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Groton Community Calendar

Thursday, April 27

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, tossed salad, rainbow sherbert.

School Breakfast: Oatmeal.

School Lunch: Hot dogs, baked beans.

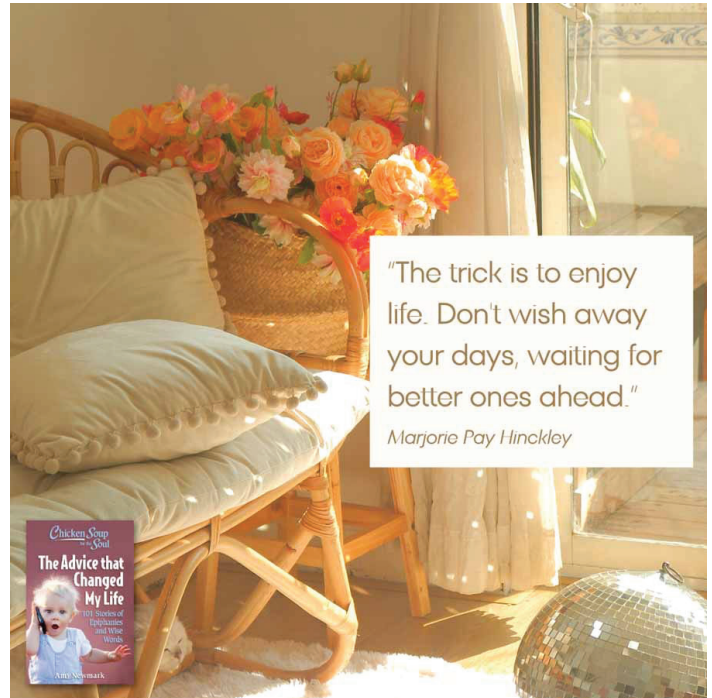
Cancelled: Girls Golf Meet at Redfield Golf Course, 10 a.m.

Middle School Spring Concert, 7 p.m.

Track at Milbank, 3:30 p.m.

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

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



"The trick is to enjoy life. Don't wish away your days, waiting for better ones ahead."

Marjorie Pay Hinckley

Friday, April 28

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, breadstick, apple crisp.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Mac and cheese, peas.

Cancelled: Track at Webster Area, 10 a.m.

Saturday, April 29

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Middle School Band Contest at GHS Gym.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

- At least 55 people died when a boat carrying migrants off the coast of Libya sank, the latest in a series of deadly shipwrecks reported in the area over the last few months.
- Two commanders in the military unit in which Pentagon leak suspect Jack Teixeira worked have been suspended pending further investigation into the unauthorized disclosure of classified information, the Air Force said Wednesday.
- Elon Musk has been ordered to testify in a trial over the 2018 death of a man whose Tesla crashed after his automated driving software allegedly failed.
- Australia will end a decade-old freeze on the minimum wage for skilled migrant workers as part of an overhaul of what the government described as a broken system that fosters exploitation.
- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a "long and meaningful" phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping as the two leaders spoke for the first time since the war began.

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

- South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol is scheduled to address a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress at 11 a.m. ET. His address will air live on C-SPAN.
- Former President Donald Trump is scheduled to deliver remarks this afternoon at a campaign event in Manchester, New Hampshire. Recent presidential primary polls indicate Trump is leading his GOP challengers by double digits in the state.
- Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who once vowed to "be the most pro-Israel Governor in America," is expected to deliver the keynote address at a "Celebrate the Faces of Israel" event today as he visits Israel for his second time as governor.
- The 2023 NFL Draft kicks off at 8 p.m. ET in Kansas City, Missouri. The Carolina Panthers have this year's first overall draft pick.

- Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is poised to announce his 2024 bid for president as soon as mid-May, according to NBC News. Some of his supporters have pushed him to do so as early as May 11.

- Donald Trump has lost an appeal to block his former Vice President Mike Pence from testifying in the federal criminal investigation into efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

- Severe storms and hail have caused damage and disrupted travel in parts of Texas and Florida.

Larson Strong at the Plate as Groton Area Tigers Varsity Defeats Wolsey-Wessington Varsity Outlaws

Tate Larson had the hot hand on Wednesday, tallying four hits and leading Groton Area Tigers Varsity to a 10-1 victory over Wolsey-Wessington Varsity Outlaws. Larson doubled in the first, singled in the third, singled in the fifth, and singled in the sixth.

Wolsey-Wessington Varsity Outlaws opened up scoring in the first inning, when Jett Kleinsasser singled on a 2-0 count, scoring one run.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity tallied four runs in the sixth inning. Bradin Althoff, Larson, and Logan Ringgenberg each had RBIs in the frame.

Dillon Abeln was credited with the victory for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. The righty lasted seven innings, allowing two hits and one run while striking out eight and walking one.

Blaze Herdman took the loss for Wolsey-Wessington Varsity Outlaws. Herdman went five innings, allowing six runs on seven hits, striking out three and walking one.

Groton Area Tigers Varsity had 12 hits in the game. Larson and Althoff all managed multiple hits for Groton Area Tigers Varsity. Larson went 4-for-4 at the plate to lead Groton Area Tigers Varsity in hits.

Kleinsasser led Wolsey-Wessington Varsity Outlaws with two hits in three at bats.

Dacotah Prairie Museum Foundation announces 2023 scholarship winners

Scholarship Program in its First Year

[ABERDEEN, SD, May 2023] — The Dacotah Prairie Museum Foundation (DPMF) has announced the recipients for its first annual scholarship. The scholarships are open to all Brown County, S.D. students (either residents of the county or attend a school/homeschool within the county) who plan to attend any technical, 2-year or 4-year accredited post-secondary school in South Dakota.

