheless, there's little doubt at the Idaho National Laboratory that nuclear power is on the cusp of a major resurgence.

During a media tour this month at the 890-square mile national laboratory site, home to 5,700 researchers and support staff, the sense of history coming full circle was a common theme.

"There's a lot going on in nuclear right now in this decade. Not in the 2040s," said John Wagner, the lab's executive director. "The last time we took a new novel reactor operational on this site was 1973. So when the MARVEL reactor right here comes online next calendar year, it will have been 50 years since we operated a new reactor on this site."

The lab is working not just on testing new reactors but helping to smooth the path for private developers by exploring new construction methods and materials, testing fuels and components to evaluate their performance and exploring how reactors can function as part of microgrids. The lab's National Reactor Innovation Center has also developed a siting tool that can help developers avoid wetlands and cultural resources, incorporate environmental justice concerns as well as gauge "nuclear sentiment" in a given community, said Stephanie Weir, the siting and regulatory strategy manager at the lab's National Reactor Innovation Center.

"It's been awhile but we have done this before," Weir told reporters. "This nation built 52 reactors over a period of about 25 years, which shows us that we as a nation can innovate and demonstrate rapidly

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when we focus on it and when we have an urgent need to do so. We're learning from the things that have happened over the last 50 years and so we're going to do things a little bit differently. ... We're going to do it better by engaging closely with the public, private sector and tapping the innovators into the world class capabilities of our national lab system."

The Idaho National Laboratory provided travel assistance to States Newsroom for its media days event.

Why did the U.S. stop building nuclear reactors?

New nuclear units at Georgia Power's Plant Vogtle, about 30 miles southeast of Augusta, are at last nearing completion after years of delays and billions of dollars in cost overruns. Per Georgia Power they will be the first new nuclear units built in the U.S. in the past three decades. (The Tennessee Valley Authority brought a new reactor online in 2016, which, at the time, was the first new nuclear generation in 20 years, but that facility, Watts Bar Unit 2, was originally launched in 1972 before work was suspended in 1985).

The vast majority of the United States' 92 existing nuclear power reactors were built in the 1970s and 1980s, after which new construction fell off sharply. Why did that happen?

John Wagner, a nuclear engineer who is now the director of the Idaho National Laboratory, says the Three Mile Island partial meltdown in 1979 was a factor, but not in the way most people might think. No one was hurt in the incident and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, after numerous studies and sampling by other agencies and independent organizations, concluded that the "small radioactive releases had no detectable health effects on plant workers or the public." But after the accident, Wagner said, the industry coalesced on a series of new safety protocols not just for new reactors but those already under construction.

"Was it a killer by itself? No. But it added cost," he said.

Coupled with inflated power demand projections that didn't materialize and interest rates climbing above 10% in the early 1980s, it was enough to put the brakes on new nuclear power plant construction, Wagner said.

"It pretty much just killed everything," Wagner said. With it went supply chains and construction expertise that made it tough for the few projects that did go forward in later years to come in on time and on budget.

"We lost all our muscle memory, all our experience building these systems," he said.

Wagner acknowledged that nuclear power has a safety problem in the public perception, even though data suggests it's one of the safest forms of power generation in terms of deaths from accidents and pollution. With the ongoing failure of the federal government to find a permanent repository for the nation's nuclear waste, spent fuel will continue to be managed safely onsite at nuclear power plants, like it has for decades, he added.

"People are concerned about it. We absolutely can manage it safely," he said. "We've been managing it safely and securely."

Robert Zullo is a national energy reporter based in southern Illinois focusing on renewable power and the electric grid. Robert joined States Newsroom in 2018 as the founding editor of the Virginia Mercury. Before that, he spent 13 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. He has a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Va. He grew up in Miami, Fla., and central New Jersey.

A pandemic experiment in universal free school meals gains traction in the states

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - APRIL 23, 2023 6:15 AM

WASHINGTON — Every public school kid in the United States was eligible for free school meals during the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of family income, thanks to the federal government.

While that's now ended, a growing number of states across the country are enacting universal school meal laws to bolster child food security and academic equity. With little prospect of action soon in Congress, the moves by states show an appetite for free school meals for all developing beyond Washington.

Nine states have passed a temporary or permanent universal school meal policy in the past year. Another 23 have seen legislation introduced during the past three years, according to recent data from the Food Research and Action Center.

"As a former teacher, I know that providing free breakfast and lunch for our students is one of the best investments we can make to lower costs, support Minnesota's working families, and care for our young learners and the future of our state," Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, said when signing his state's universal school meals bill on March 17.

"When we feed our children, we're feeding our future," said New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, also a Democrat, when she signed her state's policy into law on March 28.

How it works

The National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program authorize the Department of Agriculture to subsidize school meals for low-income students. Schools are reimbursed for meals that meet federal nutrition standards, and incorporate U.S.-grown foods.

The programs accounted for \$18 billion in annual expenditures in 2019, serving roughly 30 million students at lunch and 16 million at breakfast.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government enacted a policy that ensured access to school meals for all public school students, which teachers and families say supported kids' wellbeing during the health crisis.

Yet the program was sunsetted in 2022, given objections to its roughly \$29 billion estimated annual price tag and a desire among conservative members of Congress to "go back to normal."

"There are pieces to this program that are badly damaged," said Jonathan Butcher, the Will Skillman Senior Research Fellow in Education Policy at the conservative Heritage Foundation. "You're not solving anything by making it a universal program."

Under current federal law, only students with families who have incomes 185% or more below the poverty line are eligible for entirely free school meals. That would be a family of four that makes roughly \$36,000 or less.

Families with income between 130% and 185% below the poverty line pay a reduced price for meals. Students whose families have income above 130% of the poverty line must pay full price.

Party divisions

Policy experts say that despite growing interest in some states, federal universal school meals legislation would be a non-starter in the current Congress, where Republicans in the House majority aim to reduce federal spending.

States led by Republicans might be less eager to move ahead as well, with bills in those states stalled in committee or failing to pass by slim margins. Costs for the program range from \$30 million to \$40 million annually in states like Maine, to \$400 million over two years in Minnesota.

Of the nine states that have passed universal school meals, all have Democratic majorities of both chambers of state legislatures and control the governor's office.

The last legislation introduced at the federal level was the Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021, sponsored by Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Minnesota Democrat, and independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. The bill failed to make it out of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

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"I certainly don't have a whole lot of hope with Republican control of the House that they'll do much, in those terms," said Marcus Weaver-Hightower, professor of educational foundations at Virginia Tech.

Still, there is optimism about universal school meals over the long term at the federal level, after the trial run during the pandemic.

"The resistance isn't as loud as it might seem," said Rep. Rashida Tlaib, a Michigan Democrat and advocate for universal school meals. "I know it's going to be able to move with urgency because the community outside of the Capitol bubble is moving with urgency, talking about this more and more."

An experiment in the lockdown

As communities locked down in March 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economy weathered mass layoffs, the Department of Agriculture authorized the provision of free school meal waivers for all students, and raised the per-meal reimbursement rate.

The program grew to support roughly 50 million students during the health crisis. Food-insecure households with children decreased by 2.3 percentage points between 2020 and 2021, according to the USDA.

"It was kind of a natural experiment," Weaver-Hightower said. "Everybody was suddenly getting them for free."

Jeanne Reilly, the director of school nutrition at Windham Raymond Schools in Maine, recalled that when schools were closed, school nutrition teams got creative. Lunch staff were meeting parents in parking lots to distribute meals.

Yet as vaccines proliferated at the end of 2021, and students returned to school, the federal universal meals program hit turbulence.

Conservative members of Congress, including Kentucky Republican Sens. Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul, refused to extend the universal school meal policy as part of the omnibus spending bill passed in March 2022.

The bipartisan Keep Kids Fed Act of 2022 passed by Congress in June 2022 allowed some states to extend their free meal programs, and provided additional money for reimbursements. Yet school nutritionists say the effects of sunsetting the waivers are lingering.

Cohen said that experts now are starting to hear about the return of school meal debt, which can force schools to forgo educational expenses in paying the USDA for delinquent meal costs. A recent School Nutrition Association survey found that 847 school districts have racked up more than \$19 million in debt from unpaid lunches.

School participation in the meal programs also dropped to 88% in fall 2022, compared to 94% in March 2022, according to a study from the Department of Education.

States take action

Five states have passed laws that will provide free universal school meals in the 2023-2024 school year and beyond, including Minnesota, New Mexico, Maine, California and Colorado.

Vermont, Connecticut, and Massachusetts are providing universal school meals for the 2022-2023 school year, through a combination of federal and state funds. Nevada is providing universal school meals through the 2023-2024 school year.

Twenty-three other states have seen universal school meals legislation introduced in the past three years, including Arizona, Louisiana, Montana, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Punam Ohri-Vachaspati, a professor of nutrition and leader of the Arizona State Food Policy and Environmental Research Group, said offering free school meals reduces the social stigma for low-income students, increasing participation and nutritional benefits for those who need it most.

Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, a cardiologist and the Jean Mayer Professor in the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University, cited a Journal of the American Medical Association study which found school meals are among the most nutritious meals students eat anywhere.

Other studies have shown that universal school meals produce positive overall effects on school attendance, and academic performance across grades.

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Tlaib says she benefited firsthand from participating in the National School Lunch Program when she was a kid, while growing up with 13 siblings, an immigrant father who worked the night shift at Ford Motor Company and a mother who was still learning English.

"As our family grew larger, I'll tell you that I don't think my family would have ever been able to provide us food for lunch," Tlaib said. "When you have a parent tell me that's the only place their child eats twice a day, this is so incredibly important."

Others say that the policy would be a waste of taxpayer dollars, and push the school lunch program further from its original purpose.

"Free and reduced price school meals are for those who need the assistance," said Republican Arkansas Sen. John Boozman, who declined to extend universal school meal waivers in a stopgap spending bill in September, in a statement to States Newsroom.

"Universal school meals isn't about increasing access for hungry children — it's about taxpayers subsidizing meals for those who do not need it."

Butcher, of the Heritage Foundation, said that the National School Breakfast and National School Lunch programs are on the high-priority list for the government watchdog Government Accountability Office, accounting for over \$1 billion in untracked spending as food waste grows in school lunchrooms.

Baylen Linnekin, a food policy analyst for the libertarian think tank Reason Foundation, said that nutritional quality of the meals has improved "slightly" since the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act.

But he said two-thirds of the costs of the program go to overhead expenses, and with the variety of diets and allergies emerging, he said there is "no way" one school meal program can account for the needs of all children.

Origins of free school meals

In the build-up to World War I and World War II, a significant number of men who signed up for military service were disqualified due to nutritional deficiencies. This, combined with economic pressures of the Great Depression, fueled the development of federally-subsidized meal programs.

President Harry Truman signed the National School Lunch Act in 1946, formally enshrining the National School Lunch Program.

"The preamble is that it has a military function: the nation's defense of the welfare of children, and the protection of our agricultural system," Weaver-Hightower said.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Republicans in Washington began denouncing inefficiencies in the meals program, and pushing policies that dropped participation by millions of children.

It wouldn't be until 2010 that the idea of nutritious school meals for all children gained steam, when Congress ultimately passed the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010.

The legislation enacted more rigorous nutrition standards to combat the rise of childhood obesity, while boosting federal meal reimbursement rates. It also created the Community Eligibility Provision, or CEP, which allowed schools with more than 40% of students on means-tested federal nutrition programs to offer free meals to all students.

While the CEP has improved outcomes for students in low-income areas, nutrition experts say the provision has not eliminated child food insecurity.

"What a lot of people don't realize is that there are a lot of families that are not eligible for free school meals that are struggling," said Juliana Cohen, director of the Center for Health Inclusion, Research and Practice at Merrimack College in Massachusetts.

Some things states and localities can do

While Congress may not act on universal school meals, policy minds said there are numerous alternatives for state and local governments to improve student food access.

Cohen said Arizona just got rid of its reduced-price tier for school meals in 2022, folding it into the free lunch tier.

Mozaffarian said he believes the best return on investment at the federal level is by expanding the Community Eligibility Provision, so public schools could provide free meals to all students if they have 25% of their students or more on means-tested nutrition assistance.

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He added that Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack proposed this change earlier this year.

Mozaffarian also suggested increasing the reimbursement rate for low-income schools, as well as improving federal school lunch nutrition standards. The doctor also recommended investing in scratch kitchens, where chefs make food from fresh ingredients, at low-income schools.

Butcher suggested using the money for universal school meals to create education savings accounts, which allow parents to “design” their child’s educational experience.

Reilly noted that she hopes to see a federal universal school meal legislation, because “everyone needs it.”

“I do think it’s feasible in the next five or 10 years federally,” Mozaffarian said.

Tlaib said that we as a society have a “moral obligation” to ensure students do not worry about where their next meal comes from.

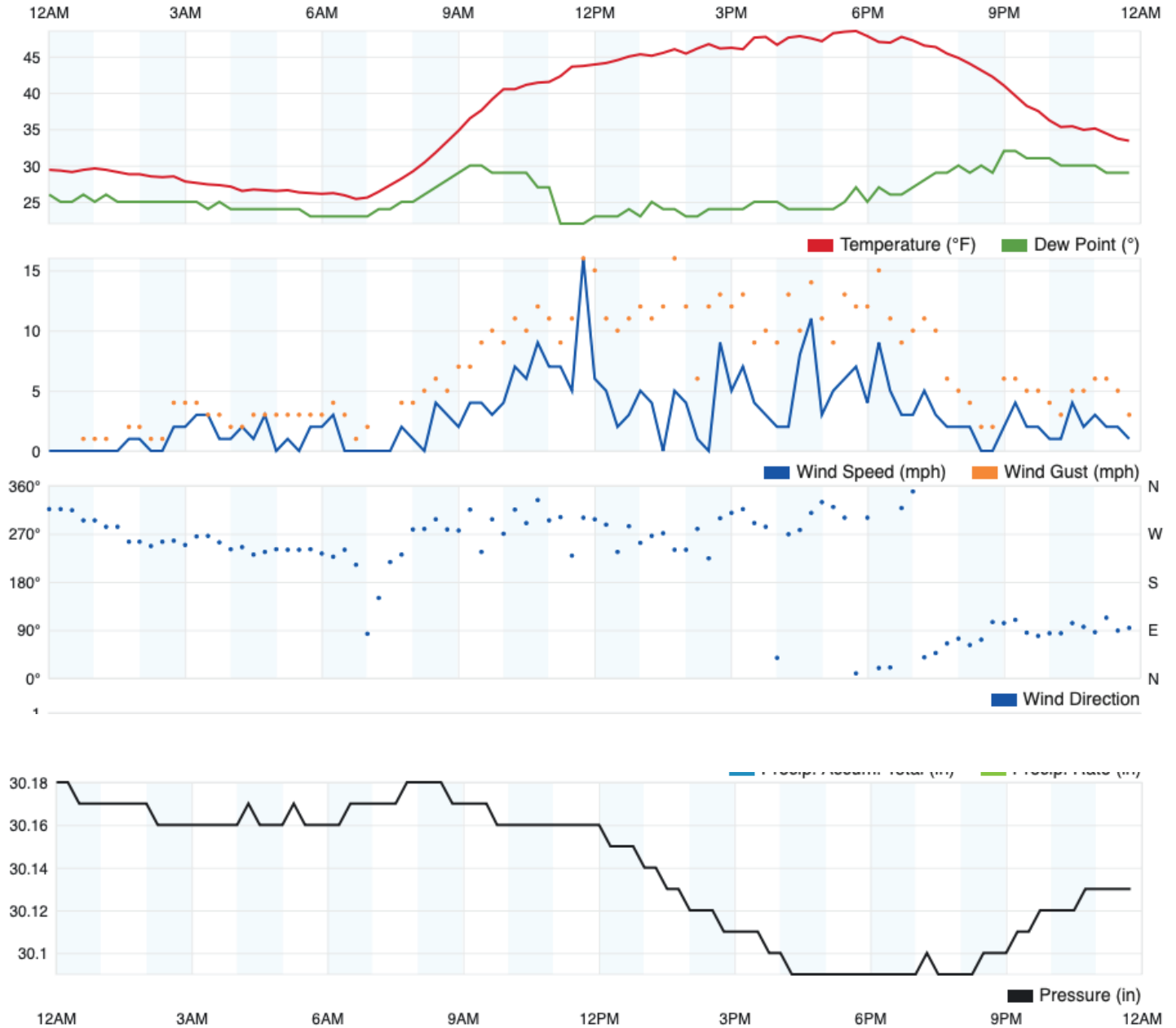
“Something like this — something that our country can afford — we should do it,” Tlaib said. “There should be no hesitation.”

Adam Goldstein is the D.C. Bureau intern for States Newsroom. Goldstein is a graduate student at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, studying digital reporting. He is originally from San Francisco, and loves swimming, cooking, and the San Francisco 49ers.

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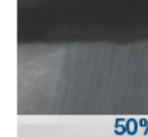
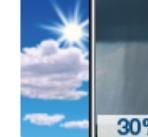
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs




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Today	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
						
Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Cloudy then Chance Showers and Breezy	Chance Showers and Breezy	Mostly Sunny then Chance Showers
High: 50 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 52 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 61 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 59 °F

This Week's Outlook April 24, 2023 2:31 AM

Maximum Temperature Forecast									Minimum Temperature Forecast								
4/24	4/25	4/26	4/27	4/28	4/29	4/30	Maximum		4/24	4/25	4/26	4/27	4/28	4/29	4/30	Minimum	
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun			Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun		
Aberdeen	51	52	61	56	48	52	54	61	Aberdeen	23	26	31	34	32	32	32	23
Britton	46	48	56	52	45	47	49	56	Britton	23	24	29	32	34	29	30	23
Eagle Butte	55	49	62	57	46	52	53	62	Eagle Butte	28	32	36	36	33	33	33	28
Eureka	51	50	57	55	47	51	52	57	Eureka	24	27	33	33	30	30	30	24
Gettysburg	53	52	62	56	46	50	52	62	Gettysburg	24	29	34	34	34	30	31	24
Kennebec	59	55	66	61	47	55	56	66	Kennebec	29	35	37	37	38	32	33	29
McIntosh	53	51	56	54	45	51	52	56	McIntosh	26	28	36	34	32	32	30	26
Milbank	49	51	59	57	50	49	51	59	Milbank	26	26	28	38	38	34	33	26
Miller	55	54	63	58	47	51	53	63	Miller	26	29	34	36	36	32	32	26
Mobridge	56	54	60	59	50	55	56	60	Mobridge	27	29	36	35	33	33	32	27
Murdo	59	51	66	61	49	54	56	66	Murdo	31	34	37	37	37	32	32	31
Pierre	59	52	68	62	52	55	58	68	Pierre	28	36	38	38	38	34	35	28
Redfield	54	54	63	63	47	52	54	63	Redfield	24	28	33	35	32	32	32	24
Sisseton	48	50	58	59	48	49	51	59	Sisseton	26	27	29	36	38	34	33	26
Watertown	50	51	58	57	44	48	51	58	Watertown	24	27	29	36	38	32	32	24
Webster	47	49	56	57	45	45	48	57	Webster	23	25	29	33	34	29	30	23
Wheaton	46	49	55	56	46	47	49	56	Wheaton	23	24	26	35	35	29	31	23

- Slight to chances of rain in central/south central SD early Tuesday
- Chances of precipitation again Wednesday through the end of the week

Quiet conditions expected today with a blend of clouds and sun. Highs across the forecast area will range in the 40s and 50s with chilly overnight lows once again. Warmest temps for the week will be on Wednesday before a cooldown Friday. Greatest chance of precipitation could be possible towards the end of the week.