Recipients were decided by the Dacotah Prairie Museum Foundation Scholarship Committee comprised of museum board members and museum staff. Students answered essay questions regarding community involvement, connection to Brown County, and future plans. Award amounts of \$1,000 will be sent directly to the intended post-secondary school upon confirmation of enrollment to that institution. There were 16 applicants with these 8 selected:

- Cole Bisbee, Columbia, SD, Groton High School, attending South Dakota State University
- Reegan Cvancara, Aberdeen, SD, Aberdeen Central High School, attending Northern State University
- Jackson Dinger, Groton, SD, Groton High School, attending South Dakota State University
- Ella Hanson, Aberdeen, SD, Aberdeen Roncalli High School, attending Northern State University
- Jenna Joachim, Aberdeen, SD, Aberdeen Central High School, attending Northern State University
- Irina Jones, Aberdeen, SD, Aberdeen Christian High School, attending University of South Dakota
- Preston Kreber, Aberdeen, SD, Aberdeen Central High School, attending Northern State University
- Masyn Schutter, Aberdeen, SD, Aberdeen Central High School, attending University of South Dakota

The Dacotah Prairie Museum celebrates over 50 years as Brown County's premier history museum. The Museum is housed in the historic Northwestern Bank building built in 1889 on Aberdeen's Main Street. Gallery & Museum Store Hours: Tues.-Fri. 10am-5pm and Sat. 10am-4pm. Closed Sundays, Mondays and major holidays. Free admission, donations appreciated. Check out the latest exhibits and events at www.dacotahpraiemuseum.com

Gov. Noem Recognizes the 75th Anniversary of the State of Israel

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem recognized the 75th anniversary of the state of Israel. The proclamation can be found [here](#).

Genesis 12: 1-3 tells us that Israel has been granted her lands by a promise made by God to Abraham. Throughout the last four thousand years, the Jewish people have held a constant claim and presence in Israel. And in 1948, the people of Israel declared their independence with the goal of reestablishing it as the homeland for the Jewish people.

“The promise of the God of Israel is that God will bless those that bless Israel,” said Governor Noem, “and let it be known that the State of South Dakota openly blesses Israel with gratitude for our cordial and mutually beneficial relations since 1948.”

Over the last 75 years, Israel has rebuilt itself. The nation has developed an advanced economy, a thriving tech industry, and a democratic political system. Their government also recognizes the God-given Freedoms of speech, association, religion, and press.

“The State of Israel and the United States maintain a very close relationship born of shared democratic values and moral beliefs,” Governor Noem continued. “Both the United States and South Dakota regard Israel as a trusted ally. We care for and respect the people of Israel, and we want to celebrate their Independence Day with them.”

The United States was the first country to recognize Israel as an independent nation and serves as Israel’s principal ally.

Commissioner Steve Westra Stepping Down

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem announced that Steve Westra, Commissioner of the Governor’s Office of Economic Development (GOED), will be stepping down from that position, effective May 22.

“South Dakotans are building the strongest economy in America with the lowest unemployment rate of all time. Steve helped provide the level playing field to make that possible,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “I want to thank him for his leadership on behalf of the people of South Dakota.”

Westra has served as GOED Commissioner since 2019. He previously served as the chief operating officer of Hegg Companies in Sioux Falls. He was a member of the State House of Representatives from 2013-2016 and also served on the State Tourism Advisory Board.

“When I took on this role, I never expected that it would be defined by a global pandemic. Governor Noem trusted the people of South Dakota and our business community to make the right decisions, and we have emerged with record-breaking business investment,” said Steve Westra. “We had more business development in the last four years than in the previous ten combined. I am grateful to the Governor for her trust in me and her leadership of our state, and it has been an honor to serve on her team. There are more opportunities for our future than ever before!”

South Dakota’s 1.9% unemployment rate is the lowest in the nation and tied for the lowest of any state in American history. In the last year, South Dakota has at various points been the national leader in new business applications per-capita, new housing growth, and personal income growth.

Travis Dovre will serve as interim commissioner of GOED.

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Turn Lane Project Scheduled to Begin throughout Watertown Area

WATERTOWN, S.D. – A project to add turn lanes throughout the Watertown Area is scheduled to start Monday, May 1, 2023, on U.S. Highway 81 south of Lake Poinsett.

Overall, the project will add eight turn lanes throughout the local area. Turn lanes will be added to U.S. Highways 12, 81, and 212 near Lake Poinsett, Watertown, Goodwin, and Summit.

Traffic will be controlled by flaggers and a pilot car during construction hours. Lane widths will be reduced to 11-feet wide. A speed reduction of 45 mph will be in place when flaggers are not present.

Reede Construction of Aberdeen, SD is the primary contractor for the \$6.7 million project. The overall project completion date is Friday, Nov. 3, 2023.

U.S. Highway 12 Construction Projects Starting in Aberdeen

ABERDEEN, S.D. – On Monday, April 17, 2023, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) began a concrete repair project on U.S. Highway 12 from South Melgaard Road to 392nd Avenue in Aberdeen.

The project consists of removing and replacing concrete. The construction operations will reduce traffic to one lane through this area. Motorists should prepare for suddenly slowing and stopped traffic and be aware of construction equipment and workers through the work zone.

This concrete repair project is adjacent to the \$20.5 million grading and paving project on Highway 12 from Aberdeen to the town of Bath.

Reede Construction of Aberdeen, SD is the prime contractor for both construction projects.

Groton Citywide 2023 Spring Cleanup

April 29-May 5

**ALL ITEMS NEED TO BE DROPPED OFF
BEFORE 10AM ON 5/5/23!!**



Bring anything you wish to dispose of to the City Shop-10 E Railroad Ave starting April 29th.

Please place items in the appropriate pile.

RESIDENTIAL ONLY!!

Keep Metal, Tires, Paint, Batteries & Chemicals Separate

**Pickup can be arranged for
Monday, May 1st to Friday, May 5th ENDING AT 10AM
by calling City Hall 397-8422.**

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Groton Area Third Quarter Honor Roll

Seniors

4.0 GPA: Ethan Clark, Jacob Lewandowski, Shaylee Peterson, Jackson Dinger, Cole Simon, Elliana Weismantel, Andrew Marzahn, Carter Barse, Cole Bisbee, Brenna Carda, Brooke Gengerke, Caleb Hanten, Aspen Johnson, Gracie Traphagen

3.99-3.50: Kaleb Antonsen, Porter Johnson, Cade Larson, Tate Larson, Cadance Tullis, Ashtyn Bahr, Sierra Ehresmann, Shallyn Foertsch, Kamryn Flihs, KayLynn Overacker, Nathalia Garcia

3.49-3.00: James Brooks, Marlee Tollifson, Hollie Frost

Juniors

4.0 GPA: Claire Heinrich, Kyleigh Englund, Hannah Monson, Ashlyn Sperry, Emily Clark, Holden Sippel, Sydney Leicht, Sara Menzia, Lexi Osterman

3.99-3.50: Cadence Feist, Anna Fjeldheim, Emma Schinkel, Abigail Jensen, Lydia Meier, Dillon Abeln, Colby Dunker, Jaycie Lier, Logan Ringgenberg, Cilia Moreno Mananes, Lane Tietz, Bradin Althoff, Anna Bisbee, Bryson Wambach

3.49-3.00: Camryn Kurtz, Faith Flihs, Karsyn Jangula, Kate Profeta, Layne Hanson

Sophomores

4.0 GPA: Gretchen Dinger, Elizabeth Flihs, Kayla Lehr, Payton Mitchell, Diego Eduardo Nava Remigio, Faith Traphagen, Axel Warrington

3.99-3.50: Brooklyn Hansen, Emily Overacker, Kennedy Hansen, Jeslyn Kosel, Brevin Flihs, Turner Thompson, Riley Carman, Laila Roberts, Logan Pearson, Blake Pauli, Karrah-Jo Johnson, Korbin Kucker, Corbin Weismantel, Abby Yeadon

3.49-3.00: Quintyn Bedford, Carter Simon, Kellen Antonsen, Emma Kutter, Kaden Kampa, Nicolas Fernandez-Gonzalez, Drew Thurston, Emma Bahr, Aiden Heathcote, Rebecca Poor, Ashley Johnson, Easten Ekern

Freshmen

4.0 GPA: Lucas Carda, Mia Crank, Carly Gilbert, Jerica Locke, Jaedyn Penning, Nathan Unzen

3.99-3.50: Ryder Johnson, Talli Wright, Natalia Warrington, Gage Sippel, Benjamin Hoeft, Logan Warrington, Paisley Mitchell, Raelee Lilly, De Eh Tha Say, London Bahr, Aiden Meyers, Olivia Stiegelmeier, Rylee Dunker, Karter Moody, Cali Tollifson, Cabria Bonn

3.49-3.00: Jayden Schwan, Hannah Sandness, Karsten Flihs, Keegen Tracy, Lincoln Krause, Breslyn Jeschke, Drake Peterson

Eighth Grade

4.0 GPA: Teagan Hanten, Ashlynn Warrington

3.99-3.50: Liby Althoff, Emerlee Jones, Kira Clocksene, Carlee Johnson, Brody Lord, Colt Williamson, Halee Harder, Taryn Traphagen, McKenna Tietz, Gavin Kroll, Aiden Strom

3.49-3.00: Walker Zoellner, Avery Crank, Zander Harry, Blake Lord, Kella Tracy, Addison Hoffman Wipf, Leah Jones, Claire Schuelke, Hailey Pauli

Seventh Grade

4.0 GPA: Elizabeth Cole, Makenna Krause, Sydney Locke, Thomas Schuster

3.99-3.50: Kyleigh Kroll, Mya Feser, Jace Johnson, Layne Johnson, Taryn Thompson, Ryder Schelle, Chesney Weber, Rylie Rose, Rylan Ekern, Easton Weber, Addison Hoeft, Ethan Kroll

3.49-3.00: Wyatt Wambach, Brysen Sandness, Karson Zak, John Bisbee, Kason Oswald, Gracie Pearson, Ruelle Gilbert, Kinsley Rowen

Sixth Grade

4.0 GPA: Wesley Borg, Zachary Flihs, Novalea Warrington

3.99-3.50: Abby Fjeldheim, Nelly Althoff, Kolton Antonsen, Tevan Hanson, Asher Johnson, Brooklyn Spanier, Aspen Beto, Madison Herrick, Arianna Dinger, Lincoln Shilhanek

3.49-3.00: Wesley Morehouse, Samuel Crank, Aurora Washenberger, Savannah Beauchamp, Kaedynce Bonn, Tenley Frost, Jose Fernando Nava Reminio, May Dallaire, Logan Olson, Grayson Flores, Adeline Kotzer, Jordan Schwan



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Public tells Forest Service to expand proposed mining ban in portion of Black Hills

BY: SETH TUPPER - APRIL 26, 2023 9:01 PM

RAPID CITY – Dozens of people told federal officials Wednesday that they not only support a proposed ban on new mining-related activity in a portion of the Black Hills, but also want the ban expanded.

The U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management hosted a four-hour public input meeting at the Rapid City Ramkota Hotel. Beyond the dozens who spoke, hundreds attended, and most appeared to support the proposed mining ban.

The ban would cover about 32 square miles encompassing the Pactola Reservoir and areas of public land upstream that drain into the reservoir via Rapid Creek.

Many speakers said they want the boundaries of the proposed ban expanded to cover more of the Rapid Creek watershed, plus additional watersheds or even the entire Black Hills National Forest.

Some of the speakers expressed concerns about the potential impact of mining on water availability and quality. One of those speakers was Rapid City resident Jay Davis.

“This is our drinking water. This is our lifeline. Water is life,” Davis said.

Native Americans from several South Dakota-based tribes shared similar concerns. They also spoke about the potential impact of mining on areas of cultural significance in the Black Hills – a region that figures prominently in Native American history and spirituality.

Doug Crow Ghost spoke on behalf of the Great Plains Tribal Water Alliance.

“The Forest Service should impose a moratorium on all mining in the Black Hills,” Crow Ghost said.

A few speakers defended exploration and mining. Larry Mann, who has worked as a lobbyist for mining companies, said all future mining-related activity in the affected area should not be prohibited based on concerns about a current exploratory drilling proposal. He said exploratory drilling rarely locates economically viable deposits, and the number of drilling projects that result in mines is minimal.

“Why are we setting our hair on fire over something that the science even says is unlikely to occur?” Mann said.

Origin of controversy

The current controversy over potential drilling in the Pactola Reservoir area began about four years ago. That’s when Minneapolis-based F3 Gold went public with a plan to conduct exploratory drilling for gold in the Jenney Gulch area of the Black Hills National Forest, within a mile of Pactola. The man-made mountain lake is the largest and deepest reservoir in the Black Hills. It’s also a popular recreation destination and a drinking-water source for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base.

F3 Gold won draft approval of its drilling plan last year from local Forest Service officials. Then, in March, the national offices of the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management announced they’re considering a 20-year ban on new mining-related activity in the Pactola region.

Deputy Regional Forester Jacqueline Buchanan, who is based at a Forest Service office in Colorado, attended Wednesday’s meeting and said the draft approval of the drilling plan was subject to an objection period. It was during that period when she and other Forest Service officials took note of objections regarding water and cultural resources, she said.

“So out of the objection process, the conversations started around whether there are other options we

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should consider," Buchanan told South Dakota Searchlight.

The option currently being considered is formally called a "mineral withdrawal," because it would withdraw an area of public land from eligibility for mining-related activities. Twenty years is the maximum period allowed by federal law, although a mineral withdrawal can be renewed after that. Only Congress can enact a permanent mineral withdrawal on federal land.