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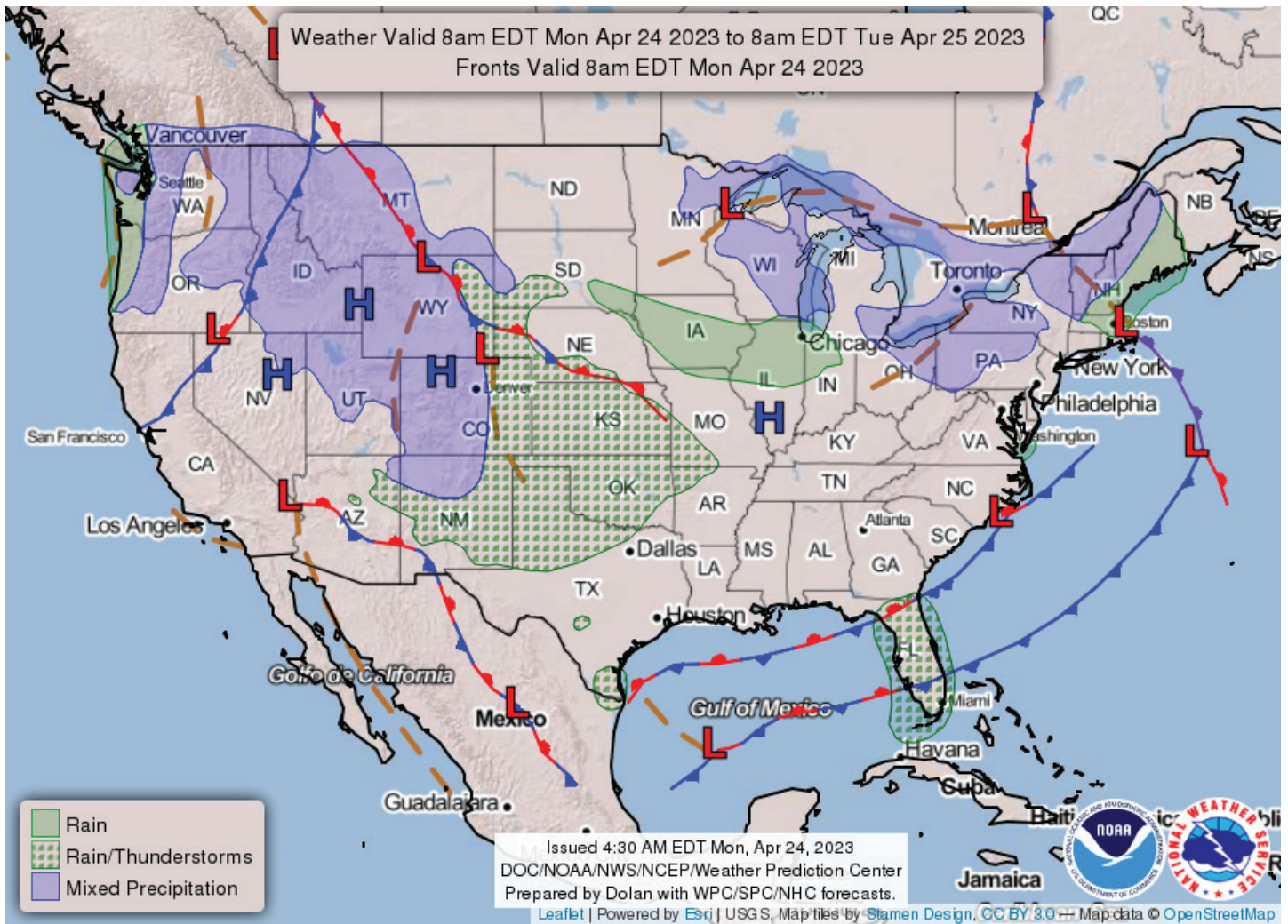
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 49 °F at 5:41 PM
Low Temp: 25 °F at 6:49 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 11:46 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 01 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1962
Record Low: 17 in 1956
Average High: 62
Average Low: 35
Average Precip in April.: 1.36
Precip to date in April.: 1.67
Average Precip to date: 3.42
Precip Year to Date: 5.60
Sunset Tonight: 8:31:15 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:28:11 AM



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Today in Weather History

April 24, 1948: A significant F2 tornado moved northeast from South of Castlewood to near Goodwin. Barns were destroyed on two farms. Also on this day, two other tornadoes were observed in South Dakota. One moved from Turner County on into Minnehaha County, injuring two people. The other touchdown 3 miles Southeast of Sioux Falls, destroying barns and other buildings on the west edge of Brandon.

1880: Several tornadoes affected parts of central and southwest Illinois. One tornado of F4 intensity touched down near Jerseyville and killed one person along the 18-mile path. Another F4 tornado passed just north of Carlinville and lifted near Atwater, destroying 50 buildings. Six people died in Christian County by an F5 tornado, which tracked from 9 miles southwest of Taylorville to near Sharpsburg.

1899 - Two women and one son lived to tell the story of being picked up by a tornado and carried more than a fourth of a mile, flying far above the church steeples, before being gently set down again. The young boy and one of the ladies said they had the pleasure of flying alongside a horse. The horse "kicked and struggled" as it flew high above, and was set down unharmed about a mile away. (The Weather Channel)

1908 - Severe thunderstorms spawned eighteen tornadoes over across the Central Gulf Coast States claiming the lives of 310 persons. The state of Mississippi was hardest hit. A tornado near Hattiesburg MS killed 143 persons and caused more than half a million dollars damage. Four violent tornadoes accounted for 279 of the 310 deaths. The deadliest of the four tornadoes swelled to a width of 2.5 miles as it passed near Amite LA. The tornado also leveled most of Purvis MS. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. Up to seven inches of rain drenched Virginia in three days. Morgantown WV received 4.27 inches in 24 hours, and flooding was reported in south central West Virginia. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Low pressure produced high winds and severe thunderstorms in the Southern Plains Region. Strong thunderstorm winds destroyed two mobile homes at Whitt TX injuring two persons. Winds associated with the low pressure system gusted to 70 mph at Guadalupe Pass TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Twenty cities in the central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Russell KS was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 101 degrees. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from Colorado to Wisconsin. Hail four and a half inches in diameter was reported at Sargeant NE. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Southern High Plains to north central Kansas. Thunderstorms spawned ten tornadoes, including one which injured four persons and caused 1.5 million dollars damage at Shattuck OK. Thunderstorms also produced softball size hail at Wheeler TX, wind gusts to 85 mph southwest of Arnett OK, and 13.45 inches of rain near Caldwell TX, which resulted in the worst flooding in recent memory for that area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003: The temperature soared to a maximum of 70 degrees in Juneau, Alaska. This is the earliest record of 70-degree reading to occur in Juneau.

2010: April Tornado Outbreak- During a significant severe weather outbreak across the South on April 22-25, 142 tornadoes raked the region, including 77 on April 24 alone. Ten died from the long-track tornado that swept across Mississippi on April 24. A long-lived twister left a trail of destruction extending over 149 miles from Louisiana through Mississippi, resulting in 10 deaths and 75 injuries. This EF4 storm, which grew to a width of 1.75 miles, sported the fourth longest track in Mississippi history. This storm destroyed part of Yazoo City, Mississippi. The Swiss Reinsurance Company estimated insured damages with this outbreak at \$1.58 billion.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CARING MEANS SHARING

A delivery boy was in a hurry to make his last stop before going home. In his haste, he stumbled and fell, breaking the two dozen eggs he had been carefully carrying. He sat on the curb near the customer's home, crying.

A crowd gathered around him wanting to know if he had injured himself. Each of them was happy to learn that he was "ok" but saddened that he had broken the eggs. One gentleman reached into his pocket and gave him two quarters. Turning to the others he said, "I care fifty cents worth. How much do the rest of you care?"

John clearly confronted Christians when he said, "If you have enough money to live well and see someone in need, and refuse to help - how can God's love be in you?"

And Paul also warned us that what we give and how we give is what we will one day receive for ourselves from our Father, in heaven. No matter what we say, it is always what we do, that matters most. If we care, we will share. Works, not words, are the true proof of our love. We must walk our talk.

Prayer: Lord, may we be grateful that when we give to others in Your name we are honoring You and blessing them. Help us to have gracious hearts. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Remember this-a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 2 Corinthians 9:6



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.21.23

3 21 29 46 63 9

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$26,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.23

5 9 12 24 26 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,450,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 36 Mins 27
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.23.23

16 21 31 33 36 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 6 Mins 27
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.23

7 11 18 25 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$36,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 27 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.23

9 10 50 62 63 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 35 Mins 26
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.22.23

17 36 47 63 68 25

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$28,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 35 Mins 26
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

9 teenagers injured in shooting at prom after-party in Texas

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Gunfire at a huge prom after-party at a home in Texas injured nine teenagers, and a second shooting in a nearby city is being investigated for a possible connection, officials said.

Sheriff's deputies in Jasper County, in East Texas, arrived in the wee hours of Sunday at a home where about 250 people were partying, authorities said. They found nine victims with gunshot wounds that didn't appear to be life-threatening, according to a statement by the Jasper County Sheriff's Office.

Eight people were taken in personal vehicles to Jasper Memorial Hospital, and at least one of them was transferred to a hospital in nearby Beaumont, Jasper County Sheriff's Office spokesperson Karli Cherry said. One person did not go to the hospital, she said.

A second shooting within the city of Jasper occurred shortly after the first, the statement said. There were no injuries in the second shooting, but a connection is being investigated because of a "common vehicle at both locations," the statement said.

According to the statement, "people of interest are being questioned," and the investigation is ongoing.

'Dancing With the Stars' judge Len Goodman dies at 78

LONDON (AP) — Len Goodman, a long-serving judge on "Dancing with the Stars" and "Strictly Come Dancing" who helped revive interest in ballroom dancing on both sides of the Atlantic, has died, his agent said Monday. He was 78.

Agent Jackie Gill said Goodman "passed away peacefully." He had been diagnosed with bone cancer.

A former professional ballroom dancer and British champion, Goodman was head judge on "Strictly Come Dancing" for 12 years from its launch on the BBC in 2004. The dance competition, which pairs celebrities with professional dance partners, was a surprise hit and has become one of the network's most popular shows.

Goodman's pithy observations, delivered in a Cockney accent, endeared him to viewers. "You floated across that floor like butter on a crumpet," he remarked after one foxtrot. He praised a salsa-dancing couple as "like two sizzling sausages on a barbecue."

Goodman was head judge on the U.S. version of the show, ABC's "Dancing With the Stars," for 15 years until his retirement in November. For several years he judged the British and American shows simultaneously each autumn, criss-crossing the Atlantic weekly.

British broadcaster Esther Rantzen said Goodman had been "astonished and delighted" by his late-life fame.

"One of the reasons he succeeded so well in the States is that he was quintessentially British," she said. "He was firm but fair, funny but a gentleman and I hope the nation will adopt his favorite expostulation of 'pickle me walnuts.'"

Goodman also presented BBC radio programs and made TV documentaries, including a 2012 program about the sinking of the Titanic. As a young man, Goodman had worked as a shipyard welder for the company that built the doomed ship.

BBC director-general Tim Davie said Goodman was "a wonderful, warm entertainer who was adored by millions. He appealed to all ages and felt like a member of everyone's family. Len was at the very heart of Strictly's success. He will be hugely missed by the public and his many friends and family."

Goodman was also a recipient of the Carl Alan Award in recognition of outstanding contributions to dance, and owned the Goodman Academy dance school in southern England.

Ex-officer who fatally shot Breonna Taylor hired as a deputy

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — The former Louisville police officer who fatally shot Breonna Taylor has a new job in law enforcement in a county northeast of the city.

The Carroll County Sheriff's Office on Saturday confirmed the hiring of Myles Cosgrove, who was fired from the Louisville Metro Police Department in January 2021 for violating use-of-force procedures and failing to use a body camera during the raid on Taylor's apartment, WHAS-TV reported.

Taylor, a Black woman, was killed March 13, 2020, by police executing a narcotics search warrant. None of the three white officers who fired into Taylor's home were charged by a grand jury in her death.

Robert Miller, chief deputy in Carroll County, pointed to that fact in reference to Cosgrove's hiring.

A protest in Carroll County was planned Monday in response to his hiring.

Investigators said that Cosgrove fired 16 rounds into the apartment after the front door was breached and that Taylor's boyfriend fired a shot at them. Federal ballistics experts said they believe the shot that killed Taylor came from Cosgrove.

In November, the Kentucky Law Enforcement Council voted not to revoke Cosgrove's state peace officer certification. That meant he could apply for other law enforcement jobs in the state.

Cities reviving downtowns by converting offices to housing

By MAE ANDERSON, ASHRAF KHALIL and MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — On the 31st floor of what was once a towering office building in downtown Manhattan, construction workers lay down steel bracing for what will soon anchor a host of residential amenities: a catering station, lounge, fire pit and gas grills.

The building, empty since 2021, is being converted to 588 market-rate rental apartments that will house about 1,000 people. "We're taking a vacant building and pouring life not only into this building, but this entire neighborhood," said Joey Chillelli, managing director of real estate firm Vanbarton Group, which is doing the conversion.

Across the country, office-to-housing conversions are being pursued as a potential lifeline for struggling downtown business districts that emptied out during the coronavirus pandemic and may never fully recover. The conversion push is marked by an emphasis on affordability. Multiple cities are offering serious tax breaks for developers to incentivize office-to-housing conversions — provided that a certain percentage of apartments are offered at affordable below-market prices.

In January, Pittsburgh announced it was accepting proposals to produce more affordable housing through the "conversion of fallow and underutilized office space." Boston released a plan in October aimed at revitalizing downtown that included a push for more housing, some of which would come from office conversions. And Seattle launched a competition in April for downtown building owners and design firms to come up with conversion ideas.

In the nation's capital, Mayor Muriel Bowser has made office-to-housing conversions a cornerstone of her plan to repopulate and revitalize the district's downtown. Her "comeback plan" for the capital city, announced earlier this year, seeks to add 15,000 new residents to the downtown area, adding to the approximately 25,000 who already live here.

Bowser's administration says about 1 million square feet of downtown real estate is already transitioning from commercial to residential. But the city needs another 6 million square feet converted to meet her goal of 15,000 new downtown residents.

"We're not going to have as many workers downtown as we had before the pandemic," Bowser said earlier this year. "Our job is to make sure that we are getting more people downtown."

But the conversion push has some skeptics. Housing advocates worry that the affordable housing requirements could get watered down. And even advocates of the conversion model say giving tax breaks to wealthy developers isn't the best tool to achieve the goal.

"Developers who feel it's going to benefit their bottom line will do it without an incentive," said Erica Williams, director of the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute. "This is a very costly proposal for an unproven program."

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And, as increasing numbers of employers turn to hybrid work models, there's the question of whether people will want to move to downtown areas if they're not required to be there every day.

"You have to make downtown a neighborhood — somewhere that's living and playful and active," Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey told a panel at the United States Conference of Mayors meetings in Washington last January. "How do you make it a neighborhood that has a vibe where young people want to be?"

Jordan Woods, a 33-year-old federal government contractor, moved to an apartment in downtown Washington in 2019, attracted in part by the appeal of being able to walk to work. He said he was able to find dependable stores and restaurants that stayed open at night, but then the pandemic came and downtown became "like a moonscape" for more than a year.

"And even before the pandemic it was still missing basic stuff like playgrounds and dog parks and a normal non-Whole Foods grocery store that I could walk to," Woods said. "I wouldn't say I regret it, but if I was considering the same move right now, I'm not sure I would do it."

Chuck D'Aprix, principal at Downtown Economics, a development consulting firm, said attracting new residents to a former downtown business district holds specific chicken-and-egg issues. The businesses that residents need are different from those of daytime office workers.

They include mid-size affordable grocery stores and day-care centers, pet supply shops, hardware stores and auto repair garages. And those places need to stay open past office hours.

"A lot of those services simply aren't available right now in small city downtowns or mid-sized city downtowns, you know, they close up at night," D'Aprix said.

But with vacancy rates at downtown office buildings continuing to rise, from 12.2% in the fourth quarter of 2019 to 17.8% in the first quarter of 2023, according to the real estate firm CBRE, there's an urgency to do something. Some of the hardest hit places include San Francisco with a preliminary vacancy rate of 29.4%, Houston 23.6%, Philadelphia at 21.7% and Washington at 20.3%.

In New York City, where the vacancy rate is 15.5%, Mayor Eric Adams announced in January a plan to bring 500,000 new homes to the city including what he calls rent-restricted units.

A key piece of that plan is to rezone parts of midtown Manhattan which currently only allow office and manufacturing spaces. Along with the rezoning, the mayor's office is pushing bills in the legislature to approve tax breaks that would entice developers to invest in conversions that include affordable units as well as changes in the state's multiple dwellings law that would allow buildings built through 1990 access to more flexible regulations that make conversions easier.

"The ability to really take our outdated office stock in the city is a true win-win because we not only shore up the office market, given the vacancy rates that we are seeing, but we also help reactivate our business districts, which really suffered right during the pandemic," Deputy Mayor Maria Torres-Springer said.

"We can also make a dent in this dire housing crisis that we've been in," she said, noting that more than 70,000 New Yorkers sleep in shelters every night and there's "essentially a functional zero-vacancy rate for the most affordable apartments in our city."

Over the past two decades, nearly 80 office buildings in New York have been converted into residences — the most in the country according to CBRE. Around 200 more could be in play over the next decade, according to John Sanchez, the executive director of the 5 Borough Housing Movement, which supports conversion. That would produce around 20,000 units of housing.

The conversions are credited with turning lower Manhattan from a neighborhood that shut down at dusk into a sought-after destination for both families and foodies.

"What you saw was the fastest growing residential neighborhood in the city," said Ross Moskowitz, a partner at the Stroock & Stroock & Lavan law firm who specializes in real estate, land use and public-private partnerships. "All of a sudden, you just saw strollers and dogs, so obviously that means that people are not just coming to work. They're actually coming to stay."

But conversions alone in New York and elsewhere are unlikely to bring back entire downtown neighborhoods, nor will they automatically put a dent in the affordable housing crisis. In a March report, CBRE found that office-to-home conversions only represented about 1% of new multi-family projects and that,

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despite the hype, that “there’s no evidence” they’ve significantly increased.

“Converting buildings is not easy,” said Luke Bronin, the mayor of Hartford, Connecticut. “There are a lot of buildings that just aren’t conducive.”

Issues include access to natural light and air, the absence of balconies in most office buildings and the need to install hundreds of bathrooms and kitchens, along with the accompanying plumbing, in buildings often constructed with just two large bathrooms per floor.