Impact on F3 plan

Since federal officials proposed the mineral withdrawal in March, it has been unclear how it would affect F3 Gold, which not only has draft approval of its drilling plan but also has a completed environmental assessment.

The Forest Service is now saying that the final decision on F3's drilling plan won't come anytime soon.

"The Forest Service has postponed issuing a final decision on the Jenney Gulch Gold Exploration Drilling Project," say documents from the agency released in conjunction with Wednesday's meeting, "until the environmental analysis and withdrawal process for the requested withdrawal is completed."

That could take up to two years, which is the maximum "segregation period" while federal officials consider implementing the mineral withdrawal. During the segregation period – which began March 21 – the mineral withdrawal essentially takes effect temporarily while federal officials gather the public input, studies and analysis needed to decide whether the mineral withdrawal should be implemented for a 20-year term. That decision will be made by the secretary of the Department of the Interior (the department oversees the Bureau of Land Management, which manages mining claims on federal land).

Mining has been continuous in the Black Hills since the 1870s, and some past mines have caused extensive water pollution.

The Homestake Mine in Lead so polluted Whitewood Creek decades ago that the waterway was known colloquially as "Cyanide Creek" before it was cleaned up pursuant to modern environmental regulations.

The company that owned the Gilt Edge Mine near Lead went bankrupt and abandoned the mine in the 1990s, leaving pits containing a combined 150 million gallons of water laden with lead, arsenic and cadmium. The mine remains under an active cleanup funded by the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund.

Because of the Black Hills' long mining history, the region is littered with mining claims staked by prospectors ranging from hobbyists to global conglomerates. The Forest Service says F3 Gold alone has about 800 claims in the proposed mineral withdrawal area.

A mineral withdrawal would only prohibit new claims, but there's also a process to contest existing claims. If holders of existing claims are unable to show "a discovery of a valuable mineral deposit," in the official language of the Forest Service, the claims may be declared null and void.

"F3 has active claims in the requested withdrawal area," says a Forest Service document, "however, it has not been determined whether and how many are supported by the discovery of a valuable mineral deposit."

Proving the discovery of a valuable mineral deposit is a process of its own, involving certified examiners who analyze maps, samples, data and mine cost models. The Forest Service says any discovery must predate the start of the mineral withdrawal process.

In other words, for F3 Gold to utilize its mineral claims, the company may have to prove its claims harbor a valuable deposit without being allowed to conduct exploratory drilling.

Scott Haight, of the Bureau of Land Management, attended Wednesday's meeting and told South Dakota Searchlight it's "theoretically possible" to prove a valuable mineral deposit without drilling. But he added that "drilling is the usual mechanism for making a discovery."

What's ahead

F3 Gold did not attend Wednesday's meeting. An official representing the company told South Dakota Searchlight by phone that the company is studying the publicly available information about the proposed mineral withdrawal and withholding comment until the company receives further communications from the Forest Service.

The proposed mineral withdrawal is currently subject to a 90-day public comment period that will close

June 20. The Forest Service plans to announce additional opportunities for public involvement as the process moves forward.

In the meantime, F3 Gold has other projects, including a proposal for exploratory drilling near Custer that drew vehement opposition during a public meeting earlier this year.

Several other companies have active exploratory drilling operations or plans for drilling in other areas of the central and northern Black Hills. The region's only active, large-scale gold mine is the Wharf Mine near Lead.

Beyond gold, activists concerned about water quality in the Black Hills have called attention to a recent proliferation of lithium claims, as companies consider the region's potential as a source of the material for the electric battery industry.

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

SD school districts find compromise between snow days and online learning post-COVID

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - APRIL 26, 2023 4:12 PM

Whether they sleep with a spoon under their pillow or turn their pajamas inside out – two rituals purported to bring about a snow day – South Dakota students haven't lost the magic of a serendipitous day off from school.

And if school districts across the state have anything to say about it, they'll always keep that magic.

While national media articles claimed snow days would be obsolete after the COVID pandemic normalized remote learning across the country, South Dakota school districts have only used remote learning in a few instances this past year — even with some rural districts calling off school over a dozen times.

That's because remote learning can't replace in-person learning, said Jamie Nold, assistant superintendent at Sioux Falls School District. The state Department of Education published a report in 2021 showing the impacts of the pandemic on learning loss. Over half of school leaders reported that at least a few to all students experienced learning loss.

"We know from COVID that remote learning was not the most advantageous way to educate kids," Nold said. "There weren't good results and there was significant learning loss. We haven't used remote learning during snow days yet, and we would like to not have to use it."

But the district is considering using remote learning for some snow days starting next year, he told the school board in an April meeting. Using some sort of learning to keep students engaged is better than nothing, Nold said, and it's better than adding school days at the end of the year.

"We came to realize in-person is most effective, but that's not always possible," Nold said. "Having a virtual option when weather dictates things will help us meet some of those needs for when they can't be in school."

The Sioux Falls School District called off school five days this school year for inclement weather. Rapid City, the state's second-largest district, called off school four days, using remote learning for another two days.

The western school district's practice is to only use remote learning when a snow day can be determined before 2 p.m. the day before, said Bobbi Schaeftbauer, community relations manager for Rapid City Area Schools. The timing gives students, teachers and parents time to prepare, and it keeps "everyone on schedule."

It's common practice for school districts to plan a few extra days into their calendar in case of snow days. According to state law, elementary students must have no fewer than 875 hours in a school year. Older children must have no fewer than 962.5 hours.

While many school districts now have laptops for each of their students to take home, including districts like Lemmon in northeastern South Dakota and Highmore-Harrold in central South Dakota, many students live in the country — some up to 45 miles away from their school — and may not have reliable access to

broadband internet.

"We have one-to-one but we try not to remote learn," said JoLinda Hay, administrative assistant for the Lemmon School District. "Kids don't like it and teachers don't like it."

Students aren't as engaged through remote learning, Hay said. Lemmon has instead shifted its schedule to allow students to attend in-person: The district built eight possible snow days into its schedule this year (there's still one left in case of a spring storm), and used eight late starts and six early dismissals throughout the winter.

In Highmore-Harrold, the rural central South Dakota school district called 12 snow days, using three-hour remote learning days for the last four snow days, said Superintendent Quinton Cermak. The district has added an hour onto Fridays since January, which are usually dismissed an hour early, instead of adding full in-person days to the end of the school year.

The 1,100-square-mile school district serves 214 students with about half living in town and the rest in the country, Cermak said. The three-hour remote learning days condense class periods into 20-minute segments. Students in seventh through 12th grades bring their laptops home with them while young children bring home paper assignments.

Shortening the school day allows students to keep their "free" day, but also keeps content fresh in their minds, Cermak added. It also increased attendance compared to full remote-learning days used during the pandemic.

Cermak has been with the school district for 10 years. The district typically only sees three snow days a year. Going forward, Cermak plans to allow students those first three traditional snow days but then implement the three-hour remote learning if more school is called off due to inclement weather.

"Three-hour days are a great compromise," Cermak said. "You'll still get a good portion of that magic free day, but give us three hours of your time so we don't have to take away your spring when it's actually nice out and you can go to the river, work outside or do more fun things than sit in school."

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

U.S. House GOP pushes through debt ceiling increase coupled with massive spending cuts

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JACOB FISCHLER - APRIL 26, 2023 9:17 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans on Wednesday struggled but whipped just enough votes to pass their plan to temporarily raise the nation's borrowing limit and also cut spending by slashing key parts of President Joe Biden's climate and tax law, potentially risking some veterans' health benefits and imposing more work rules on the nation's safety net programs.

The measure will face certain opposition in the Democratic-led U.S. Senate and Biden has threatened a veto, leaving negotiations over a crucial debt ceiling increase potentially needed as soon as June still at a stalemate.

GOP leaders passed the Limit, Save, Grow Act by a margin of 217-215 (including a yes vote from Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota) after late-night maneuvering Tuesday into early Wednesday to pacify party holdouts who demanded expedited work requirements for assistance for low-income Americans and Midwestern lawmakers who wanted ethanol tax credits restored.

Four Republicans — Andy Biggs of Arizona, Ken Buck of Colorado, Tim Burchett of Tennessee and Matt Gaetz of Florida — joined all Democrats in voting against the measure, allowing it to pass by the slimmest possible margin.

Two Democrats and one Republican were not present.

A handful of votes

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California could only afford to lose a handful of votes on his plan to tie a reduction in federal spending to raising the debt limit — a promise he made to far-right members

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during his beleaguered path to the speaker's gavel.

The Limit, Save, Grow Act raises the nation's \$31.4 trillion borrowing cap by \$1.5 trillion, or until March 31, 2024, whichever comes first, while reducing the federal deficit by a projected \$4.8 trillion over the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office score.

Biden and Democrats have repeatedly said Congress should deal with the debt limit in a stand-alone bill and maintain that discussions about tax and spending policy should take place within the annual budget and appropriations process.

McCarthy and Biden last met to talk about the debt ceiling in early February.

"If Joe Biden won't lead, House Republicans will," said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana during the GOP morning press conference Wednesday.

"If you look at this package, it represents the most common sense, straightforward approach to addressing the spending problem that got us here as we confront the debt ceiling," Scalise continued.

In a statement Tuesday, the White House called the proposal a "reckless attempt to extract extreme concessions as a condition for the United States simply paying the bills it has already incurred."

The House Republicans and Biden are staring down a tight deadline as the looming X-date nears — that's the date the U.S. Treasury runs out of cash to pay the nation's bills on time.

The U.S. could default on its obligations as summer hits, possibly as early as June, according to analysis by Moody's Analytics.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said on the floor Wednesday his party would not allow the measure to become law.

"The speaker should drop the brinkmanship, drop the hostage taking, come to the table with Democrats, pass a clean bill to avoid default," he said. "Given the way the Republican proposal is, that's the only way to go. Time is running out."

Rescinding Biden's climate agenda

The GOP legislation would return government spending to fiscal 2022 levels and cap most discretionary spending until 2033.

If enacted, the legislation would achieve savings by dismantling parts of Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, the massive omnibus budget reconciliation package passed last year and celebrated by Democrats for its climate and tax measures.

The bill would repeal \$500 million in tax credits for clean energy production and consumer rebates that were included in Democrats' 2022 climate and tax bill.

When Democrats passed that bill last year, environmental groups praised it as a landmark for climate action.

As debate on the debt limit bill advanced this week, administration officials and House Democrats also promoted the tax credits' role in expanding manufacturing jobs, especially in Republican states.

U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, a New Jersey Democrat who is the ranking minority member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, said Wednesday that companies have announced \$28 billion in new manufacturing for clean energy products like electric vehicles and \$242 billion in clean energy capital investments since the law passed.

U.S. Rep. Jen Kiggans, a Republican from southeast Virginia, said she opposed the repeal of clean energy tax credits. She pledged to vote for the bill because it "gets us to the negotiating table," but said she would continue to advocate for the tax credits to be restored.

The bill would also roll back consumer tax credits on items including electric vehicles and energy-efficient appliances.

The Republican measure would also eliminate grant programs in the climate law to fund methane reduction and clean-energy projects in disadvantaged communities.

The debt limit package also includes sweeping energy legislation the House passed last month. Meant to catalyze fossil fuel production, that bill includes measures to hasten environmental permitting for energy products.

A measure in that bill would reduce royalty rates for new oil and gas leasing. The provision would also

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likely reduce federal revenues by \$6 billion over the same period, CBO said.

The spending caps in the debt limit bill would also force further cuts to environment and climate programs. Leaders of the Agriculture and Interior departments told House appropriators last month that the proposed cuts would lead to drastic reductions in their respective budgets for fighting wildfires. The cuts could lead to a loss of between 3,200 and 3,700 workers between the two departments, they said.

The National Park Service could lose one-quarter of its workforce, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland wrote.

Ethanol tax credits restored

The first version of the debt limit bill that Republicans introduced would have removed tax credits for ethanol and other biofuels in the Democrats' climate bill.

But in a late-night Rules Committee agreement, GOP leaders dropped those provisions under pressure from Midwestern lawmakers.

That move won the support of Iowa's four-member delegation, Mariannette Miller-Meeks, Ashley Hinson, Zach Nunn and Randy Feenstra, all of whom are Republicans.

"Since this proposal was unveiled, our delegation has stood united for Iowa's farmers and producers fighting to amend the bill to protect biofuels tax credits," the Iowa Republicans said. "Having successfully amended the bill to protect funding for these tax credits, our delegation will vote for this legislation, which is a starting point to avoid a default and cut wasteful spending."

Restoring the biofuel credit would add \$38.6 billion to the federal deficit over 10 years, the CBO estimated.

Less tax enforcement, more work requirements

The bill would also rescind most of the \$80 billion in new funding included in the IRA to modernize the Internal Revenue Service.

While the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan group that analyzes federal fiscal policy, largely supports the bill, the organization said it "strongly oppose(s)" cutting funding meant to improve tax collection.