There also can be environmental issues, said Anoop Davé, the CEO of Victrix, a real estate investment management development company specializing in converting mostly vacant office buildings into residential buildings and hotels. “A lot of these buildings could have asbestos or something like that. That is not necessarily a deal killer but sometimes the cost or remediating is so large that even if you are given it for zero, it doesn’t work.”

Financing, current lease holders and zoning issues can present challenges, as well. Washington, for example, has a glut of federal buildings that are untouchable.

Christopher Nicholson, 38, a technical operations analyst, knows first-hand the pluses and minuses of living in a converted downtown office building — he has lived in two in downtown Denver. In 2018 he moved into a 31-story former office high-rise built in 1967 that was converted into apartments in 2006.

“It was in the downtown business district, so everything else next door was office buildings, and there was a big parking structure right next door,” he said. “There was definitely a lack of green space, the nearest park is more than a half a mile away. The grocery store was about a mile plus.”

He moved to his current building in 2020, a 130-year-old, nine-story former office building converted in 2000. His new building is right by the light rail and bus stops and near hotels that have nice restaurants and cocktail bars. That makes it easy to get friends and businesses colleagues to meet near his home, he said.

“I can’t imagine living anywhere else,” Nicholson said. “I think for what I get, I’m more than happy with the tradeoffs that I’ve made.”

Khalil reported from Washington and Casey from Boston. Associated Press writer Manuel Valdes in Seattle contributed to this report.

Trial to begin in 2018 killing of 11 at Pittsburgh synagogue

By PETER SMITH and MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Jury selection will begin Monday in the federal death penalty trial of a truck driver accused of shooting to death 11 Jewish worshippers at a Pittsburgh synagogue in the deadliest antisemitic attack in U.S. history.

Robert G. Bowers, who is from the Pittsburgh suburb of Baldwin, faces 63 counts in the Oct. 27, 2018, attack at the Tree of Life synagogue while members of three Jewish congregations were holding Sabbath activities in the building. The charges include 11 counts of obstruction of free exercise of religion resulting in death and 11 counts of hate crimes resulting in death.

If convicted, Bowers, 50, could get the death sentence. He offered to plead guilty in return for a life sentence, but federal prosecutors turned him down. His lawyers also recently said he has schizophrenia and structural and functional brain impairments.

During the trial, prosecutors are expected to tell jurors about incriminatory statements he allegedly made to investigators, an online trail of antisemitic statements that they say shows the attack was motivated by religious hatred, and the guns recovered from him at the crime scene where police shot Bowers three times before he surrendered.

The families of those killed were divided over whether the government should pursue the death penalty, but most were in favor.

Prosecutors indicated in court filings that they might introduce autopsy records and 911 recordings during the trial, including recordings of two calls from victims who were subsequently shot to death. They have said their evidence includes a Colt AR-15 rifle, three Glock .357 handguns and hundreds of cartridge

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cases, bullets and bullet fragments.

Bowers also injured seven people, including five police officers who responded to the scene, investigators said.

In an filing earlier this month, prosecutors said Bowers "harbored deep, murderous animosity towards all Jewish people." They said he also expressed hatred for HIAS, founded as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, a nonprofit humanitarian group that helps refugees and asylum seekers.

During a 2021 pretrial hearing, Officer Clint Thimons testified Bowers was "very calm and he said he's had enough and that Jews are killing our children and the Jews had to die." Another officer, David Blahut, said Bowers told him "these people are committing genocide on my people and I want to kill Jews."

Prosecutors wrote in a court filing that Bowers had nearly 400 followers on his Gab social media account "to whom he promoted his anti-Semitic views and calls to violence against Jews."

U.S. District Judge Robert Colville, who was nominated to the court by President Donald Trump more than three years ago, will preside over the trial. He previously spent nearly two decades as a county judge in Pittsburgh.

The three congregations — Tree of Life, Dor Hadash and New Light — have spoken out against antisemitism and other forms of bigotry since the shootings. The Tree of Life Congregation also is working with partners on plans to renovate and rebuild on its synagogue, which still stands, by creating a complex to house a sanctuary, museum, memorial and center for fighting antisemitism.

—Scolforo reported from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Animatronic dragon bursts into flames during Disneyland show

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Spectators at Disneyland's popular "Fantasmic" show got a shock this weekend when the feature's fire-breathing animatronic dragon suddenly burst into flames.

No injuries were reported following the blaze Saturday night at the Southern California theme park, the Anaheim Fire Department said.

Ryan Laux, a frequent Disneyland visitor, said fire has always been a part of the "Fantasmic" presentation. But he said he knew something was awry when flames didn't come from where they usually do.

"The head started going on fire instead of the fire projecting out," said Laux, who lives in Los Angeles and captured the blaze on video.

The show was stopped almost immediately "and then right after that, the dragon started catching fire and the whole body was up in flames," he said Sunday.

The show takes place twice nightly near the park's famous Tom Sawyer Island. The climax features Mickey Mouse battling a giant dragon named Maleficent.

Laux said Mickey vanished from the stage as soon as the dragon's head became engulfed in flames.

The extent of the damage wasn't immediately known.

Did Ed Sheeran hit pilfer Marvin Gaye classic? Trial to tell

By ANDREW DALTON and LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Jury selection and opening statements are set to begin Monday in a trial that mashes up Ed Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" with Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On."

The heirs of Ed Townsend, Gaye's co-writer of the 1973 soul classic, sued Sheeran, alleging the English pop star's hit 2014 tune has "striking similarities" to "Let's Get It On" and "overt common elements" that violate their copyright.

The lawsuit filed in 2017 has finally made it to a trial that is expected to last a week in the Manhattan federal courtroom of 95-year-old Judge Louis L. Stanton.

Sheeran, 32, is among the witnesses expected to testify.

"Let's Get It On" is the quintessential, sexy slow jam that's been heard in countless films and commercials

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and garnered hundreds of millions of streams, spins and radio plays over the past 50 years. "Thinking Out Loud," which won a Grammy for song of the year, is a much more marital take on love and sex.

While the jury will hear the recordings of both songs, probably many times, their lyrics — and vibes — are legally insignificant. Jurors are supposed to only consider the raw elements of melody, harmony and rhythm that make up the composition of "Let's Get It On," as documented on sheet music filed with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

Sheeran's attorneys have said the songs' undeniable structural symmetry points only to the foundations of popular music.

"The two songs share versions of a similar and unprotectable chord progression that was freely available to all songwriters," they said in a court filing.

Townsend family attorneys pointed out in the lawsuit that artists including Boyz II Men have performed seamless mashups of the two songs, and that even Sheeran himself has segued into "Let's Get It On" during live performances of "Thinking Out Loud."

They sought to play a potentially damning YouTube video of one such Sheeran performance for the jury at trial. Stanton denied their motion to include it, but said he would reconsider it after he sees other evidence that's presented.

Gaye's estate is not involved in the case, though it will inevitably have echoes of their successful lawsuit against Robin Thicke, Pharrell Williams and T.I. over the resemblance of their 2013 hit "Blurred Lines" to Gaye's 1977 "Got to Give it Up."

A jury awarded Gaye's heirs \$7.4 million at trial — later trimmed by a judge to \$5.3 million — making it among the most significant copyright cases in recent decades.

Sheeran's label Atlantic Records and Sony/ATV Music Publishing are also named as defendants in the "Thinking Out Loud" lawsuit. Generally, plaintiffs in copyright lawsuits cast a wide net in naming defendants, though a judge can eliminate any names deemed inappropriate. In this case, however, Sheeran's co-writer on the song, Amy Wadge, was never named.

Townsend, who also wrote the 1958 R&B doo-wop hit "For Your Love," was a singer, songwriter and lawyer. He died in 2003. Kathryn Townsend Griffin, his daughter, is the plaintiff leading the lawsuit.

Already a Motown superstar in the 1960s before his more adult 1970s output made him a generational musical giant, Gaye was killed in 1984 at age 44, shot by his father as he tried to intervene in a fight between his parents.

Major artists are often hit with lawsuits alleging song-stealing, but nearly all settle before trial — as Taylor Swift recently did over "Shake it Off," ending a lawsuit that lasted years longer and came closer to trial than most other cases.

But Sheeran — whose musical style drawing from classic soul, pop and R&B has made him a target for copyright lawsuits — has shown a willingness to go to trial before. A year ago, he won a U.K. copyright battle over his 2017 hit "Shape of You," then slammed what he described as a "culture" of baseless lawsuits intended to squeeze money out of artists eager to avoid the expense of a trial.

"I feel like claims like this are way too common now and have become a culture where a claim is made with the idea that a settlement will be cheaper than taking it to court, even if there is no basis for the claim," Sheeran said in a video posted on Twitter after the verdict. "It's really damaging to the songwriting industry."

The "Thinking Out Loud" lawsuit also invokes one of the most common tropes in American and British music since the earliest days of rock 'n' roll, R&B and hip-hop: a young white artist seemingly appropriating the work of an older Black artist — accusations that were also levied at Elvis Presley and The Beatles, whose music drew on that of Black forerunners.

"Mr. Sheeran blatantly took a Black artist's music who he doesn't view as worthy as compensation," Ben Crump, a civil rights attorney who represents the Townsend family but is not involved in the trial, said at a March 31 news conference.

Dalton reported from Los Angeles.

Probe ordered after Florida shooter fires at delivery driver

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A Florida prosecutor has ordered an investigation in a confrontation in which a homeowner fired shots into a couple's car when they mistakenly turned onto his property while making a late-night grocery delivery. Police closed the case without consulting the state attorney's office.

No one was injured by the gunfire in an upscale Fort Lauderdale suburb, but is the latest in a spate of similar shootings across the U.S. where people have mistakenly turned onto the wrong property or gotten in the wrong car. One person has been killed and others seriously wounded. In this case, the shooter told police the car was being driven erratically, struck his leg and made him fear for himself and his son.

Broward County State Attorney Harold Pryor issued a statement saying police investigators never contacted his office about the April 15 shooting in Southwest Ranches that put at least two bullets into the car driven by 19-year-old Waldes Thomas Jr., who was with his 18-year-old girlfriend, Diamond Darville.

Pryor said his staff members were unaware of the shooting until they were contacted Friday by a reporter from WTVJ-TV, who interviewed the couple. The Davie Police Department has a contract with Southwest Ranches to provide service.

"I contacted the Davie Police Department to request a full investigation," Pryor said Friday, adding that his prosecutors will decide whether charges should be filed.

Davie police declined to comment Sunday, but released the lead detective's report. He wrote that without any video, he couldn't determine if either the shooter or couple committed a crime.

"Each party appeared justified in their actions based on the circumstances they perceived," the report concluded.

The shooting happened on an unlit street in a semi-rural neighborhood at a home sitting on two-acres.

According to the police report, Thomas and Darville got lost while delivering groceries for Instacart shortly before 10 p.m. They were on the phone with their customer when Thomas turned their 2014 Honda Civic into an area where the shooter stores equipment for his excavation business. The address they were looking for is across the street.

The shooter and the couple gave investigators conflicting reports about what happened next.

The homeowner told officers he asked his 12-year-old son to tell the driver to leave, but soon heard the boy yelling for help. The father said he saw the car driving erratically, banging into logs and boulders so he told his son to run.

He said the car then drove toward him and ran over his foot. Saying he feared for his life and his son's, the man drew his handgun and fired at the car's tires, but it sped away. He then called police.

An officer found Thomas and Darville parked nearby. When he asked what happened, they replied, "we just got shot at." He said Darville was crying and Thomas appeared "extremely nervous and scared." The officer said there were two bullet holes in the car's bumper and one tire was flat.

The couple told police they thought that they were at the right house, then tried to leave after the boy told them they weren't. Thomas said he put the car into reverse and hit a boulder, which was when the shooter approached "aggressively." That's when Thomas said he heard shots and drove away. Darville said she saw the shooter pull his gun and fire.

"I said, 'We got to go, we got to go,'" Darville told WTVJ. "I was scared, I'm not going to lie." She didn't respond to a phone call or emails from The Associated Press.

The AP isn't naming the property resident because he hasn't been charged with a crime. His phone rang unanswered and he did not return a text message Sunday seeking comment.

Police say they returned the shooter's gun after closing the case. —

An earlier version incorrectly said the statement was issued Sunday, not Friday.

Foreigners airlifted out; Sudanese seek refuge from fighting

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — As foreign governments airlifted hundreds of their diplomats and other citizens from Sudan, Sudanese on Monday desperately sought ways to escape the chaos amid fears the country's two rival generals could escalate their all-out battle for power once evacuations were completed.

Many Sudanese, along with Egyptians and other foreigners who could not get on flights, risked the long and dangerous drive to the northern border into Egypt.

"We traveled 15 hours on land at our own risk," Suliman al-Kouni, an Egyptian student, said at the Arqin border crossing with Egypt. Buses lined up at the remote desert crossing carrying hundreds of people, he said. Al-Kouni was among dozens of Egyptian students making the trek. "But many of our friends are still trapped in Sudan," he said.

Prominent Sudanese filmmaker Amjad Abual-Ala wrote on Facebook that his mother, siblings and nephews "are on the road from Sudan to Cairo through Aswan," referring to Egypt's southernmost city.

Fighting raged in Omdurman, a city across the Nile River from Khartoum, residents said, despite a hoped-for cease-fire to coincide with the three-day Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

"We did not see such a truce," Amin al-Tayed said from his home near state TV headquarters in Omdurman, adding that heavy gunfire and thundering explosions rocked the city.

Over 420 people, including 264 civilians, have been killed and over 3,700 wounded in nine days of fighting between the Sudanese armed forces and the powerful paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces.

The RSF said the armed forces unleashed airstrikes on the upscale neighborhood of Kafouri, north of Khartoum. There was no immediate army comment. The ongoing violence has affected operations at the main international airport, destroying civilian planes and damaging at least one runway, and thick, black smoke rose above it. Other airports also have been knocked out of operation.

Still, the two sides have eased fighting enough for the stream of international military aircraft to land in the Khartoum area and extract foreign citizens since Sunday.

The exodus began with American special operations forces swooping in and out of Khartoum in helicopters early Sunday to evacuate U.S. Embassy personnel.

France brought out nearly 400 people, including citizens from 28 countries, on four flights to the nearby Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti, two of them overnight. A Dutch air force C-130 Hercules flew out of Sudan to Jordan in the early hours Monday carrying evacuees of various nationalities, including Dutch, on board. Germany has so far conducted three flights out of Sudan, bringing more than 300 people out to Jordan.

Italy, Spain, Jordan and Greece also brought out a total of several hundred more people, including their own citizens of those of other countries.

Evacuations appeared likely to continue if conditions of fighting allow. Although American officials said it was too dangerous for a government-coordinated evacuation of thousands of private U.S. citizens, other countries scrambled to remove their citizens who wanted to leave.

Japanese nationals are being transported by land to an eastern town to be picked up by Japanese aircraft positioned in Djibouti, Japanese media said. France and Germany each said they were prepared to do more flights if possible.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak tweeted that U.K. armed forces evacuated British diplomatic staff and dependents. But Britain's Middle East Minister, Andrew Mitchell, said about 2,000 U.K. citizens still in Sudan have registered with the embassy for potential evacuation. Many Britons in the country have complained about a lack of information from the government and say they are in the dark about any evacuation plans.

Mitchell told the BBC that the government was doing "intense planning" for "a series of possible evacuations."

Egypt, which said it had over 10,000 citizens in Sudan, urged those in cities other than Khartoum to head to consular offices in Port Sudan and Wadi Halfa in the north for evacuation, the state-run MENA news agency reported.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters in Luxembourg on Monday that the evacuation opera-

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tion has been successful, with more than 1,000 brought out by EU members.

"We have to continue pushing for a political settlement. We cannot afford that Sudan, which is a very populated country, implodes because it will be sending shock waves around the whole (of) Africa," he said. He earlier tweeted that he had spoken with the rival commanders urging a cease-fire.

The army chief, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the RSF leader Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, however, have so far appeared determined to fight to the end. Thousands of Sudanese have fled fighting in Khartoum and elsewhere, U.N. agencies said, but millions are sheltering in their homes amid explosions, gunfire and looting without adequate electricity, food or water.

Hospitals have struggled as violence rages. Many wounded are stranded by the fighting, according to the Sudan Doctors' Syndicate that monitors casualties, suggesting the death toll is probably higher than what is known.

The rival generals came to power after a pro-democracy uprising led to the 2019 ouster of former strongman Omar al-Bashir. In 2021, the generals joined forces to seize power in a coup.

The current violence came after Burhan and 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.

Khalid Omar, a spokesman for the pro-democracy bloc that seeks to restore civilian rule, urged both generals to resolve their differences. "There is an opportunity to stop this war and put the county on the right path," he wrote on Facebook. "This is a war fueled by groups from the deposed regime who want it to continue."

In other fighting, a senior military official said it repelled an RSF attack on Kober Prison in Khartoum where al-Bashir and former officials in his movement are held. A number of prisoners fled and some were killed or wounded, but al-Bashir and other high-profile inmates were in a "highly secure" area, the official speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Sudan experienced a "near-total collapse" of internet and phone service Sunday, according to the monitoring service NetBlocks.

"This will have a major effect on residents' ability to stay safe and will impact the evacuation programs that are ongoing," said Netblocks director Alp Toker. ___ Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre in Jerusalem, Samy Magdy in Cairo, Michael Corder in The Hague, Netherlands, Angela Charlton in Paris, Frances D'Emilio in Rome and Fay Abuelgasim in Beirut contributed to this report.

Amazon Indigenous woman wins Goldman environment prize

By FABIANO MAISONNAVE Associated Press

SÃO PAULO (AP) — When Alessandra Korap was born in the mid-1980s, her Indigenous village nestled in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil was a haven of seclusion. But as she grew up, the nearby city of Itaituba, with its bustling streets and commercial activity, crept closer and closer.

It wasn't just her village feeling the encroachment of non-Indigenous outsiders. Two major federal highways paved the way for tens of thousands of settlers, illegal gold miners and loggers into the region's vast Indigenous territories, which cover a forested area roughly the size of Belgium.

The influx posed a grave threat to Korap's Munduruku people, 14,000-strong and spread throughout the Tapajos River Basin, in Para and Mato Grosso states. Soon illegal mining, hydroelectric dams, a major railway and river ports for soybean exports choked their lands — lands they were still struggling to have recognized.

Korap and other Munduruku women took up the responsibility of defending their people, overturning the traditionally all-male leadership. Organizing in their communities, they orchestrated demonstrations, presented compelling evidence of environmental crime to the Federal Attorney General and Federal Police, and vehemently opposed illicit agreements and incentives offered to the Munduruku by unscrupulous miners, loggers, corporations, and politicians seeking access to their land.

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Korap's defense of her ancestral territory was recognized with the Goldman Environmental Prize on Monday. The award honors grassroots activists around the world who are dedicated to protecting the environment and promoting sustainability.

"This award is an opportunity to draw attention to the demarcation of the Sawre Muybu territory," Korap told The Associated Press. "It is our top priority, along with the expulsion of illegal miners."

Sawre Muybu is an area of virgin rainforest along the Tapajos River spanning 178,000 hectares (440,000 acres). Official recognition for the land, or demarcation, began in 2007 but was frozen during the far-right presidency of Jair Bolsonaro, which ended in January.