According to the CBO, slashing the IRS funding would add to the deficit by \$120 billion over the next decade.

The federal deficit would be reduced by the same amount, \$120 billion over 10 years, if the bill's additional work requirements for safety net programs go into effect, according to the CBO.

About \$109 billion of that would come from stricter work rules on recipients of Medicaid, which provides health coverage for roughly 85.2 million low-income households nationwide.

The Biden administration warned that 21 million participants would see "draconian" changes, including increased documentation requirements that if not met could result in coverage termination, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, or CMS, officials told reporters on a call Wednesday afternoon.

The administration pointed to the case study of Arkansas, where in 2018 state officials began enforcing 80 hours per month of work or qualifying activities, requiring enrollees to report work hours or exemption reason in an online portal by the fifth of each month.

"The evidence was really clear (that) the barriers to finding all sorts of documents and sending it in were real, and people lost coverage not because they weren't working or didn't meet some exceptions, but simply because they could not get through all the administrative red tape," said Daniel Tsai, CMS deputy director for the Children's Health Insurance Program.

In a state-by-state breakdown, the left-leaning Committee on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that Pennsylvania and Ohio — two of the most populous states that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act — could respectively see benefits at risk for 519,000 and 421,000 enrollees. The CBO estimates that once requirements are in place, about 1.5 million low-income people across the U.S. could lose their federal health insurance.

Regarding Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, formerly called food stamps, the CBO estimates \$11 billion would be cut from the low-income food aid program by 2033 as roughly 275,000 individuals per month drop from the program because new rules could not be met.

Another safety net program, known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, which provides

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cash to some of the poorest families in the U.S., could see \$6 billion pulled from federal funds allocated to the states by 2033, the CBO says.

Middle-of-the-night jockeying after the six-hour Rules Committee debate led to McCarthy budging from his opposition to any changes. The bill was changed to expedite the effective dates for safety net work requirements — from 2025 to 2024 for SNAP, and from 2026 to 2025 for TANF — to satisfy far-right conservatives, like Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, who vowed a “no” vote if the new rules weren’t hastened.

A late Wednesday updated CBO score found that moving the work requirements a year earlier for both programs would “reduce direct spending by an insignificant amount” in the coming years.

Veterans’ health benefits fate unclear

The bill’s spending cap at fiscal 2022 funding levels would mean a 22% decrease in non-defense discretionary spending, including veterans programs, Democrats said.

Republican leaders have said they do not plan to include cuts to veterans programs, but the bill as written does not require that. Reducing cuts to veterans programs under the law would require deeper cuts in other domestic spending.

“There are zero guarantees that veterans care is protected in the bill,” Allison Jaslow, the CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, said in a statement.

“This is unacceptable,” Jaslow added. The bill “should explicitly protect benefits and care for veterans.”

Other veterans groups, including Veterans of Foreign Wars and Paralyzed Veterans of America, raised similar concerns.

VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci noted an additional potential flaw in the bill: It could undermine last year’s bipartisan law to expand protections for veterans affected by fumes from burn pits of toxic waste in Iraq and Afghanistan.

That law was enacted after fiscal 2022 funding levels were set, he wrote in an open letter to McCarthy.

The VFW is “gravely concerned” the bill “missed the mark by not protecting the advances in care and benefits for toxic-exposed veterans,” he wrote. “This could set our collective hard work back years and make veterans once again have to fight for the care and benefits they have earned.”

The provisions in the debt limit bill to rescind unspent money from coronavirus relief laws and other large spending laws since 2020 would cost veterans’ programs \$2 billion, according to a fact sheet from House Appropriations ranking Democrat Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut.

“This bill is a betrayal of the obligation this country has to everyone who’s served,” Pennsylvania Democrat Chris Deluzio said in a Wednesday floor speech.

In an animated floor speech, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost, an Illinois Republican, accused Democrats of lying about the impact on veterans programs.

“You better believe that I’m dead serious that we’re not cutting veterans and I mean it,” he said.

Massachusetts Democrat Richard E. Neal, the ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee, responded that both parties voted to expand veterans’ benefits. That bill provides an additional \$15 billion for a fund to pay for toxic exposure claims.

“The bill is due,” Neal said.

A starting point?

Though Republicans began Wednesday with a blustery morning press conference where GOP leadership placed all spending blame on Democrats and Biden, who they say “has maxed out the nation’s credit card” with “reckless spending,” the reality of what will happen to the bill in the Senate began to show.

Rules Committee Chair Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican, said on the floor the measure was merely “an opening offer” from House Republicans in the absence of proposals from congressional Democrats or the White House about how to raise the debt limit.

“We’re going to put the ball over and see what you guys are actually going to do with it,” he said.

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

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

Congressional farm leaders split over work requirements for food aid, climate funds

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - APRIL 26, 2023 12:03 PM

WASHINGTON — Three of the four top agricultural leaders in Congress are emphasizing writing a farm bill that meets the needs of all rural Americans, but they diverge sharply over food assistance work requirements pushed by U.S. House Republicans as well as uses of Inflation Reduction Act conservation funds.

Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, Republican Sen. John Boozman of Arkansas and Republican Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson of Pennsylvania expressed a shared commitment to getting the bill done on time with "ground-up" input from farmers and ranchers while speaking this week at the North American Agricultural Journalists conference.

"When you look and see what's going on in rural America, agriculture is really all that's left," said Boozman, the ranking member on the Senate Committee for Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. "It's a safety net for our farmers, but it's also a safety net for rural America."

Still, the committee leaders split along party lines in discussing the possibility of expanded work requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. They also disagreed over a Senate Agriculture GOP proposal to redirect funding for climate initiatives in the Inflation Reduction Act into the farm bill's baseline budget.

The farm bill is a multiyear omnibus law which authorizes an array of agricultural and food programs, including federal crop insurance, food stamp benefits and farm resource conservation.

The farm bill is renewed close to every five years, and includes mandatory spending that must be in line with previous farm bills.

The 2018 farm bill expires at the end of September 2023, was projected to cost \$867 billion over 10 years when enacted, and has cost roughly \$428 billion over the past five years. Baseline spending for the coming farm bill is currently projected at \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 fiscal years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

SNAP work requirements

Boozman and Thompson, the chair of the House Agriculture Committee, spoke in favor of changes to the work requirements in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program proposed by California Republican Rep. Kevin McCarthy's debt limit and spending cuts bill.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is the predominant federal nutrition safety net for low-income Americans. The program, formerly known as food stamps, cost \$233 billion overall in 2021 and 2022 while serving more than 41 million people nationwide, according to the USDA.