Still, the Munduruku people celebrated a victory in 2021 when the British mining company Anglo American gave up trying to mine inside Indigenous territories in Brazil, including Sawre Muybu.

Studies have shown that Indigenous-controlled forests are the best preserved in the Brazilian Amazon.

Almost half of Brazil's climate pollution comes from deforestation. The destruction is so vast now that the eastern Amazon, not far from the Munduruku, has ceased to be a carbon sink, or net absorber of the gas and is now a carbon source, according to a study published in 2021 in the journal *Nature*.

Korap, however, knows that land rights alone don't protect the land.

In the neighboring Munduruku Indigenous Territory, illegal miners have destroyed and contaminated hundreds of miles of waterways in search of gold, even though it was officially recognized in 2004.

Now Brazil's new government has created the country's first Ministry of Indigenous Peoples and more recently mounted operations to drive out miners. But Korap remains skeptical of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. She sees his actions as contradictory, noting that while he advocates for forest protection, he also negotiates trade deals with other countries to sell more of the country's top exports — beef and soybeans — which are the main drivers of deforestation in Brazil.

"When Lula travels abroad, he is sitting with rich people and not with forest defenders. A ministry is useless if the government negotiates our lands without acknowledging we are here," she said.

Other Goldman Environmental Prize recipients this year are:

— Tero Mustonen, a university professor and environmental activist from Finland, who led the purchase of peatland damaged by state-sponsored industrial activity.

— Delima Silalahi, a Batak woman from North Sumatra, Indonesia, who organized Indigenous communities across the country to advocate for their rights to traditional forests.

— Chilekwa Mumba, a Zambian community organizer who has fought for and won compensation for residents harmed by copper mining before the UK Supreme Court.

— Zafer Kizilkaya of Turkey, a marine conservationist and conservation photographer who established Turkey's first community-managed marine protected area in the Mediterranean.

— Diane Wilson, an American shrimp boat captain who won a landmark case against petrochemical giant Formosa Plastics over the discharge of plastic waste on the Texas Gulf Coast.

Isabella O'Malley contributed from Philadelphia.

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

The man in a hurry: King Charles III rushes to make a mark

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III is a man in a hurry.

After waiting 74 years to become king, Charles has used his first six months on the throne to meet faith leaders across the country, reshuffle royal residences, stage his first overseas state visit and hold a sleepover at Windsor Castle that included the coach of the England soccer team. Then there was the big news: He opened the royal archives to researchers investigating the crown's links to slavery.

"We are already surprised by the Prince Charles who was turned into King Charles and who we still call

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Prince Charles, because that's how we think of him," quipped royal historian Robert Lacey. "But, actually, he's become a monarch quicker than people expected."

With the coronation just weeks away, Charles and the Buckingham Palace machine are working at top speed to show the new king at work. And the public is seeing a new kind of sovereign as he tries to slim down the monarchy and show that it is still relevant in a modern, multi-cultural nation where reverence for Queen Elizabeth II muted criticism during her 70 years on the throne.

Out is the matronly decorum that characterized Elizabeth's reign. In is a more human monarch, who held back tears as he addressed the nation after his mother's death and threw a mini-tantrum when a pen leaked on his fingers while signing a book in Northern Ireland. The public had a good laugh. The king now carries his own pen for signing emergencies.

While Elizabeth progressed grandly through meetings with subjects who bowed and curtsied before her, King Charles sat on the floor with the congregation during a visit to a gurdwara, or Sikh house of worship, in Luton, some 30 miles (50 kilometers) northwest of London. On his first state visit, he displayed an ability to properly roll his R's while flipping between German and English in a speech to the Bundestag, the German parliament.

Germans were impressed. Britons were surprised. Who knew he could speak German?

It's as if Charles, long derided as gray and stiff, has just stepped into the room. With extreme subtlety, his personality is starting to show, such as with the ever-changing pocket squares that give a dash of color to his conservative suits.

"Charles, the monarch, with his faults and virtues, has become a subject of more genuine interest," said Lacey, the author of "Battle of Brothers: William & Harry and the Inside Story of Family in Tumult."

"I mean, what pocket handkerchief is he going to wear? Maybe this will become the equivalent of the queen's handbag."

One reason Charles is so eager to get started may be because he knows he won't have much time to make his mark.

The man who waited a lifetime to be king alluded to the march of time during a white tie dinner at the presidential palace in Berlin, saying he hoped he and Camilla would "live long enough" to return to see the sapling they had just planted grow into a tree.

But there are speed bumps on the horizon, some linked to history, others to family.

Charles tried to get ahead of the history question by promising openness about the crown's links to slavery, but some think that commitment fell short.

Laura Trevelyan, whose ancestors enslaved at least 1,000 people on the island of Grenada, says the king should do what her family did and apologize.

"I hope that he will use some of the wealth that the royal family accumulated from the slave trade to better the lives of people in the Caribbean and in Britain who are descendants of the enslaved," she told the Times of London.

Then there is family.

Charles continues to fend off criticism from Prince Harry, whose memoir "Spare" painted his father as distant and unsympathetic toward a son who struggled with the death of his mother, Princess Diana, and then had to fight for the royal family to accept his wife, Meghan, a biracial American.

Hugo Vickers, a royal historian and author of "Coronation: The Crowning of Elizabeth II," compared the new king's accession to the throne with being named chairman of a global corporation at a time when most people have retired. It's a job where he will face questions of religion, the armed forces and politics, in addition to running the royal household and mediating family feuds.

"It's a big thing to take on at that age," Vickers said of Charles, who turns 75 in November. "So, yes, I suspect he's a man in a hurry."

But on another level, Charles' long apprenticeship may also be an advantage, giving him more training and experiences to draw upon than his mother, who was just 25 when she became queen.

While Elizabeth, like all British monarchs before her, was educated by tutors, Charles was bundled off to

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Hill House School in London just shy of age 8 to begin experiencing the world outside the palace.

Richard Townend, the son of the school's founder, was a contemporary of Charles' at Hill House.

Townend said his father created the school as an antidote to what he had seen as a soldier, thinking that children who learned about other cultures would be less likely to wage war as adults.

"What he wanted to do was to make a school, which was quite unlike other schools at the time, in which half the children were not English," Townend said. "They came from all over the world, so the children would learn to live with each other, different nationalities, different people, different colors, different races, different religions."

"He felt passionately that if children learned to live in peace with each other, then the world could only get better."

Charles eventually earned a degree in history from the University of Cambridge and spent six years in the Royal Navy before leaving to focus on his duties as heir to the throne.

As Prince of Wales he founded charities, including one that helps young people get jobs, education and training. He started an organic food company and dabbled in urban planning. Charles was also an early advocate for conservation and environmental protection.

That said, he ruffled feathers when he lobbied government ministers and spoke out against projects he thought threatened Britain's historic architecture, drawing complaints that he had violated the prohibition against royals intervening in politics.

But the biggest controversy of Charles' life was the breakdown of his marriage to Princess Diana amid stories about his long-time relationship with the woman who would become his second wife, Camilla Parker-Bowles. Many people still remember Charles' admission of adultery and the leaked tapes of intimate conversations between Charles and Camilla, including one in which he compared himself to a tampon.

It took Charles years to shake off the failure of his first marriage, and many people were slow to accept Camilla.

In "Spare," Harry wrote bitterly of the palace's effort to rehabilitate Camilla's image, suggesting that unflattering and untrue stories about him were leaked to the media in exchange for more glowing portraits of the senior royals.

Over time, Camilla's charity work, her sense of humor and down-to-earth style won over the public, and she moved from being home wrecker to queen.

She will be crowned alongside her husband at Westminster Abbey.

"This is a man who has overcome problems and hurdles," said Lacey, the historical consultant to the Netflix series "The Crown."

"He's loved despite the problems that he's been through. He's loved for his mistakes as well as for his virtues. We're getting a rounded figure, and that's what a personal represented monarchy is all about."

Diplomats flee Sudan fighting as citizens struggle to escape

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — Foreign governments evacuated diplomats, staff and others from Sudan on Sunday as rival generals battled for a ninth day with no sign of a truce that had been declared for a major Muslim holiday.

While world powers like the U.S. and Britain airlifted their diplomats from the capital of Khartoum, Sudanese desperately sought to flee the chaos. Many risked dangerous roads to cross the northern border into Egypt.

"My family — my mother, my siblings and my nephews — are on the road from Sudan to Cairo through Aswan," prominent Sudanese filmmaker Amjad Abual-Ala wrote on Facebook.

Fighting raged in Omdurman, a city across the Nile River from Khartoum, residents said, despite a hoped-for cease-fire to coincide with the three-day Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

"We did not see such a truce," Amin al-Tayed said from his home near state TV headquarters in Omdurman, adding that heavy gunfire and thundering explosions rocked the city.

Over 420 people, including 264 civilians, have been killed and over 3,700 wounded in fighting between

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the Sudanese armed forces and the powerful paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces. The RSF said the armed forces unleashed airstrikes on the upscale neighborhood of Kafouri, north of Khartoum. There was no immediate army comment.

The ongoing violence has affected operations at the main international airport, destroying civilian planes and damaging at least one runway, and thick, black smoke rose above it. Other airports also have been knocked out of operation.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell tweeted he had spoken with the rival commanders, urging an immediate cease-fire to protect civilians and the evacuation of EU citizens.

In other fighting, a senior military official said it repelled an RSF attack on Kober Prison in Khartoum where Sudan's longtime ruler, Omar al-Bashir, and former officials in his movement have been held since his 2019 ouster. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, said a number of prisoners fled but al-Bashir and other high-profile inmates were in a "highly secure" area, adding that "a few prisoners" were killed or wounded.

The RSF claimed the military removed al-Bashir and other prisoners from the facility, although the statement could not be independently confirmed.

The Arqin border crossing with Egypt was crowded with about 30 passenger buses of at least 55 people each, said Suliman al-Kouni, an Egyptian student who fled northward from Khartoum with dozens of other students.

"We traveled 15 hours on land at our own risk," al-Kouni told The Associated Press by phone. "But many of our friends are still trapped in Sudan."

Sudan experienced a "near-total collapse" of internet and phone service Sunday, according to the monitoring service NetBlocks.

"It's possible that infrastructure has been damaged or sabotaged," said Netblocks director Alp Toker. "This will have a major effect on residents' ability to stay safe and will impact the evacuation programs that are ongoing."

After a week of battles that hindered rescues, U.S. special forces swiftly evacuated 70 U.S. Embassy staffers from Khartoum to Ethiopia early Sunday. Although American officials said it was too dangerous for a government-coordinated evacuation of thousands of private citizens, other countries scrambled to remove their citizens as well as their diplomats.

France and Italy said they would accommodate all their citizens who want to leave, as well as those of other countries who could not otherwise join an evacuation operation.

Germany said early Monday that a military plane carrying 101 German diplomatic staff, family members and citizens of partner countries who were evacuated from Sudan via Jordan has landed safely in Berlin. The military said it had brought 311 people to Jordan so far, from where an onward journey is being organized.

A Dutch air force C-130 Hercules flew out of Sudan to Jordan early Monday carrying evacuees of various nationalities, including Dutch. The French Foreign Ministry said Monday it has so far brought four flights from Sudan to Djibouti, with a total of 388 people — citizens of 28 countries of Europe, Asia, North America and Africa, including Sudan.

An Italian air force C-130 that left Khartoum with evacuees landed Sunday night at an air base in Djibouti, the Defense Ministry said. Another plane, carrying Italy's ambassador and military personnel involved in the evacuation, was expected in Djibouti later in the night.

About 100 people were flown out of Khartoum by Spanish military aircraft — more than 30 Spaniards and the rest from Portugal, Italy, Poland, Ireland, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Argentina, the foreign ministry said.

Officials in Jordan said four planes landed at Amman military airport carrying 343 Jordanian evacuees from Port Sudan. Other flights from Sudan were organized by Greece and the Netherlands.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak tweeted that U.K. armed forces evacuated British diplomatic staff and dependents "amid a significant escalation in violence and threats."

Overland travel through contested areas was possible but dangerous. Khartoum is about 840 kilometers

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(520 miles) from Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

On Saturday, Saudi Arabia said it evacuated 157 people, including 91 Saudi nationals and citizens of other countries. Saudi state TV showed a large convoy of cars and buses from Khartoum to Port Sudan, where a navy ship took them to the Saudi port of Jeddah.

Fighters attacked a U.S. Embassy convoy last week, and stormed the home of the EU ambassador. Violence wounded an Egyptian Embassy employee in Sudan, according to Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Abu Zaid.

Egypt, which said it had over 10,000 citizens in Sudan, urged those in cities other than Khartoum to head to consular offices in Port Sudan and Wadi Halfa in the north for evacuation, the state-run MENA news agency reported.

The power struggle between the Sudanese military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the RSF, led by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, has dealt a harsh blow to Sudan's hopes for a democratic transition. The rival generals came to power after a pro-democracy uprising led to the ouster of the former strongman, al-Bashir. In 2021, the generals joined forces to seize power in a coup.

The current violence came after Burhan and 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.

Both generals, each craving international legitimacy, have accused the other of obstructing the evacuations. The Sudanese military alleged the RSF opened fire on a French convoy, wounding a French national. The RSF countered it came under attack by warplanes as French citizens and diplomats left the embassy for Omdurman, saying the military's strikes "endangered the lives of French nationals."

Hospitals have struggled as violence rages. Many wounded are stranded by the fighting, according to the Sudan Doctors' Syndicate that monitors casualties, suggesting the death toll is probably higher than what is known.

The Italian medical group Emergency said 46 of its staff refused to leave, working in hospitals in Khartoum, Nyala and Port Sudan.

Thousands of Sudanese have fled fighting in Khartoum and elsewhere, U.N. agencies said, but millions are sheltering in their homes amid explosions, gunfire and looting without adequate electricity, food or water.

In the western region of Darfur, up to 20,000 people left for neighboring Chad. War is not new to Darfur, where ethnically motivated violence has killed up to 300,000 people since 2003. But Sudan is not used to such heavy fighting in its capital, which "has become a ghost city," said Atiya Abdalla Atiya of the Doctors' Syndicate.

Khalid Omar, a spokesman for the pro-democracy bloc that seeks to restore civilian rule, urged both generals to resolve their differences. "There is an opportunity to stop this war and put the country on the right path," he wrote on Facebook. "This is a war fueled by groups from the deposed regime who want it to continue."

Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre in Jerusalem, Samy Magdy in Cairo, Michael Corder in The Hague, Netherlands, Angela Charlton in Paris, Frances D'Emilio in Rome and Fay Abuelgasim in Beirut contributed.

39 bodies dug up in cult investigation of pastor in Kenya

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Thirty-nine bodies have been found so far on land owned by a pastor in coastal Kenya who was arrested for telling his followers to fast to death.

Malindi sub-county police chief John Kemboi said that more shallow graves have yet to be dug up on the land belonging to pastor Paul Makenzi, who was arrested on April 14 over links to cultism.

The total death toll is 43, because a further four people died after they and others were discovered starving at the Good News International Church last week.

Police have asked a court to allow them to hold Makenzi longer as investigations into the deaths of his followers continue.

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A tipoff from members of the public led police to raid the pastor's property in Malindi, where they found 15 emaciated people, including the four who later died. The followers said they were starving on the pastor's instructions in order to meet Jesus.

Police had been told there were dozens of shallow graves spread across Makenzi's farm and digging started on Friday.

Makenzi has been on hunger strike for the past four days while in police custody.

The pastor has been arrested twice before, in 2019 and in March of this year, in relation to the deaths of children. Each time, he was released on bond, and both cases are still proceeding through the court.

Local politicians have urged the court not to release him this time, decrying the spread of cults in the Malindi area.

Cults are common in Kenya, which has a largely religious society.

Some DeSantis allies feel growing urgency to launch 2024 bid

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

Inside the Florida statehouse, Gov. Ron DeSantis' Republican allies say they're working "at warp speed" to finish their legislative business.

In South Carolina and Nevada, early voting states that are critical in a presidential primary, his operatives are moving quickly to build out a political team that is essentially a campaign in waiting. And in Washington, his most vocal supporters are urging him to announce his White House intentions now.

Just six months after a dominant reelection sent his national stock soaring, a palpable sense of urgency is growing among DeSantis' allies as increasingly emboldened critics within his own party — particularly former President Donald Trump — work to undermine his presidential campaign before it begins.

"I would prefer him to be in the race right now. In fact, I encouraged him to get in the race right now," said Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who hosted a visit by DeSantis to Washington last week that was overshadowed by Trump's efforts to pick off support among Florida's congressional delegation.

In an interview, Massie, who is one of just three members of Congress who has endorsed DeSantis for 2024, acknowledged the governor is losing some political strength.

Many GOP voters have rallied behind Trump in the wake of his recent criminal indictment in New York. Some DeSantis donors are pausing their donations, citing concerns about his readiness for the national stage. Other would-be supporters have begun to worry that the policy victories he celebrates in Florida — including the six-week abortion ban he signed earlier in the month and an ongoing crackdown on Disney, the state's largest employer — may ultimately become political liabilities.

"If there is any urgency, it's to make sure no third-place candidate emerges. Right now, it's a heads-up race between Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis," Massie said. "The urgency I feel is, the more cats and dogs that get in the race, the more they could siphon from Ron DeSantis."

The Republican Party won't formally choose its next presidential nominee until August of next year at its national convention. But with the first presidential debate little more than three months away, several Republicans have launched campaigns already. More are expected to join in the coming weeks.

For DeSantis, who has operated for much of the year with a quiet confidence that he could enter the race on his terms, some Republicans suggest it may be later than he thinks.

While all signs point to a DeSantis run, he isn't likely to make any announcements until after the state legislature concludes its business in early May. Some allies initially believed he might wait until as late as early summer to enter the race, but with the political landscape shifting, they now expect him to announce as early as the week of May 8, but more likely around the end of the month.

DeSantis is spending his time abroad this week. Over the weekend, he launched what his office described as an international trade mission to Japan, South Korea, Israel and the United Kingdom.

Technically, DeSantis couldn't enter the 2024 presidential contest now even if he wanted to because the Republican-controlled state legislature has yet to overturn Florida's so-called "resign to run" law, which bars officials from seeking one office while holding another. Republican House Speaker Paul Renner said

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last week that he's confident the change would make it through the Legislature in the coming weeks.

As DeSantis prepares to launch, the Republican statehouse supermajority has worked at a rapid pace to carry out the governor's conservative cultural agenda. In a sign of their ongoing compliance, lawmakers last week began to move legislation that would further solidify DeSantis' control of Disney World's governing body, the latest spat in the Republican governor's extraordinary feud with the private business.

Florida state Rep. Spencer Roach, a Trump critic allied with DeSantis, noted that the state Legislature has been conducting its business "at warp speed" this spring. The accelerated pace, he said, is likely to allow DeSantis to shift his attention to the 2024 contest as soon as possible.

Roach downplayed any sense of urgency around DeSantis's announcement, but acknowledged Trump's merciless attacks against the Florida governor may be taking a toll. Indeed, Trump has been almost singularly focused on tearing down DeSantis, whom he calls "Ron DeSanctimonious" and "Meatball Ron." The kitchen-sink assault on social media, in speeches and in paid ads covers everything from DeSantis' past policies on Social Security to his character and even his sexuality.

Trump's jabs on Social Security and Medicare have been particularly effective, Roach conceded.

"I have had elderly constituents and even members of my family say, 'Hey, I'm a little worried,'" Roach said. "Those attacks are landing."

To that end, the DeSantis-sanctioned super PAC, Never Back Down, is taking aggressive steps to build out what appears to be a campaign in waiting across several key states. The super PAC, which has reported \$30 million in the bank so far, is based in an Atlanta office with roughly two dozen paid staff.

As of Friday, the group said it had installed at least six paid staffers on the payroll in each of the first four states on the Republican presidential primary calendar: Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina. Each state features a director, political director and a field director, among others.

The super PAC has also established 28 Students for DeSantis chapters across 18 states, including the first four on the calendar and others in subsequent primary states like Alabama, Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas. Several more are already in the works.

Most of the announced candidates don't have that much manpower on the ground so far.

"This really is based on people who are excited and in these states craving action now," said Kristin Davison, Never Back Down's chief operating officer. "We want to give them a vehicle and infrastructure to convert their enthusiasm into action."

Davidson pushed back against the negative narrative developing around DeSantis, who isn't even an announced candidate. "Some of the D.C. headlines are just disconnected from the reality of what we're seeing on the ground," she said.

As DeSantis wraps up his business in Florida, the super PAC has begun to give him protection from Trump's attacks on the airwaves.

The group's first paid ad, which ran earlier this month on Fox News, knocked Trump for attacking fellow Republicans: "Trump should fight Democrats, not lie about Gov. DeSantis," the narrator says.

But the group invested much more in a positive ad highlighting DeSantis' background and record in Florida, which ran on broadcast television in Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina last week. The super PAC believes that DeSantis' name is well known among primary voters, but most don't know about his origins.

To that end, the group distributed its first mailer last week to likely primary voters in the same four states noting the DeSantis family's "humble beginnings" in Pennsylvania and Ohio, his participation in the Little League World Series, his military service and his political victories in Florida.

"Ron DeSantis: A blue-collar backbone forged with steel," reads the main headline on the mailer, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

And while the super PAC is spending millions to ensure DeSantis has momentum when he gets into the race, DeSantis himself has only just begun to introduce himself to voters beyond Florida.

He made one trip to Iowa last month, but he hasn't returned since, even as his rivals flock to the first-in-the-nation primary voting state. DeSantis was notably absent this weekend as Iowa's religious conserva-

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tives gathered for the state's Faith and Freedom Coalition spring meeting.

Steve Scheffler, the Republican National Committee member who leads the group, described DeSantis as "a pretty appealing" potential candidate. He said the Florida governor paid to help sponsor the event and had representatives on site, but he still encouraged DeSantis to spend more time with Iowa voters — especially in the rural parts of the state.

"It's going to need to happen sooner than later," Scheffler said.

Associated Press writer Anthony Izaguirre in Tallahassee, Florida, contributed to this report.

Biden's 2024 campaign has been hiding in plain sight

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's reelection campaign has been hiding in plain sight all along.

The contours of the 2024 campaign that Biden will formally launch with a video as soon as this week will look a lot like his messaging and policy moves from the past few months: Play up accomplishments from his first two years, draw a sharp contrast with Republican policies he deems extreme, and brush off worries about his age.

Biden, aides contend, has essentially been campaigning since Republicans took control of the House last year, focused on showing Americans how his administration is implementing massive new infrastructure, technology and climate laws, and portraying Republicans as in the grip of the far right at a time when Washington is nearing a crucial fight over raising the nation's borrowing limit.

While advisers say Biden's activities and message in coming months will be largely indistinguishable from what he's been doing over the last six months, the frame of reference will inevitably shift as voters increasingly tune in to 2024 political dynamics.

"President Biden is delivering and making the strong case for reelection before, during and after any formal campaign announcement," said Democratic consultant and former Biden spokesman Scott Mulhauser. "Rather than throwing darts at calendars, let's focus on the President doing his job and doing it well, from an investing in America tour, an economy humming and unemployment at historic lows to a home run of a State of the Union, an expertly pulled-off Ukraine trip and more."

He added: "These wins on economic and political fronts onward are what success looks like, how incumbents win and matter far more than a campaign kick-off event."

Aides are planning for Biden's launch video to be released Tuesday, the four-year anniversary of his first successful campaign launch, but said the timing was still fluid. It was not immediately clear whether the president, who was spending the weekend at Camp David, had as yet taped it. He was expected to select Julie Rodriguez, a senior White House adviser, to manage his reelection campaign, according to two people familiar with deliberations.

Biden has taken his time in making official his candidacy for reelection not because he's wavered in his commitment to run, a half-dozen aides and advisers said, but because there was little incentive to do it sooner.

Incumbents — with the exception of former President Donald Trump, who filed for reelection on his Inauguration Day — tend to hold off on announcing as long as possible. Most deemed it easier to appeal to a wider swath of the populace when they were viewed outside the lens of electoral politics.

Leaks and private reassurances last year about Biden's intention to run, aides said, were designed to reinforce to the political class that the president was all-in for a second term and to ward off any serious rivals for the nomination. That effort largely succeeded, with only self-help author Marianne Williamson and anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. mounting largely symbolic challenges to Biden.

Even with Democrats giving Biden a clear path to the nomination, Biden faces a more uncertain general election picture, with the potential for a rematch with GOP frontrunner Trump, or a contest against one of the handful of other Republicans campaigning in part on ushering in a new generation of leadership. Republicans in Congress, meanwhile, continue to hammer Biden on government spending increases and

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inflation as they attempt to weaken him before the upcoming election.

Biden's decision to launch the campaign now is largely driven by a desire to start fundraising: His last campaign raised more than \$1 billion, and he'll need to marshal even more this time around.

He's expected to jumpstart that effort with a gathering for top donors in Washington on Friday. The president also needs to begin building the digital and field organizing operation for what aides expect to be a close general election owing to the country's polarization, no matter who emerges as the GOP standard-bearer.

Biden's clear path to the 2024 nomination will be a markedly different experience from four years ago, when he was written off by much of the political establishment until he consolidated support as the candidate best positioned to defeat Trump. That campaign also took place under the unusual constraints associated with the coronavirus pandemic, which sharply limited travel and in-person politicking.

This time, Biden will have to juggle the challenge of running for office with the demands of running the country. Aides and allies contend that those priorities are one and the same.

"The single best thing Joe Biden can do for his reelection is to continue to be president of United States, and, when he's out there barnstorming the country, talking about what he's delivered and what he wants to do," said Eric Schultz, a Democratic operative and spokesman for former President Barack Obama. "That's exactly what he's been doing."

It's no coincidence that Biden's announcement is expected to land during a busy week for his presidency — the timing is meant to highlight his focus on governing rather than campaigning.

Biden's schedule for the week includes a Monday meeting with Tennessee lawmakers who were punished for protesting in support of gun control laws, a Tuesday speech to a trade union, a Wednesday state visit by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, and a weekend appearance at the White House Correspondents' Association dinner. He'll also continue to shadowbox with congressional Republicans over how to raise the nation's borrowing authority.

The president, at 80 already the oldest person ever elected president, also knows he will have to contend with voter concerns about his fitness for the job. So far, he has brushed aside those concerns by repeatedly telling voters to just "watch me."

Aides say he plans to mount a robust campaign when the time comes. Biden was set to ramp up fundraising in coming weeks for Democrats — and now for himself. But as far as holding larger campaign events, aides said Biden intends to follow a roadmap similar to Obama, who launched his reelection campaign in April 2011 but waited 13 months to hold his first official reelection campaign rally in May 2012.

Still, Biden faces skepticism even from members of his own party. Only about half of Democrats think he should run again in 2024, even if most are likely to fall in behind him if he becomes the nominee.

A recent poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that 26% of Americans overall want to see Biden run again — a slight recovery from the 22% who said that in January. Forty-seven percent of Democrats say they want him to run, also up slightly from only 37% who said that in January.

For all the talk of staying the course, aides acknowledge it's not enough for Biden to focus on what he's gotten done. He's begun holding events to highlight popular components of his agenda that got left on the cutting room floor during the Democrats' legislative blitz over the last two years.

For example, Biden last week held a Rose Garden gathering to showcase his efforts to boost affordability and quality of child and long-term care.

He's also using the bully pulpit to push for strengthening gun control laws after recent high-profile shootings and to write into law a national right to abortion. Both are proposals his aides believe have the backing of most Americans, but they are unlikely to pass unless Democrats also win significant congressional majorities along with reelecting Biden.

Dying patients protest looming telehealth crackdown

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

At age 93, struggling with the effects of a stroke, heart failure and recurrent cancer, Teri Sheridan was ready to end her life using New Jersey's law that allows medically assisted suicide -- but she was bed-bound, too sick to travel.

So last Nov. 17, surrounded by three of her children, Sheridan drank a lethal dose of drugs prescribed by a doctor she had never met in person, only online. She died within minutes.

Soon, others who seek Sheridan's final option may find it out of reach, the unintended result of a federal move to roll back online prescribing of potentially addictive drugs allowed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"How much should one person suffer?" said Sheridan's daughter, Georgene White, 68. "She wanted to just go to sleep and not wake up."

Online prescribing rules for controlled drugs were relaxed three years ago under emergency waivers to ensure critical medications remained available during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has proposed a rule that would reinstate most previously longstanding requirements that doctors see patients in person before prescribing narcotic drugs such as Oxycontin, amphetamines such as Adderall, and a host of other potentially dangerous drugs.

The aim is to reduce improper prescribing of these drugs by telehealth companies that boomed during the pandemic. Given the ongoing opioid epidemic, allowing continued broad use of telemedicine prescribing "would pose too great a risk to the public health and safety," the proposed rule said. It also cracks down on how doctors can prescribe other less-addictive drugs, like Xanax, used to treat anxiety, and buprenorphine, a narcotic used to treat opioid addiction.

The rule would allow some of these drugs to be prescribed with telemedicine for an initial 30-day dose, though patients would need to be seen in person to get a refill. And patients who have been referred to a new doctor by one they had previously met in person could continue to receive prescriptions for the drugs via telemedicine.

DEA Administrator Anne Milgram called the plan "telemedicine with guardrails."

The agency, with input from the Department of Health and Human Services, is working to finalize the rule by May 11, when the COVID public health emergency officially ends, an HHS spokeswoman said. If approved by then, the new requirements would take effect in November.

The proposal has sparked a massive backlash, including more than 35,000 comments to a federal portal and calls from advocates, members of Congress and medical groups to reconsider certain patients or provisions.

"They completely forgot that there was a population of people who are dying," said Dr. Lonny Shavelson, a California physician who chairs the American Clinicians Academy on Medical Aid in Dying, a coalition of doctors who help patients access care under so-called right-to-die laws.

Among the biggest complaints: The rule would delay or block access for patients who seek medically assisted suicide and hospice care, critics said. Many of the comments -- including nearly 10,000 delivered in person to DEA offices -- came from doctors and patients protesting the effect of the rule on seriously ill and dying patients.

"Please do not make the end of life harder for me," wrote Lynda Bluestein, 75, of Bridgeport, Connecticut. In March, Bluestein, who has terminal fallopian tube cancer, reached a settlement with the state of Vermont that will allow her to be the first non-resident to use its medically assisted suicide law. By the time she's ready to use the drugs, she expects to be too ill to travel to see a doctor in person for the prescription, she wrote.

The clash between desperate patients who need treatment and DEA's efforts to bar telehealth companies from overprescribing dangerous medications was inevitable, said David Herzberg, a historian of drugs at the University of Buffalo.

"The balancing act is so tricky," he said.

Laws in 10 states and Washington, D.C. allow dying people with a prognosis of six months or less to

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end their lives with a lethal combination of medications covered by the DEA rule. But such patients are often too sick to visit a doctor in person — or they live hundreds of miles from the nearest willing and qualified provider, Shavelson said.

There are similar issues for the 1.7 million Medicare recipients enrolled in hospice care in the U.S., said Judi Lund Person, who oversees regulatory compliance for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. Rolling back online prescribing flexibilities could mean a dying patient would wait for days for drugs to ease pain and other symptoms.

"They just don't have time for that," she said.

Shavelson and his colleagues called for an exception to the rule for the hundreds of patients a year who qualify for medically assisted suicide. Both the American Medical Association and the California Medical Association sent letters asking the DEA to carve out provisions for doctors prescribing the most dangerous category of drugs to patients receiving hospice or palliative care.

"These patients are extremely fragile and their medical conditions do not allow them to easily access a physician's office," wrote Dr. Donald D. Hernandez, president of the California group. Such people pose a "reduced risk for abuse" given their clear need for the medications.

Congress directed DEA in 2008 to create exceptions for certain providers to permit remote prescribing, but the agency has not done so, Virginia Democrat Sen. Mark Warner said in a statement last month.

DEA officials did not respond to questions about whether COVID-19 telehealth waivers would remain in effect if the proposed rule isn't finalized by May 11 or whether the agency will allow exceptions for remote prescribing.

During the pandemic, prescriptions for medically assisted suicide went up, in some cases significantly. In Oregon, for instance, they climbed nearly 49%, to 432 in 2022 from 290 in 2019. The number of deaths under the law in that state rose, too, to 246 from 170. Nationally, at least 1,300 people die each year using the process, according to available state figures.

Telemedicine was key to access during the COVID emergency, said Dr. Robin Plumer, the New Jersey doctor who prescribed the drugs Teri Sheridan took. Plumer has overseen 80 assisted suicide deaths since 2020. Without online prescribing, 35% to 40% of her patients wouldn't have been able to use the law.

"I feel like we've taught people over the past couple of years that telemedicine does work in so many areas and it's a great improvement for people," especially for those who are homebound or dying, Plumer said.

"And what?" she said. "They're suddenly going to yank that away?"

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

This story has been updated to correct the name of the agency to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, not the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

Fox's settlement with Dominion unlikely to cost it \$787.5M

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

Fox Corp.'s \$787.5 million settlement with Dominion Voting Systems over defamation charges is eye-popping, but the ultimate cost to the media company is likely to be much lower.

On Tuesday, Fox settled with Dominion over charges that Fox News baselessly accused the company of rigging its voting machines against former President Donald Trump in 2020. It was the most-watched media libel case in decades.

Fox had about \$4 billion of cash on hand as of December 2022, and MoffettNathanson analyst Robert Fishman expects the company to pay the settlement during the current quarter.

How much the lawsuit will actually end up costing Fox is unclear because there are ways it can defray some of the expense, primarily through insurance and the use of tax deductions.

Fox can deduct the Dominion settlement from its income taxes as an expense necessary for the cost

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of doing business. Fox Chief Communications Officer Brian Nick has confirmed the deductibility of the settlement.

Big companies often deduct large settlements to help offset some of the cost, but since settlement amounts are usually confidential, it's difficult to pin down exactly how much they benefit. Payments that are seen as restitution or compensation can be deducted, while payments made to the government or at the direction of a government are usually not deductible.

Robert Willens, a tax professor at the Columbia University School of Business, estimates that after the tax write-off, Fox will incur about three-fourths of the settlement amount, about \$590 million.

"The key is that if the payments are being made to private parties and not at the behest of the government then you can pretty much conclude without any fear of contradiction that the payment will be deductible," he said.

A study by the Government Accountability Office in 2005 found that of 34 settlements totaling over \$1 billion, 20 companies reported deducting some portion or all of their settlement payments. Big banks such as Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase reportedly also deducted portions of their settlements of charges tied to the financial crisis of 2008.

Also, if Fox is insured, insurance is likely to cover some of the settlement. Chad Milton, a partner at Media Risk Consultants, said a large media company such as Fox could have anywhere between \$100 million to \$500 million in coverage, including media liability insurance and other types of insurance.

"It's not hard to stack up \$100 million but as you go higher than that, it gets harder and harder," Milton said.

Usually, there's a certain amount a media company has to pay, which could be in the millions, before insurance kicks in. However, the deductible includes attorney fees, which in a high-profile case like Fox-Dominion could be tens of millions of dollars or higher, so the deductible could be swallowed up just by attorney fees.

One wrinkle: even if an insurance company pays a substantial part of the settlement, there could be an annual aggregate limit of liability, which could mean that insurers wouldn't cover another big-money settlement.

And media companies and insurers don't always agree on who should cover what, since there are caveats written into contracts that allow insurers to avoid paying under certain circumstances. In 2017, Disney settled a defamation suit that was filed in 2012 after ABC aired a segment that questioned the safety of a meat producer's products that critics dubbed "pink slime." But one of its insurers, AIG, ended up suing Disney so it wouldn't have to pay part of the settlement, although AIG eventually lost.

Fox has also said it doesn't expect the settlement to affect its operations.

"We don't expect significant operational effects or changes to our business given our cash flow, strong balance sheet and the health of our business," the company said in a statement after the settlement was announced.

MoffettNathanson's Fishman said everything indicates the company will be able to run its business as usual.

"It isn't clear there has been much, if any, impact of these lawsuits on Fox News' viewership and business," he said.

Fishman said he doesn't expect the settlement to hamper Fox's ability to return money to shareholders, including a \$1 billion accelerated share repurchase program announced in February.

Fox has a similar lawsuit looming with another voting machine company, Smartmatic, but no date has been set and the case might not go to court for a couple of years.

An earlier version of this story said Disney settled a defamation suit in 2012 after ABC aired a segment that questioned the safety of a meat producer's products. The settlement of the suit was announced in 2017.

Struggling Bed Bath & Beyond files for bankruptcy protection

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Bed Bath & Beyond — one of the original big box retailers known for its seemingly endless offerings of sheets, towels and kitchen gadgets — filed for bankruptcy protection, following years of dismal sales and losses and numerous failed turnaround plans.

The beleaguered home goods chain made the filing Sunday in U.S. District Court in New Jersey and said it will start an orderly wind down of its operations, while seeking a buyer for all or some of its businesses. In the bankruptcy filing, the retailer said it anticipates closing all of its stores by June 30.

For now, the company's 360 Bed Bath & Beyond stores and its 120 Buy Buy Baby sites as well as its websites will remain open to serve customers.

It listed estimated assets and liabilities in the range of \$1 billion to \$10 billion. The move comes after the company failed to secure funds to stay afloat.

In a statement, the company, based in Union, New Jersey, said it voluntarily made the filing "to implement an orderly wind down of its businesses while conducting a limited marketing process to solicit interest in one or more sales of some or all of its assets."

The store closings will put thousands of jobs at risk. The company employed 14,000 workers, according to the court filing. That's drastically down from the 32,000 as of February 2022.

Bed Bath & Beyond said it secured a commitment of roughly \$240 million in financing from Sixth Street Specialty Lending, Inc. to allow it to keep operating during the bankruptcy process.

"It's the death of an icon. A lot of people have grown up with it," said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail. "It's an institution in retailing, but unfortunately being an institution doesn't protect you from financial woes."

Founded in 1971, Bed Bath & Beyond had for years enjoyed its status as a big box retailer that offered a vast selection of sheets, towels and gadgets unmatched by department store rivals. It was among the first to introduce shoppers to many of today's household items like the air fryer or single-serve coffee maker, and its 15% to 20% coupons were ubiquitous.