McCarthy's bill, if passed, would require able-bodied adults without dependents ages 18 through 55 to work or participate in a work training or education program for at least 20 hours per week to receive continuous SNAP support, up from the current range of ages 18 to 49.

Thompson said he was happy McCarthy's team consulted him when designing the work requirements policy in the debt limit bill, which would save the country a "few billion dollars."

Thompson also applauded McCarthy's proposal to eliminate "hundreds of thousands" of accrued nutrition waivers in states, which he said keeps individuals out of the full benefits of the nutrition title like career training and education.

"Those have got to go," Thompson said. "What these folks really need, in addition to getting the nutrition support — which I'm certainly supportive of — they need a shot at the American dream, which is getting a new job or a better job."

Boozman also advocated for expanded SNAP work requirements, calling them an "integral part" of debt ceiling talks in the House. However, he said enforcing the work requirement in states is just as big of an issue as passing the legislation.

"I think you can make it more efficient," Boozman said. "Right now, the farm bill is \$1.2 trillion of nutri-

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tion, \$300 billion of farm programs. So there is a finite amount of money that we have to work with.”

Still, the Republican leaders did express diverging views on SNAP work requirements in future farm bill negotiations if the debt limit legislation stalls, as expected. The Senate is unlikely to take up the House legislation.

Boozman said that if McCarthy fails to get the debt limit bill with adjusted work requirements out of the House, “it would be hard to get an agreement in the future.”

In contrast, Thompson said he was open to addressing work requirements in the House version of the farm bill if McCarthy’s plan does not move forward.

“My preference would have been to just work on this in the farm bill,” he said. “I was pleased to work with leadership to provide very reasonable suggestions. I wouldn’t have offered that there if originally I wasn’t hoping to do something like that.”

Stabenow, the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said that she did not believe any debt limit bill with SNAP work requirements attached would be supported either by the Senate or the White House, “with the threat of default for our country.”

She added that the majority of SNAP assistance is directed to seniors, people with disabilities, families who have children or veterans.

“Taking \$6 a day away from a mom and her kids, or a senior citizen, or a person with disabilities, or a veteran, is not a winning strategy for Republicans,” she said. “It’s just mean.”

Climate and conservation

The Republican agricultural committee leaders also spoke to the need to loosen climate-based eligibility provisions in USDA programs that might limit risk management access for conventional farmers.

“Certainly we’re not going to try to tie our safety nets — our risk management tools, that our farmers desperately need around — to being climate-friendly,” Boozman said.

Boozman also expressed interest in a proposal from his staff that would reallocate \$37 billion in funds allocated to the USDA’s conservation programs from the Inflation Reduction Act to the farm bill’s baseline.

He added that his team is seeking increased clarity on the spending criteria for the funds after an April 20 Senate Agriculture Committee conservation hearing, especially regarding carbon capture.

Thompson suggested the House Agriculture Committee could request the House Appropriations Committee reappropriate Inflation Reduction Act funds to the farm bill baseline, given the House’s jurisdiction over federal spending granted in Article I of the Constitution.

He added that additional USDA funding has been authorized and allocated through Congress without being spent, and he has not before seen a farm bill “when there’s been that many pots of money sitting around idle.”

Stabenow, in contrast, said that the Inflation Reduction Act funds should not be reappropriated, given the original intent for the money to alleviate oversubscribed conservation programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, which helps farmers, ranchers and forest landowners integrate conservation practices on their working lands.

“These were not new programs,” Stabenow said. “So that is not something that I view as a pool to just throw into the farm bill. This is specific money augmenting the things that our farmers want.”

Reference price adjustments

Boozman reiterated that he would not vote on a farm bill that would not increase reference prices, or estimated average market prices tied to insurance reimbursement rates, for the farm bill’s commodity risk management programs like the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs. He said that reference prices had not been updated since 2012.

Stabenow said that while updated reference prices are a part of farm negotiations, and are of considerable interest to the middle of the country, farmers elsewhere may have different priorities for “what they most need.”

Thompson said that the increase for reference prices is important, “but it also is going to come with a dollar amount, too.”

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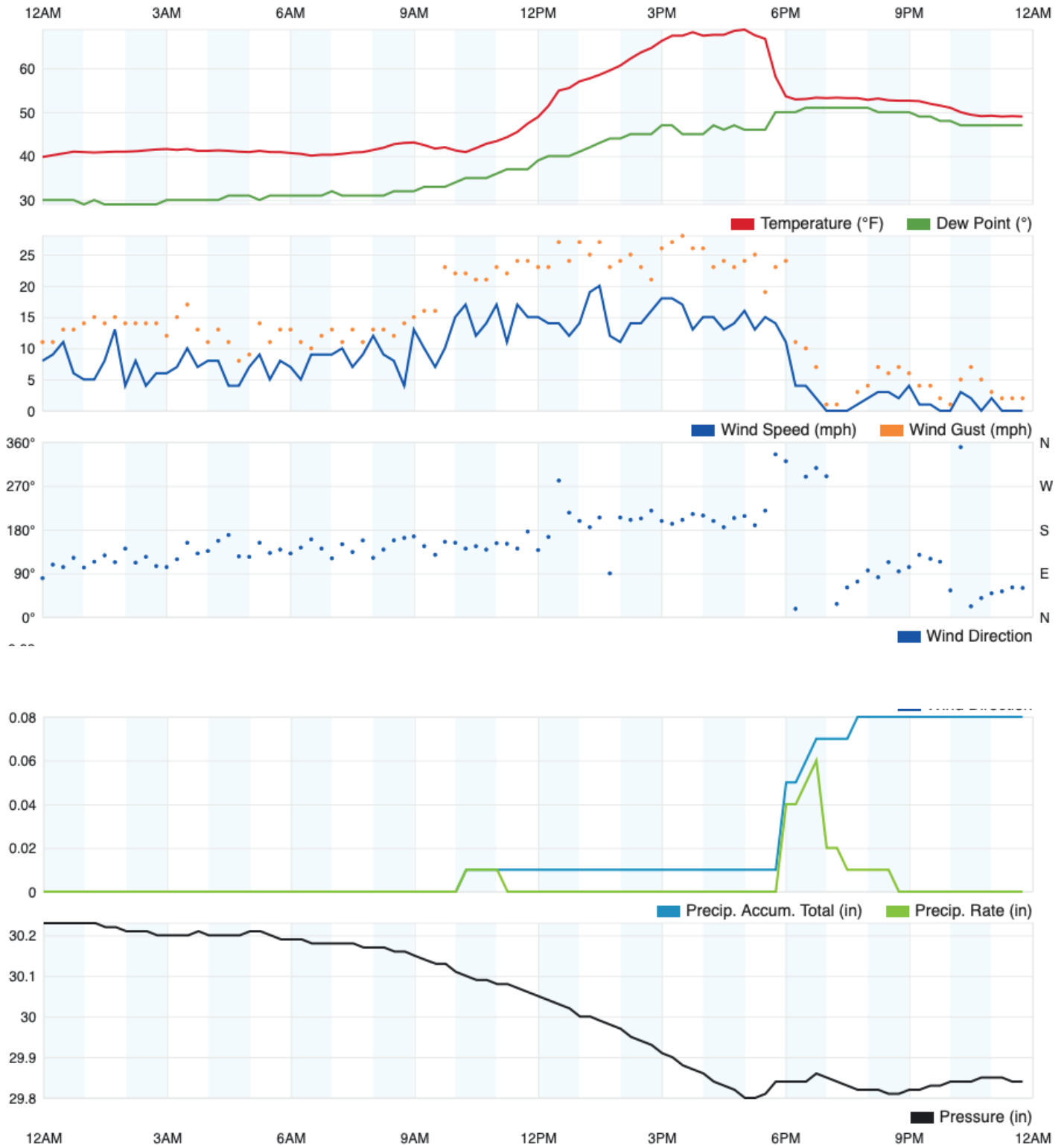
The committee leaders largely expressed the need for patience as lawmakers craft their respective bills. "We certainly are moving," said Stabenow. "This is going to take several months yet. So I think when you say on time, it's all relative. We're going to do this as quickly and as responsibly as we can."