But for the last decade or so, Bed Bath & Beyond struggled with weak sales, largely because of its messy assortments and lagging online strategy that made it hard to compete with the likes of Target and Walmart, both of which have spruced up their home departments with higher quality sheets and beddings. Meanwhile, online players like Wayfair have lured customers with affordable and trendy furniture and home décor.

In late 2019, Bed Bath & Beyond tapped Target executive Mark Tritton to take the helm and turn around sales. Tritton quickly reduced coupons and started to introduce store label brands at the expense of national labels, a strategy that proved disastrous for the retailer.

And the pandemic, which happened shortly after his arrival, forced the retailer to temporarily close its stores. It was never able to use the health crisis to pivot to a successful online strategy as others had, analysts said. And while many retailers were grappling with supply chain issues a year ago, Bed Bath was among the most vulnerable, missing many of its 200 best-selling items including kitchen appliances and personal electronics, during the holiday 2021 season.

The retailer ousted Tritton in June 2022 after two back-to-back quarters of disastrous sales. In recent months, the company, under the stewardship of recently appointed president and CEO Sue Grove, went back to its original strategy of focusing on national brands, instead of pushing its own store labels. But the company has had a hard time having suppliers commit to delivering merchandise because of the retailer's financial woes.

This past holiday season, the stores were missing many key items, and it lost many customers, a problem that continued to plague the retailer through the winter and spring seasons.

The bankruptcy filing comes as the company's shares have tumbled even more as speculation of an impending bankruptcy filing increased. Its financial performance has also deteriorated. In late March, it noted that preliminary results showed anywhere from a 40% to 50% decline in sales at stores opened at least a year for the quarter ended Feb. 25.

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The company also said in a Securities and Exchange Commission filing in late March that it planned to sell \$300 million worth of shares to avoid bankruptcy filing.

The home goods retailer had been issuing several warnings about a potential bankruptcy filing since early this year. In late January, it noted in a government filing it was in default of its loans and didn't have the funds to repay what it owes. The company had said the default is forcing the company to look at various alternatives including restructuring its debt in bankruptcy court.

Bed Bath & Beyond joins a growing list of retailers that have filed for bankruptcy so far this year including party supplies chain Party City and David's Bridal. The bankruptcy could offer a window of what's to come in the retail industry, given the changing landscape and the increasing challenges in the U.S. economy.

During the depths of the pandemic, a number of retailers filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy including Neiman Marcus and J.C. Penney. But in 2022, there was a respite in retail bankruptcy filings as shoppers, flush with government stimulus money and a pile of savings, spent with abandon, helping to lift all types of retailers. But as credit tightens and inflation remains stubborn, shoppers have been tightening their purse strings in recent months, leaving struggling retailers like Bed Bath & Beyond more vulnerable.

Bed Bath & Beyond had been trying to turn around its business and slash costs after the previous management's new strategies worsened a sales slump. The company announced last August it would close about 150 of its namesake stores and slash its workforce by 20%. It also lined up more than \$500 million of new financing.

Bed Bath & Beyond's shares, which were trading at distressed levels, have also been on a turbulent run. It made a monstrous run from \$5.77 to \$23.08 in a little more than two weeks in August. The trading was reminiscent of last year's meme-stock craze, when out-of-favor companies suddenly became darlings of smaller-pocketed investors.

But the stock fell back to Earth after Ryan Cohen, the billionaire co-founder of online pet-products retailer Chewy Inc. who purchased a nearly 10% stake in Bed Bath & Beyond last March, sold off all his shares.

Shares were hovering close to 30 cents in the past few days. A year ago, shares were trading at around \$17.

Bed Bath & Beyond said it expects to process returns and exchanges in accordance with its usual policies until May 24 for items purchased prior to Sunday. It also anticipates gift cards, gift certificates and loyalty certificates will be accepted through May 8. It will stop accepting coupons on Wednesday.

AP Writer Bruce Shipkowski in Toms River, New Jersey contributed to this report.

Follow Anne D'Innocenzio: <http://twitter.com/ADInnocenzio>

3,000 migrants begin walk north from southern Mexico

By EDGAR H. CLEMENTE Associated Press

TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP) — Around 3,000 migrants set out Sunday on what they call a mass protest procession through southern Mexico to demand the end of detention centers like the one that caught fire last month, killing 40 migrants.

The migrants started from the city of Tapachula, near the Guatemalan border. They say their aim is to reach Mexico City to demand changes in the way migrants are treated.

"It could well have been any of us," Salvadoran migrant Miriam Argueta said of those killed in the fire. "In fact, a lot of our countrymen died. The only thing we are asking for is justice, and to be treated like anyone else."

But in the past many participants in such processions have continued on to the U.S. border, which is almost always their goal. The migrants are mainly from Central America, Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia.

Mexican authorities have used paperwork restrictions and highway checkpoints to bottle up tens of thousands of frustrated migrants in Tapachula, making it hard for them to travel to the U.S. border.

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Argueta said that when migrants look for work in Tapachula, "they give us jobs, perhaps not humiliating, but the one the Mexicans don't want to do, hard work that pays very little."

Organizer Irineo Mújica said the migrants are demanding the dissolving of the country's immigration agency, whose officials have been blamed — and some charged with homicide — in the March 27 fire. Mújica called the immigration detention centers "jails."

The roots of the migrant caravan phenomenon began years ago when activists organized processions — often with a religious theme - during Holy Week to dramatize the hardships and needs of migrants. In 2018 a minority of those involved wound up traveling all the way to the U.S. border.

This year's mass walk began well after Holy Week had ended, but Mújica, a leader of the Pueblos Sin Fronteras activist group, called it a "Viacrucis," or stations of the cross procession, and some migrants carried wooden crosses.

"In this Viacrucis, we are asking the government that justice be done to the killers, for them to stop hiding high-ranking officials," Mújica said in Tapachula before the long walk began. "We are also asking that these jails be ended, and that the National Immigration Institute be dissolved."

Some migrants carried banners or crosses reading "Government Crime" and "The Government Killed Them."

The migrants made it only as far as the town of Alvaro Obregon, about 9 miles (14 kilometers) from Tapachula, before stopping to settle down and rest for the remainder of the day, after having walked from around dawn.

The migrants stretched out under a covered athletic court and under trees at a park in Alvaro Obregon. There was no sign at the start of any police attempt to block them.

Mexican prosecutors have said they will press charges against the immigration agency's top national official, Francisco Garduño, who is scheduled to make a court appearance April 21.

Federal prosecutors have said Garduño was remiss in not preventing the disaster in Ciudad Juarez despite earlier indications of problems at his agency's detention centers. Prosecutors said government audits had found "a pattern of irresponsibility and repeated omissions" in the immigration institute.

The fire in Ciudad Juarez, across the border from El Paso, Texas, began after a migrant allegedly set fire to foam mattresses to protest a supposed transfer. The fire quickly filled the facility with smoke. No one let the migrants out.

Six officials of the National Immigration Institute, a guard at the center and the Venezuelan migrant accused of starting the blaze are already in custody facing homicide charges.

Migrants, especially poorer ones who cannot afford to pay migrant smugglers, have often seen such mass walks, or caravans, as a way to reach the U.S. border. Successive caravans grew to massive size in 2018 and 2019 before authorities in Mexico and Central American began stopping them of highways.

The COVID-19 pandemic also played a role in quashing the caravans, as countries instituted health restrictions.

The heat and sheer effort of walking 750 miles (1,200 kilometers) to Mexico City usually forces migrants to start walking in the pre-dawn darkness and stop in the early afternoon in towns along the way.

Many of the migrants — some carrying infants or babies in strollers — also look to catch rides from passing trucks. In the past, authorities have sometimes allowed that to happen, and sometimes prohibited it. But sheer desperation drives many of the migrants.

Venezuelan migrant Estefany Peroez was walking with her three daughters. In Tapachula, they had been sleeping in the streets.

"We don't have anything to eat, the authorities don't help us, we are doing this to give my daughters a better life," Peroez said.

NBCUniversal CEO Shell departs over 'inappropriate conduct'

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and JAKE COYLE undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Jeff Shell, the chief executive of NBCUniversal and one of the media industry's renowned executives, is departing the company after an investigation into inappropriate conduct, parent company Comcast announced Sunday.

In a brief statement, Shell said Sunday would be his last day after what he called "an inappropriate relationship with a woman in the company."

"I'm truly sorry I let my Comcast and NBCUniversal colleagues down, they are the most talented people in the business and the opportunity to work with them the last 19 years has been a privilege," said Shell, who has been CEO of NBCUniversal since January 2020.

He joins a number of media industry executives who have left their posts in recent years over inappropriate relations, including others at NBCUniversal. Three years ago, NBCUniversal Vice Chairman Ron Meyer, a Hollywood power player, left the company after revealing he received threats of extortion following a settlement with a woman with whom he had an affair.

And last year, Jeff Zucker abruptly resigned as president of CNN while acknowledging a consensual relationship with another network executive — an entanglement that surfaced during a probe of now-fired anchor Chris Cuomo.

Former CBS Chief Les Moonves resigned in September 2018, just hours after reports of multiple allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

As CEO of NBCUniversal, Shell oversaw the company's portfolio of news and entertainment television networks, a premiere motion picture company, significant television and sports production operations and a leading television stations group, according to the company website. He also oversaw the company's theme parks and a premium ad-supported streaming service.

Previously, Shell was chairman of NBCUniversal Film and Entertainment. In that role, he oversaw the content creation, as well as the programming and distribution engines behind NBCUniversal's film and network television businesses, including NBC Entertainment, Universal Filmed Entertainment Group (UFEG), Telemundo and NBCUniversal International.

Comcast did not say who will succeed Shell.

The company is slated to report its first-quarter earnings results on Thursday.

This story has been corrected to show that Shell was not ousted from NBCUniversal, but is leaving as part of a mutual agreement with the company.

Lizzo brings drag queens on stage, protesting Tennessee law

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — In a concert Friday night in Knoxville, Tennessee, Lizzo filled the stage with drag queens in a glittery protest against the state's legislation designed to restrict drag performances in public.

While performing at Thompson-Boling Arena, the Grammy-winning "Juice" singer brought out a number of drag performers, including Aquaria, Kandy Muse, Asia O'Hara and Vanessa Vanjie Mateo. On Saturday, Lizzo posted videos on Instagram from the show, including comments to the crowd that referenced the pending law.

In February, Republican Gov. Bill Lee signed the legislation against "adult cabaret" in public or in front of minors. A federal judge temporarily blocked the law in late March, saying it was too vaguely written. Civil rights groups have criticized the law as a violation of free speech.

The Tennessee law is part of a wider Republican effort to restrict drag shows and other LGBTQ+ public gatherings.

"In light of recent and tragic events and current events, I was told by people on the internet, 'Cancel your shows in Tennessee,' 'Don't go to Tennessee,'" Lizzo said during the Friday concert. "Their reason was valid, but why would I not come to the people who need to hear this message the most?"

"Why would I not create a safe space in Tennessee where we can celebrate drag entertainers and celebrate our differences?" added Lizzo.

This story corrects the name of drag performer Vanessa Vanjie Mateo.

Ukrainian troop positions spark counteroffensive speculation

By DAVID RISING and JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian military forces have successfully established positions on the eastern side of the Dnieper River, according to a new analysis, giving rise to speculation Sunday that the advances could be an early sign of Kyiv's long-awaited spring counteroffensive.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, reported late Saturday that geolocated footage from pro-Kremlin military bloggers indicated that Ukrainian troops had established a foothold near the town of Oleshky, along with "stable supply lines" to their positions.

Analysts widely believe that if Ukraine goes ahead with a spring counteroffensive, a major goal would be to break through the land corridor between Russia and the annexed Crimean Peninsula, which would necessitate crossing the Dnieper River in the country's south.

Responding to Ukrainian media reports proclaiming that the establishment of such positions indicated the counteroffensive had begun, Natalia Humeniuk, the spokeswoman for Ukraine's Operational Command South, called for patience.

While neither confirming nor denying the ISW report, she said only that details of military operations in the Dnieper delta couldn't be disclosed for operational and security reasons.

Speaking on Ukrainian television, Humeniuk added that it was "very difficult work" when "it's necessary to overcome an obstacle such as the Dnieper, when the front line passes through a wide and powerful river."

The Kremlin-installed head of the Kherson region, one of four parts of Ukraine that Russia said it was illegally annexing in September, denied on Sunday that Ukrainian forces have established a foothold on the east bank of the Dnieper.

In a Telegram update, Vladimir Saldo said that Russian forces are "in full control" of the area, and speculated that the images referenced by the ISW may have depicted Ukrainian sabotage units that "managed to take a selfie" across the Dnieper before being forced back.

After more than a year since the Russian invasion, recent fighting has become a war of attrition, with neither side able to gain momentum.

But Ukraine has recently received sophisticated weapons from its Western allies, and new troops freshly trained in the West, giving rise to growing anticipation of a counteroffensive.

American-made Patriot missiles arrived in Ukraine last week and military spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said Sunday on Ukrainian television that some have already gone into battlefield service.

The U.S. agreed in October to send the surface-to-air systems, which can target aircraft, cruise missiles and shorter-range ballistic missiles such as those that Russia has used to bombard residential areas and the Ukrainian power grid.

The fiercest battles have been in the eastern Donetsk region, where Russia is struggling to encircle the city of Bakhmut in the face of dogged Ukrainian defense.

On Sunday, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed Moscow's forces had captured two more neighborhoods in the western part of Bakhmut, without providing further details or clarifying what areas were still in Ukrainian hands.

In the south, the Dnieper has for months marked the contact line in the Kherson region, where its namesake capital is regularly pummeled by shelling from Russian forces stationed across the river.

In addition to having established a foothold near the town of Oleshky, across the Dnieper delta from Kherson, ISW said that Ukrainian troops were also approaching the nearby village of Dachi, citing data from Russian military bloggers.

In Telegram posts on Thursday and Saturday, ISW said the bloggers claimed that Ukrainian forces had

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maintained these positions for weeks and established stable supply lines to them, indicating a lack of Russian control over the area.

The Associated Press confirmed the posts from the bloggers, but it wasn't immediately possible to independently verify the data they shared.

Russia is also expected to launch more intensive attacks in the spring, but ISW reported that top Russian defense figures are showing signs that they may be pushing for a consolidation of existing gains in Ukraine, rather than costly new operations, as Moscow struggles with both material and manpower.

The think tank cited comments from financier Yevgeniy Prigozhin, the head of the Wagner Group — a private Russian military company whose fighters have spearheaded the offensive on Bakhmut.

On Saturday, Prigozhin's press service posted comments he made on its official Telegram channel in which he argued that Russian forces need to "anchor (themselves) in such a way that it is only possible to tear them out with (the) opponent's claws."

The interview was published shortly after Western leaders meeting at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany pledged to train more Ukrainian personnel and keep up their military support for Kyiv.

As Moscow seeks to bolster its troop numbers, the U.K. Ministry of Defense noted Sunday in an intelligence briefing that Russian authorities had mounted a large-scale military recruitment campaign using social media, billboards and state television.

It said Russian officials are "almost certainly seeking to delay any new, overt mandatory mobilization for as long as possible to minimize domestic dissent," while assessing that this latest effort would likely fail to meet the defense ministry's stated goal of recruiting 400,000 new volunteers.

In attacks overnight, local authorities in eastern Ukraine reported that Russian forces had launched at least five S-300 missiles at Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city and the surrounding region.

The missiles damaged an industrial facility and private homes but caused no casualties, according to Oleh Syniehubov, the Kharkiv regional governor.

In Kherson, one civilian was killed and two were wounded as Russian troops used artillery, drones and warplanes to launch a total of 54 strikes on the province, Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin said on Telegram on Sunday morning.

Russian forces on Saturday and overnight also dropped five guided aerial bombs over the Kherson region, Ukraine's Operational Command South said in a Facebook post Sunday. According to the post, the bombs were launched from drones and aircraft and damaged multiple residential buildings, but caused no casualties.

Also in the Kherson region, two women, ages 85 and 57, were hospitalized after being wounded in a Russian artillery attack that damaged a local school and about 25 residential buildings in the village of Kizomys, Prokudin said in a Telegram post.

In the neighboring Zaporizhzhia region, Russian shelling wounded a 56-year-old man in Stepanivka, a town on the banks of the Dnieper river, local Gov. Yuriy Malashko wrote on Telegram. ____

Joanna Kozłowska reported from London.

A previous version of this story was corrected to show that the Kremlin-installed head of the Kherson region made the comments on Telegram, not to RIA.

Pollution lawsuit could curb use of aerial fire retardant

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A legal dispute in Montana could drastically curb the government's use of aerial fire retardant to combat wildfires after environmentalists raised concerns about waterways that are being polluted with the potentially toxic red slurry that's dropped from aircraft.

A coalition that includes Paradise, California — where a 2018 blaze killed 85 people and destroyed the town — said a court ruling against the U.S. Forest Service in the case could put lives, homes and forests at risk.

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An advocacy group that's suing the agency claims officials are flouting a federal clean water law by continuing to use retardant without taking adequate precautions to protect streams and rivers.

The group, Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, requested an injunction blocking officials from using aerial retardant until they get a pollution permit.

The dispute comes as wildfires across North America have grown bigger and more destructive over the past two decades because climate change, people moving into fire-prone areas, and overgrown forests are creating more catastrophic megafires that are harder to fight.

Forest Service officials acknowledged in court filings that retardant has been dropped into waterways more than 200 times over the past decade. They said it happens usually by mistake and in less than 1% of the thousands of drops annually, and that environmental damage from fires can exceed the pollution from retardant.

"The only way to prevent accidental discharges of retardant to waters is to prohibit its use entirely," government attorneys wrote. "Such a prohibition would be tantamount to a complete ban of aerial discharges of retardant."

Government officials and firefighters say fire retardant can be crucial to slowing the advance of a blaze so firefighters can try to stop it.

"It buys you time," said Scott Upton, a former region chief and air attack group supervisor for California's state fire agency. "We live in a populous state — there are people everywhere. It's a high priority for us to be able to use the retardant, catch fires when they're small."

Forest Service officials said they are trying to come into compliance with the law by getting a pollution permit but that could take years.

"The Forest Service says it should be allowed to pollute, business as usual," said Andy Stahl, who leads the Eugene, Oregon-based group behind the lawsuit. "Our position is that business as usual is illegal."

A ruling from U.S. District Judge Dana Christensen is expected sometime after the opposing sides present their arguments during a Monday hearing in federal court in Missoula.

Christensen denied a request to intervene in the case by the coalition that includes Paradise, other California communities and trade groups such as the California Forestry Association. The judge is allowing the coalition's attorney to present brief arguments.

As the 2023 fire season gets underway, California Forestry Association President Matt Dias said the prospect of not having fire retardant available to a federal agency that plays a key role on many blazes was "terrifying."

"The devastation that could occur as a result of the Forest Service losing that tool could be just horrific," Dias said.

More than 100 million gallons (378 million liters) of fire retardant were used during the past decade, according to the Department of Agriculture. It's made up of water and other ingredients including fertilizers or salts that can be harmful to fish, frogs, crustaceans and other aquatic animals.

A government study found misapplied retardant could adversely affect dozens of imperiled species, including crawfish, spotted owls and fish such as shiners and suckers.

Health risks to firefighters or other people who come into contact with fire retardant are considered low, according to a 2021 risk assessment commissioned by the Forest Service.

To keep streams from getting polluted, officials in recent years have avoided drops inside buffer zones within 300 feet (92 meters) of waterways.

Under a 2011 government decision, fire retardant may only be applied inside the zones, known as "avoidance areas," when human life or public safety is threatened and retardant could help. Of 213 instances of fire retardant landing in water between 2012 and 2019, 190 were accidents, officials said.

The remaining 23 drops were necessary to save lives or property, they said.

Stahl's organization suggested in court filings that the buffer zones be increased, to 600 feet (182 meters) around lakes and streams.

In January — three months after the lawsuit was filed — the Forest Service asked the Environmental

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Protection Agency to issue a permit allowing the service to drop retardant into water under certain conditions. The process is expected to take more than two years.

Forest Service spokesperson Wade Muehlhof declined comment on the case.

Special forces swiftly evacuate US embassy staff from Sudan

By MATTHEW LEE, TARA COPP and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. special operations forces carried out a precarious evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Sudan on Sunday, sweeping in and out of the capital with helicopters on the ground for less than an hour. No shots were fired and no major casualties were reported.

With the final embassy employee out of Khartoum, the United States shuttered its diplomatic mission indefinitely. Remaining behind in the East African nation are thousands of private American citizens. U.S. officials said it would be too dangerous to carry out a broader evacuation operation.

Battles between two rival Sudanese commanders had forced the closing of the main international airport and left roads out of the country in control of armed fighters. The skirmishes has killed more than 400 people.

In a statement thanking the troops, President Joe Biden said he was receiving regular reports from his team on efforts to assist remaining Americans in Sudan "to the extent possible."

He also called for the end to "unconscionable" violence there.

About 100 U.S. troops in three MH-47 helicopters carried out the operation. They airlifted all of roughly 70 remaining American employees from a landing zone at the embassy to an undisclosed location in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia also provided overflight and refueling support, said Molly Phee, assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

Biden said Djibouti and Saudi Arabia provided assistance, too.

"I am proud of the extraordinary commitment of our Embassy staff, who performed their duties with courage and professionalism and embodied America's friendship and connection with the people of Sudan," Biden said in a statement. "I am grateful for the unmatched skill of our service members who successfully brought them to safety."

U.S. Africa Command and the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Gen. Mark Milley, were in contact with the factions before and during the operation to ensure that U.S. forces would have safe passage to conduct the evacuation. John Bass, an undersecretary of state, denied claims by Sudan's paramilitary Rapid Security Forces that it assisted in the U.S. evacuation.

"They cooperated to the extent that they did not fire on our service members in the course of the operation," Bass said.

Biden had ordered American troops to evacuate embassy personnel after receiving a recommendation from his national security team, with no end in sight to the fighting.

"This tragic violence in Sudan has already cost the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians. It's unconscionable and it must stop," Biden said. "The belligerent parties must implement an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, allow unhindered humanitarian access, and respect the will of the people of Sudan."

Sudan's fighting broke out April 15 between two commanders who just 18 months earlier jointly orchestrated a military coup to derail the nation's transition to democracy.

The power struggle between the armed forces chief, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the head of the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary group, Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, has millions of Sudanese cowering inside their homes.

The violence has included an unprovoked attack on an American diplomatic convoy and numerous incidents in which foreign diplomats and aid workers were killed, injured or assaulted.

An estimated 16,000 private U.S. citizens are registered with the embassy as being in Sudan. The figure is rough because not all Americans register with embassy or say when they depart.

The embassy issued an alert earlier Saturday cautioning that "due to the uncertain security situation in Khartoum and closure of the airport, it is not currently safe to undertake a U.S. government-coordinated

evacuation of private U.S. citizens.”

The U.S. evacuation planning for American employees of the embassy got underway in earnest on Monday after the embassy convoy was attacked in Khartoum. The Pentagon confirmed on Friday that U.S. troops were being moved to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti ahead of a possible evacuation.

Embassy evacuations conducted by the U.S. military are relatively rare and usually take place only under extreme conditions. When it orders an embassy to draw down staff or suspend operations, the State Department prefers to have its personnel leave on commercial transportation if that is an option.

When the embassy in Kyiv temporarily closed just before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022, staffers used commercial transport to leave.

In several other recent cases, notably in Afghanistan in 2021, conditions made commercial departures impossible or extremely hazardous. U.S. troops accompanied personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, Libya, in an overland convoy to Tunisia when they evacuated in 2014.

Guyana birdsong competitions flourish amid oil boom

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

METEN-MEER-ZORG, Guyana (AP) — The judges leaned in, hands clasped behind their backs.

Everyone grew quiet as they stared at the two tiny black birds flitting before them, wondering which one would break the silence.

“One. Two,” a judge called out softly as the bird on the right erupted into tinkly chirps. It then abruptly stopped as the bird in the cage next to it darted about before bursting into song, only to be surpassed seconds later by his foe, which spread its wings and tail in anticipated triumph.

These are Guyana’s speed-singing contests — a centuries-old tradition where male finches are placed in cages next to each other as judges count the number of chirps they emit in the span of five minutes. It’s a hobby and business that rakes in thousands of dollars and is expected to grow into an even bigger gambling operation given the recent massive oil discovery off the coast of this small South American country, whose economy is expected to grow by an average annual rate of 25% in upcoming years.

The races are held every Sunday across the country, with men gathering along roadsides at dawn with their caged birds and local beer to celebrate or mourn afterward.

“God. Family. Birds. That’s my life,” said Olwayn Lynch, a 46-year-old transportation business owner.

The races are closely scrutinized given the money involved, so people record them for replay in case someone feels a judge counted too many or too little chirps and demands a recount.

There’s also big money in selling these finches: Average singers go for around \$75, while winners can cost up to \$10,000. The demand for these birds is so high that they are often smuggled to places like New York, where the Guyanese diaspora also organizes races. Smugglers have tucked finches into hair curlers, toilet paper rolls, pantyhose and other items. Some even wear special pants to carry them through airport security.

Demand in Guyana has grown even higher since oil production began in 2019, with more people competing, said Ben Winston, 59, who sells bundles of wild grass seeds at the events.

“More people, more bets, more fun,” he said, adding that he has seen his business grow about 2% and hopes it will become even more profitable as the oil wealth flows, creating more jobs and expendable income.

In the weeks leading up to a race, owners care for their birds like professional athletes, giving them vitamins, calcium and wild seeds mixed with honey. If they are molting, the birds don’t compete because their energy levels plummet when shedding feathers. The races also are not for birds that are easily excitable or get shy in front of a crowd. The winning bird has poise, bravado and grit. They don’t sing for pleasure or because they’re happy: they sing to defend their territory or attract mates.

Sunday’s race attracted a smaller crowd than usual given the heavy skies and recent rains. Among those attending but not competing was Ryan Boodhoo, a 42-year-old importer and contractor, who felt the birds present were not as competitive as he would like.

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multiple times on Saturday, according to the military's information office, media reports and a statement of responsibility from an urban guerrilla group.

The information office on Sunday said the attack was carried out by the People's Defense Force, the loosely organized armed wing of the pro-democracy National Unity Government, an underground group that opposes the military-installed government that was established when the army seized power two years ago.

Many opposition forces including local People's Defense Force groups operate autonomously from the National Unity Government but the military labels them all as "terrorists."

A resistance group calling itself "For The Yangon" said it carried out the attack on Sai Kyaw Thu, a former lieutenant colonel. It declared "Mission: Accomplished" in a Facebook post on Saturday evening that was illustrated with three photos of their target.

Sai Kyaw Thu is believed to be the most senior official of the Election Commission to be shot since the army seized power on Feb. 1, 2021, from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Resistance groups earlier this year attempted to disrupt preparations for a new election the military had promised by attacking personnel conducting a population survey that could be used to assemble voter rolls and other low-level election workers. Plans for the polls, whose date was never set, were set back indefinitely in February when the military government announced it was extending a state of emergency due to security problems.

Urban guerrillas have carried out many targeted killings, acts of arson and small bombings. Victims included officials and members of the military and their cronies, as well as people believed to be informers or military collaborators.

In November 2021, a former navy officer who was the chief finance officer of Myanmar's military-linked Mytel telecommunications company was fatally shot on a Yangon street. Than Than Swe, then a deputy governor of Myanmar's Central Bank, was shot at her home in Yangon in April 2022. She survived and was promoted to the bank governor.

Most recently, a veteran corporate lawyer accused of helping military leaders was shot dead in Yangon by self-proclaimed urban guerrillas in March.

After its takeover, the army clamped down harshly on opponents in the cities, arresting thousands and using deadly force even against nonviolent demonstrators. The repression, which has now accounted for more than 3,400 civilian deaths, triggered widespread armed resistance.

The military dismissed the members of the previous election commission — which had ratified the victory of Suu Kyi's party in a November 2020 general election — and appointed new ones. It also detained several members of the old commission, and according to reports in independent Myanmar media, pressured them to say there had been election fraud.

The new military-appointed commission declared the 2020 election results invalid and prosecuted Suu Kyi and 15 other senior political figures for alleged fraud.

In the statement, "For The Yangon" claimed Sai Kyaw Thu had been a plaintiff in the election fraud case against Suu Kyi. She and ousted President Win Myint and the former minister of the president's office, Min Thu, received three-year sentences in September last year in that case.

A member of guerrilla group said in a text message on Sunday that Sai Kyaw Thu was assassinated "for being the deputy director-general of the illegal election commission of the military council, which disrespected the votes of the people in 2020 general election and abused the people unjustly, and also for being the one who falsely prosecuted President Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi as an accessory of the military council."

"The one who insults the public will be punished by the people," said the member of group, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he fears arrest by the authorities.

According to reports in Myanmar's independent media, Sai Kyaw Thu was cross-examined as a prosecution witness in the trials against Suu Kyi last year.

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Boodhoo estimates he has won more than 1,000 races since he began participating 25 years ago: "For me, it's not just competing. It's like my therapy."

He recalled how at 6 years old, he stole someone's bird from the roadside, mesmerized by its song. Hours later, his aunt forced him to return it and punished him by rubbing a spicy ointment in his eyes, but his love for birds remained. He now has more than 40 distributed between his home and those of friends.

"The tone that the bird makes is sweet. It's very comforting to my ears," he said.

When the birds are not competing against each other on Sundays, they accompany owners in their daily lives: perched in street market stalls, nestled in the passenger seat of taxi cabs or hung in wooden boats that cross the long Demerara River just west of the capital of Georgetown.

"I like the whistling. It keeps me company," said Trevor Fort, 55, who sells face masks and do-rags at Georgetown's bustling Stabroek Market, where his bird recently chirped above the cacophony of car horns, reggae music and vendors hawking their wares like auctioneers as the sweet smell of ganja wafted into the heady air.

Fort was gifted his first bird at 8 years old and caught his first one at age 13 after spending up to three hours "in the bushes just hiding and waiting until we see the bird done come."

Like many, he mixed sugar with a bit of sticky tree sap and placed it on a stick to lure the bird. Others use nets, breed them in captivity or buy from street market vendors who purchase them from Amerindians who catch the birds in Guyana's remote interior or people who smuggle them in from neighboring Venezuela.

By age 15, Fort was entering competitions. He has since dropped out of races to attend church on Sundays, but he cares for his 10 birds as if they were still in competition mode.

Like other owners, he'll play them downloaded recordings of other birds singing for up to four hours a day, making sure to first cover their cages with a light cotton material so they can focus on the melody without distractions.

"It's like training a baby. It's going to listen to what you say," he said.

The best singer is the large-billed seed finch, *Sporophila crassirostris*, known locally as a "twa-twa" and considered expensive and rare. The second-best singer is the chestnut-bellied seed finch, *Sporophila angolensis*, or "towa-towa." There's also the plumbeous seedeater, *Sporophila plumbea*, or "mountain canary," which is cheaper and as a result, more available, according to a December 2018 bird trafficking report by Traffic, a wildlife trade monitoring network. For local birders, the premier chirp is the one that sounds like "pee-peeow."

While Guyana's Wildlife Division allows people to legally trade the three birds with an annual cap of 200 per species, local authorities "maintain a lenient acceptance of local bird markets," the report stated, noting that bird races have generated an "unsustainable demand" for the best singers.

"Trapped almost to extinction in Guyana and Suriname, they go completely unnoticed in other Amazon countries," the report said of the birds. "As the population that usually buys these birds is in the low-income sector, these species make for cheap presents and continue the customary practice of keeping of birds in homes and backyards."

Some birds are sold at Stabroek Market, where Paul Lall, 72, sat in a dark corner stall reading a newspaper on a recent morning while birds in cages hovered above him and cockroaches scurried beneath his feet as he waited for customers. He has sold birds for more than 50 years, and said owners take good care of them because they're considered pets.

And the better you treat them, the better they sing, Lall said, noting that people also take the birds on walks or hire people to do so.

The races and sales of birds are a boon for those struggling to get by in this country of some 800,000 people, of which an estimated one-third live in poverty. Orin Bradford, a 30-year-old minibus driver, said he sells his birds only if his bank account shrinks.

"Birds are business!" he said with a wide smile, showing a sliver of a gold tooth. "Sometimes when the funds are low, we use them to rise back up."

While songbirds are hugely popular in Guyana, not everyone is a fan.

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For years, Henry Ochore, 35, has tried to persuade his friends to release their finches to no avail until he convinced one last week.

"I don't like them caged up," he said. "It's not good."

Jordan: Israel arrested lawmaker on arms-smuggling charges

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — Jordan's Foreign Ministry on Sunday said a Jordanian lawmaker has been arrested by Israel on suspicion of smuggling weapons and gold into the occupied West Bank.

The ministry's spokesman, Sinan Majali, said Jordanian officials are following the case "to find out the merits of the situation and address it as soon as possible." The lawmaker was identified as Imad Al-Adwan and said to have been arrested crossing the border into the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israel's Foreign Ministry declined comment.

The incident threatens to further strain what already are tense relations between Jordan and its neighbor Israel.

The West Bank has seen a surge in violence over the past year. Israel says the area has been flooded with illegal weapons, including guns smuggled from neighboring Jordan.

Over 90 Palestinians and 18 Israelis have been killed in the West Bank and east Jerusalem this year. Israel says most of the Palestinians were wanted militants, but stone-throwing youths protesting army incursions and people not involved in confrontations have also been killed. All but one of the Israelis killed were civilians.

Since Israel's hard-line government took office, relations with Jordan have deteriorated over Israeli settlement construction, violence in the West Bank and policies over holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City.

Jordan controlled the West Bank and east Jerusalem before Israel captured the areas in the 1967 Mid-east war, but the kingdom retains custodianship of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Muslim holy sites in the Old City.

Slotkin's Senate run may complicate Dems bid to retake House

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — When U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin announced plans to run for a critical Senate seat in Michigan, many Democrats were pleased.

The three-term Lansing-area congresswoman was among the stars of last year's midterm election, handily winning one of the nation's most expensive contests. The magnitude of her victory in what was expected to be a narrow contest has largely dissuaded other prominent Democrats from challenging her for the Senate nomination and so far, no high-profile Republican has stepped forward.

Slotkin's entry into the race has helped reassure Democrats that in a year when they are defending twice as many seats as Republicans are, their standing in Michigan may be safe. That may be good news for the effort to protect Democrats' fragile Senate majority, but it's complicating the party's bid to retake the House in 2024. Democrats need to gain just five seats to return to power and it's not clear whether anyone else can repeat Slotkin's success in one of the most competitive districts in the United States.

"It is sort of a blessing and a curse," said Michigan Democratic strategist Amy Chapman, who was Barack Obama's state director during his first presidential campaign in 2008. "Senate Democrats have gotten a good candidate but the curse is, obviously, what do you do about the House district?"

Slotkin is running to succeed Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow, who is retiring at the end of her term. The same dynamic is unfolding elsewhere. In California, for example, Rep. Katie Porter's decision to enter a crowded Democratic primary for the seat held by retiring Sen. Dianne Feinstein has opened the competitive 47th Congressional District.

Losing either seat could put the majority out of reach for Democrats and expand the Republicans' cushion in the House. It also could complicate Democrats' efforts to raise money for House races. Slotkin is one of the party's most prolific fundraisers, having pulled in \$10 million for her 2022 campaign. Among Democrats seen as vulnerable last year, she was outraised only by Porter.

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Democrats, including Slotkin, insist they aren't abandoning the districts as they eye the Senate.

"I am really dedicated — to the point of obsession — in keeping this district because we can flip the House in 2024 with the seat being held," Slotkin said in a recent interview.

In the House race, Michigan Republicans have already found their top candidate in Tom Barrett, who challenged Slotkin in 2022 and plans to run again in 2024. A former state senator and an Army veteran, Barrett has long been seen as a rising star in the party but lost by more than 5 percentage points to Slotkin last year.

Michigan's 7th District, which was redistricted just before the 2022 midterms, is a blend of seven counties. It encompasses Republican-dominated counties such as Clinton and Shiawassee and Democratic strongholds like Ingham, which is home to the state Capitol and Michigan State University. The district's voters range from farmers and lawmakers to undergraduates.

Barrett will benefit from name recognition after his race against Slotkin last year. The National Republican Campaign Committee, the campaign arm of House Republicans, has said it plans to go "all hands on deck" to win the district in 2024.

Michigan Democrats have yet to find their replacement for Slotkin. While no candidates have officially come forward, former state Sen. Curtis Hertel and Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum are both seriously considering campaigns.

Hertel represented Lansing and East Lansing from 2015 to 2022 before being term-limited. He is now Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's legislative director and comes from a family of officeholders. His father, a brother and two uncles served in the Legislature and another uncle was in the U.S. House.

Byrum, who represented part of Ingham County in the state House from 2007 to 2012, has grown a following on social media by countering election misinformation as a local clerk.

The clock is ticking for Democrats, with neither Byrum nor Hertel having the connections or campaign infrastructure of a candidate like Barrett who has run for Congress before.

"The longer we don't have a candidate, the less amount of time they have to raise money," Byrum said in an interview. "Within the next few months, we should have a candidate running for this seat."

As both a state senator and representative, Barrett has represented more of the district in the past. But Hertel and Byrum would each have the advantage of having represented parts of Ingham County, which holds close to half the district's population and which Slotkin won by nearly 36 percentage points.

Slotkin has pledged to work with the nominee to ensure Democrats keep the seat. She promised constituents at a Senate campaign kickoff in Lansing last month that her "first responsibility" would be to "make sure this district stays in Democratic hands."

"To be honest, I had always thought to myself, I'm not going to be here forever," Slotkin said. "So how do you bring up the next group, the next crop of potential candidates? How do you take folks who have been in the state legislature and prepare them to run federally?"

Democrats up and down the ballot in Michigan last year benefited, in part, from blowouts at the top of the ticket and a historic abortion rights ballot initiative. Michigan had the highest youth turnout of any state in the country at 37%, according to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, which studies young voters.

This year could be different, said Lansing-based Democratic strategist Adrian Hemond, with favorability in the presidential election potentially influencing a battleground district with no strong incumbent. While President Joe Biden won the state in 2020, three of the four main counties in Michigan's 7th District voted heavily for then-President Donald Trump.

"In some parts of this district, the former president is popular," Hemond said. "In other parts, he is poison and a turnout driver for Democrats."

Follow Joey Cappelletti at <http://twitter.com/Cappelletti7>

GOP lawmakers push for state control of St. Louis police

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By DAVID A. LIEB and JIM SALTER Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Ten years after gaining local control of its police for the first time since the Civil War, the city of St. Louis has more murders than ever before — and Missouri’s Republican lawmakers are again pressuring for a state takeover of the police force.

The debate over policing power in St. Louis — a racially diverse, heavily Democratic city long vexed by violent crime — carries political and racial overtones like those that have roiled other cities and states this year. But data suggest neither state nor local control may make much difference when it comes to stemming homicides.

“Lots of things matter a whole lot more, like widespread social unrest, the economy crashing, that sort of thing,” said Richard Rosenfeld, a criminologist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis who analyzed the city’s crime statistics.

With violent crime troubling many large cities, Republicans nationwide have pushed a tough-on-crime agenda that would make it harder for the accused to get out of jail on bail and lock up people longer when convicted of certain offenses. Now a proposed state takeover of the St. Louis police department is being touted as a way to fight crime.

Missouri provides a unique case study in the effectiveness of state or local control of police departments.

For much of its history, police in Missouri’s two largest cities of St. Louis and Kansas City had been overseen by state boards appointed predominantly by the governor. That ended for St. Louis in 2013, after voters approved a statewide ballot measure to return police oversight to city officials. Around then, a mayor’s task force in Kansas City narrowly recommended continuing state control over its police.

Since 2014, both cities have seen homicide surges. Kansas City’s homicide rate rose by an average yearly rate of 6.7%, topping 150 deaths each of the past four years, according to Rosenfeld’s research. Homicide rates in St. Louis, long higher than in Kansas City, increased by an average annual rate of 8.2%, exceeding 190 deaths each of the past four years. Both cities also saw upticks in homicides in the early 1990s, when both had state control of their police.

Despite the slightly larger increase in St. Louis, “there is no statistically significant difference between the change in homicide in St. Louis and the change in homicide in Kansas City since local control was restored in St. Louis,” Rosenfeld said.

Yet some state lawmakers contend it’s time to declare local police control a failure in St. Louis.

The Republican-led state House passed a bill last month to empower GOP Gov. Mike Parson to appoint four St. Louis police board commissioners. The mayor, Democrat Tishaura O. Jones, would serve as the fifth commissioner. The Republican-led Senate is expected to debate the plan before its session ends in mid-May.

Jones said the takeover effort in her city “isn’t about public safety.”

“This is about power and politics,” she said. “If you look at all of the cities where we are facing control or overarching authority over local law enforcement, what’s the trend? They’re all led by Black mayors.”

Lawmakers have exerted control over liberal, largely minority communities in Washington, D.C., and Jackson, Mississippi.

President Joe Biden recently signed a Republican-sponsored resolution nullifying the District of Columbia’s new crime laws, including measures eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for many crimes and reducing maximum penalties for burglary, carjacking and robbery.

Tensions flared in Mississippi as the majority-white and Republican-controlled Legislature passed a bill to expand the territory of a state-run police department inside the majority Black capital city, which is governed by Democrats. GOP Gov. Tate Reeves signed the measure into law Friday.

Beyond debating control of the St. Louis police, Missouri lawmakers also are weighing a bill allowing the state to take over prosecution of violent crimes in that city. Meanwhile, Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey is seeking to oust the locally elected prosecutor, Democratic Circuit Attorney Kim Gardner, alleging negligence. If a judge agrees and removes Gardner, Parson would appoint her replacement.

Policing in St. Louis comes with a stigma of association to the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson in 2014. Officer Darren Wilson was not charged in the death of the Black 18-year-old,

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but months of protests followed, along with criticism of policing practices across the St. Louis area.

Racial justice protests newly spread nationwide after George Floyd's killing by a Minneapolis officer in 2020. Some law enforcement agencies have since struggled to recruit and retain officers; the St. Louis and Kansas City departments each have vacancy rates around 20%.

Jones, a critic of what she calls the "arrest and incarcerate" model of policing, has shifted millions of dollars toward addressing mental health issues and supporting civil rights enforcement since winning election as St. Louis mayor in 2021.

If the state took control of St. Louis police, more money could be directed to increasing patrols and adding more officers on the streets, according to the bill's sponsor, Republican state Rep. Brad Christ of suburban St. Louis County. He said a state takeover could boost officer morale, noting it has the support of local police union leadership.

"Is this going to fix crime?" Christ asked rhetorically. "Is it going to go from 200 homicides to zero? No. But this is the start ... to build the police department back to where it actually needs to be to put a crime plan in place and actually address crime."

Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas disputes that. The Black Democrat notes his city set a record high for homicides in 2020 and had its second-highest total last year with state control of police.

"It seems as if state control does nothing more than perhaps alienate the people of a community," he said.

Theoretically, local control of police could strengthen trust between residents and officers, making witnesses and victims more willing to come forward, said Ken Novak, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

But "to simply switch the governing structure and expect suddenly homicides are going to go down, I think that's unrealistic," Novak said. "Those types of changes, if any, would occur over the course of many years."

Salter reported from O'Fallon, Missouri.

National push to bolster security of key election technology

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — An effort to create a national testing program for technology central to U.S elections will be launched later this year, aiming to strengthen the security of equipment that has been targeted by foreign governments and provided fertile ground for conspiracy theories.

So far, states have been left on their own to evaluate the technology that provides the backbone of election operations: voter registration databases, websites used to report unofficial results on election night and electronic pollbooks, which are used instead of paper rolls to check in voters at polling places.

The nonprofit Center for Internet Security hopes to provide the nation's first uniform testing program for the technology, similar to one for voting machines. Its goal is to start the voluntary service in September as a way to help boost the security and reliability of the technology before the 2024 presidential election.

In 2020, 15 states, including Arizona, Florida and Nevada, did not require any type of electronic pollbook testing or certification, according to federal data.

"This is a critical need being filled at a critical time," said Chris Wlaschin, senior vice president for Election Systems & Software, a leading voting machine manufacturer that also produces electronic pollbooks. "I think as more election officials learn about it, the more they're going to ask for it."

The use of electronic pollbooks in particular has expanded rapidly in recent years. Nearly one-third of all voting jurisdictions in the U.S. used electronic pollbooks in 2020, compared with about 18% four years earlier, according to data collected by federal Election Assistance Commission.

The systems bring unique security challenges. In many cases, they have internet connections or interact with systems that do. In counties with a vote center model, where registered voters can cast a ballot at any polling place, electronic pollbooks often communicate with each other and with the central voter registration system. That's one way to ensure people are not able to vote at multiple locations or vote

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in-person after returning a mail ballot.

How much of an effect the new testing program will have on the 2024 presidential election is yet to be determined. Much depends on how many technology providers sign up and how many state election offices will use it, but there appears to be wide interest.

"One of the major benefits of this program is that it will provide a consistent process for certification for all of the different states that adopt it," Jamie Remes with VR Systems, a provider of electronic pollbooks and election management systems, said during a recent event organized to discuss the testing program.

The South Carolina Election Commission, which has developed its own voter registration system, was among the offices participating in the center's testing pilot. Commission member Brian Leach said during the recent panel discussion that he saw one benefit of the program as helping "increase voter confidence in what we are doing."

Confidence in elections, particularly among Republicans, has decreased amid a sustained campaign by former President Donald Trump and his allies to discredit the results of the 2020 presidential election. There is no evidence of widespread fraud or manipulation of voting equipment in 2020, backed up by exhaustive reviews in states lost by Trump.

The center has not been immune to the assault on U.S. elections and has faced various claims related to its work. Online posts have sought to raise questions about its funding, purpose and the services it provides to state and local election offices.

The center receives a mix of federal and private money, and the pilot developed for its testing program got support from the Democracy Fund, which was started by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, a donor to Democratic campaigns and liberal causes. The testing program itself is funded solely by the center and eventually is to be supported entirely with fees paid by technology providers, according to the center.

Meanwhile, the federal commission is pursuing its own testing program for electronic pollbooks. Earlier this year, agency officials said they are making progress with their pilot program but that it was unlikely standards could be in place before the 2024 election.

As the use of electronic systems has grown, they have proved an attractive target for those seeking to meddle in U.S. elections.

In 2016, Russian hackers scanned state voter registration systems looking for vulnerabilities and accessed the voter registration database in Illinois, although an investigation later determined no voter data was manipulated. In 2020, Iranian hackers obtained confidential voter data and used it to send misleading emails, seeking to spread misinformation and influence the election.

Experts say the systems could be prime targets again for those seeking to disrupt voting and sow doubts about the security of elections. Gaining access to a voter registration database, for example, could allow someone to delete voters from the rolls. When people show up to vote, they would be told they are not on the list and forced to cast a provisional ballot.

In Detroit last November, a few polling locations had brief delays checking in voters related to a data error that was quickly identified and resolved. Trump seized on the early reports, calling the situation in Detroit "REALLY BAD" in a social media post and urging people to "Protest, Protest, Protest!"

Those involved said the center's testing program already has had an effect in boosting confidence in the systems.

"It's not just about product testing," said Jared Dearing, the center's senior director of election security and the former director of the Kentucky Board of Elections. "It's increasing the security posture of the companies that are creating these products."

Top election official in Myanmar assassinated by guerrillas

By GRANT PECK Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A top election official in Myanmar was fatally shot in his car in Yangon, the country's commercial capital, in the latest attack attributed to militants opposed to military rule.

Sai Kyaw Thu, deputy director-general of the military-appointed Union Election Commission, was shot

Indian police arrest Sikh separatist leader after long hunt

By ASHOK SHARMA and PRABHJOT GILL Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian police on Sunday arrested a separatist leader who has revived calls for an independent Sikh homeland and the secession of India's northern Punjab state, which has a history of violent insurgency.

Amritpal Singh had been on the run since last month after capturing national attention in February, when hundreds of his supporters stormed a police station in Ajnala, a town in Punjab state, with wooden batons, swords and guns to demand the release of a jailed aide.

Punjab state police tweeted Sunday that Singh was arrested in Moga, a town in the state.

A Sikh religious leader, Jasbir Singh Rodde, said Singh surrendered after offering morning prayers at a Sikh shrine in Moga.

Police officer Sukhchain Singh Gill said police had surrounded the village on intelligence that Singh was in the shrine. "Relentless pressure built by the police over the past 35 days left Singh with no choice," Gill told reporters.

He said the police didn't enter the shrine, implying that Singh was taken into custody after he left. Gill declined to confirm whether Singh surrendered as claimed by his supporters. Singh was flown to Dibrugarh in India's northeast where he will be detained until he is brought to court to face charges.

Punjab suffered a bloody insurgency in the 1980s that led to the killing of India's then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards at her official residence in New Delhi. Her assassination in 1984 triggered bloody rioting by her Hindu supporters against Sikhs in northern India.

Ashwini Dubey, a lawyer in Punjab state, said Singh's arrest would help police dismantle the separatist network and its supporters.

Tavleen Singh, a political commentator and former journalist who covered the Punjab insurgency in the 1980s, said: "The police took this man out, which is good because had they gone into a gurdwara (Sikh shrine), and started shooting you would have had a reaction from the general populous. The Sikhs happen to be very sensitive to gurdwaras being attacked."

Sikhs are a religious minority in India and say they are discriminated against by the majority Hindus. More than 3,000 people were killed by extremists during the 1980s insurgency in the prosperous farming state. The insurgency was crushed by Indian forces by 1990.

Punjab borders India-controlled Kashmir and Pakistan. India accuses Pakistan of supporting, training and arming insurgents, a charge Islamabad denies.

Police declared Singh, a 30-year-old preacher, a fugitive and accused him and his aides of creating discord in the state. Police accused them of spreading disharmony among people, attempted murder, attacking police personnel and obstructing public servants' lawful discharge of duty.

Authorities have deployed thousands of paramilitary soldiers in the state and arrested nearly 100 of his supporters. Singh's wife was prevented from leaving India last week.

Very little was known about Singh until he arrived in Punjab state in 2022 and began leading marches calling for the protection of rights for Sikhs, who account for about 1.7% of India's population.

Singh claims to draw inspiration from Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a Sikh militant leader accused by the Indian government of leading an armed insurgency for Khalistan in the 1980s. Bhindranwale and his supporters were killed in 1984 when the Indian army stormed the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine in the Sikh religion.

Singh has styled himself after Bhindranwale, with a long, flowing beard. He also dresses like Bhindranwale.

Singh also heads Waris Punjab De, or Punjab's Heirs, an organization that was part of a massive campaign to mobilize farmers against controversial agriculture reforms being pushed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. The legislation triggered a year of protests that began in 2020, as farmers — most of them Sikhs from Punjab state — camped on the outskirts of New Delhi through a harsh winter and devastating coronavirus surge. The protests ended after Modi's government withdrew the legislation in November 2021.

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Waris Punjab De was founded by Deep Sidhu, an Indian actor who died in 2022 in a traffic accident. Singh's speeches have become increasingly popular among supporters of the Khalistan movement, which is banned in India. Officials see it and affiliated groups as a national security threat. Even though the movement has waned over the years, it still has some support in Punjab and beyond — including in countries like Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, which are home to a sizable Sikh diaspora. Last month, supporters of the movement pulled down the Indian flag at the country's high commission in London and smashed the building's windows in a show of anger against the move to arrest Singh. India's Foreign Ministry denounced the incident and summoned the U.K.'s deputy high commissioner in New Delhi to protest what it called the breach of security at the embassy in London. The supporters of the Khalistan movement also vandalized the Indian Consulate in San Francisco in the United States.

Associated Press video journalist Prabhjot Gill in Amritsar, India, contributed to this report.

Today in History: April 24, hostage rescue mission fails

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, April 24, the 114th day of 2023. There are 251 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 24, 1962, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology achieved the first satellite relay of a television signal, between Camp Parks, California, and Westford, Massachusetts.

On this date:

In 1877, federal troops were ordered out of New Orleans, ending the North's post-Civil War rule in the South.

In 1915, in what's considered the start of the Armenian genocide, the Ottoman Empire began rounding up Armenian political and cultural leaders in Constantinople.

In 1960, rioting erupted in Biloxi, Mississippi, after Black protesters staging a "wade-in" at a whites-only beach were attacked by a crowd of hostile whites.

In 1961, in the wake of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the White House issued a statement saying that President John F. Kennedy "bears sole responsibility for the events of the past few days."

In 1967, Soviet cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov was killed when his Soyuz 1 spacecraft smashed into the Earth after his parachutes failed to deploy properly during re-entry; he was the first human spaceflight fatality.

In 1980, the United States launched an unsuccessful attempt to free the American hostages in Iran, a mission that resulted in the deaths of eight U.S. servicemen.

In 1990, the space shuttle Discovery blasted off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying the \$1.5 billion Hubble Space Telescope.

In 1995, the final bomb linked to the Unabomber exploded inside the Sacramento, California, offices of a lobbying group for the wood products industry, killing chief lobbyist Gilbert B. Murray. (Theodore Kaczynski was later sentenced to four lifetimes in prison for a series of bombings that killed three people and injured 29 others.)

In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI formally began his stewardship of the Roman Catholic Church; the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said in his installation homily that as pontiff he would listen to the will of God in governing the world's 1.1 billion Catholics.

In 2013, in Bangladesh, a shoddily constructed eight-story commercial building housing garment factories collapsed, killing more than 1,100 people.

In 2019, avowed racist John William King was executed in Texas for the 1998 slaying of James Byrd Jr., who was chained to the back of a truck and dragged along a road outside Jasper, Texas; prosecutors said Byrd was targeted because he was Black.

In 2020, the Food and Drug Administration issued an alert about the dangers of using a malaria drug

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that President Donald Trump had repeatedly promoted for coronavirus patients. The parent company of Lysol and another disinfectant warned that its products should not be used as an internal treatment for the coronavirus, a day after Trump wondered aloud about that prospect during a White House briefing.

Ten years ago: A magnitude-5.7 earthquake near Jalalabad, Afghanistan killed more than 30 people and injured more than 100. The 11th-century minaret of a famed mosque in Aleppo, Syria collapsed as rebels and government troops clashed in the streets around it, depriving the city of one of its most important landmarks. The Umayyad Mosque was a UNESCO world heritage site and the centerpiece of Aleppo's walled Old City.

Five years ago: Former police officer Joseph DeAngelo was arrested at his home near Sacramento, California, after DNA linked him to crimes attributed to the so-called Golden State Killer; authorities believed he committed 13 murders and more than 50 rapes in the 1970s and 1980s. (DeAngelo is awaiting trial.) Scientists announced that they had used infrared spectroscopy data from the Gemini North telescope to determine that hydrogen sulfide is present in the clouds of Uranus.

One year ago: French President Emmanuel Macron comfortably won reelection to a second term. The victory for the 44-year-old centrist spared France and Europe from the seismic upheaval of a shift of power to firebrand populist, far-right challenger Marine Le Pen. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the highest-level visit to the war-torn country's capital by an American delegation since the start of Russia's invasion. The death toll from accidents at two coal mines in southern Poland increased to nine after four miners were brought to the surface and pronounced dead.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Shirley MacLaine is 89. Actor-singer-director Barbra Streisand is 81. Former Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley is 81. Country singer Richard Sterban (The Oak Ridge Boys) is 80. Rock musician Doug Clifford (Creedence Clearwater Revival) is 78. R&B singer Ann Peebles is 76. Former Irish Taoiseach (TEE'-shuk) Enda Kenny is 72. Actor-playwright Eric Bogosian is 70. Rock singer-musician Jack Blades (Night Ranger) is 69. Actor Michael O'Keefe is 68. Rock musician David J (Bauhaus) is 66. Actor Glenn Morshower is 64. Rock musician Billy Gould is 60. Actor-comedian Cedric the Entertainer is 59. Actor Djimon Hounsou (JEYE'-mihn OHN'-soo) is 59. Rock musician Patty Schemel (Hole) is 56. Actor Stacy Haiduk is 55. Rock musician Aaron Comess (Spin Doctors) is 55. Actor Aidan Gillen is 55. Actor Melinda Clarke is 54. Actor Rory McCann is 54. Latin pop singer Alejandro Fernandez is 52. Country-rock musician Brad Morgan (Drive-By Truckers) is 52. Rock musician Brian Marshall (Creed; Alter Bridge) is 50. Actor Derek Luke is 49. Actor-producer Thad Luckinbill is 48. Actor Eric Balfour is 46. Actor Rebecca Mader is 46. Country singer Rebecca Lynn Howard is 44. Country singer Danny Gokey is 43. Actor Reagan Gomez is 43. Actor Austin Nichols is 43. Actor Sasha Barrese is 42. Contemporary Christian musician Jasen Rauch (Red) is 42. Singer Kelly Clarkson is 41. Rock singer-musician Tyson Ritter (The All-American Rejects) is 39. Country singer Carly Pearce is 33. Actor Joe Keery is 31. Actor Jack Quaid is 31. Actor Doc Shaw is 31. Actor Jordan Fisher is 29. Golfer Lydia Ko is 26.