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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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Areas Dense Fog then Showers Likely	Chance Showers and Breezy	Partly Sunny and Breezy then Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Chance Showers and Windy	Mostly Clear and Windy	Mostly Sunny and Breezy
High: 65 °F	Low: 38 °F	High: 52 °F	Low: 32 °F	High: 56 °F	Low: 33 °F	High: 52 °F

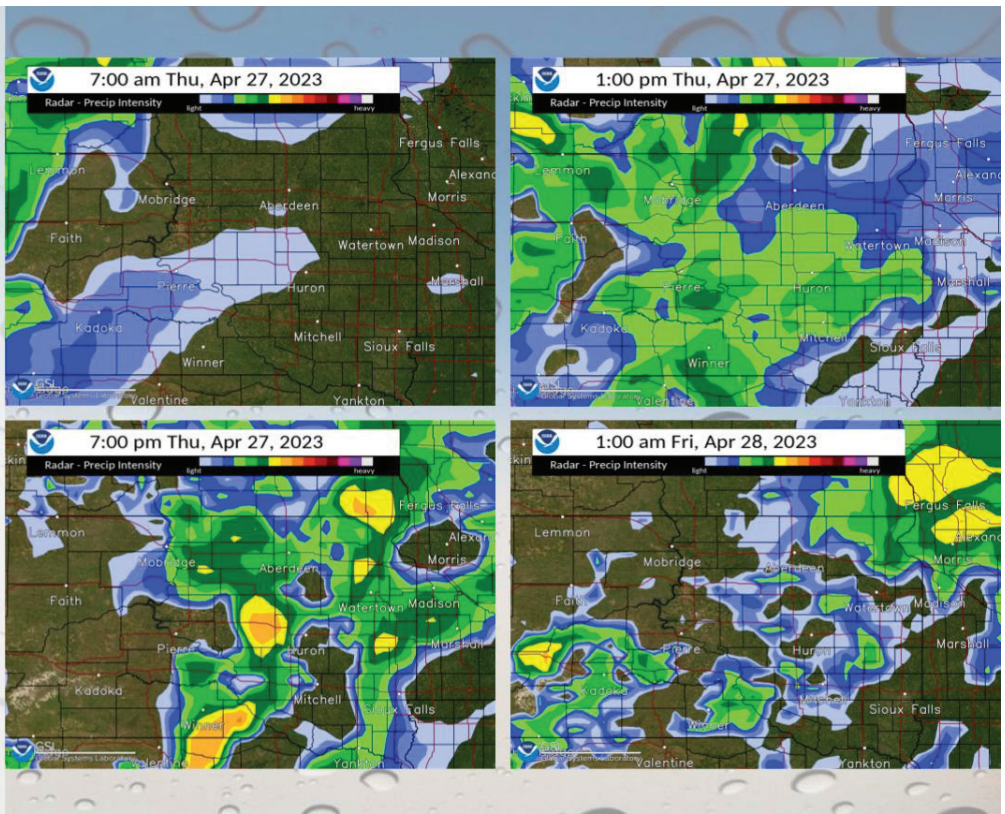


Today & Tonight:

Rain and a few thunderstorms by early afternoon, exiting overnight into Friday morning.

Highs in the 60s

 Winds increasing out of a northerly direction this afternoon & evening. Strongest winds with gusts 30 to 50 mph over portions of western & central SD.



A cold front will slide across the region bringing rain and a few thunderstorms for this afternoon and evening, before the rain ends northwest to southeast overnight into Friday morning. This 4-panel map shows one potential solution for timing and intensity of the rain.

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Increasing Winds Today



April 27, 2023
3:36 AM

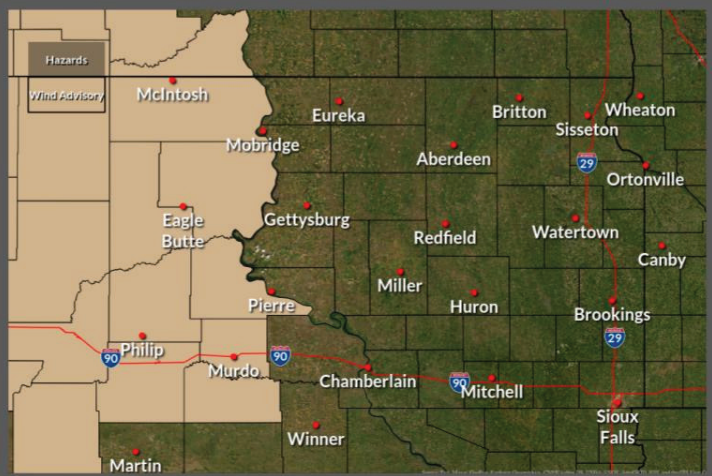
Maximum Wind Gust Forecast

	4/27 Thu				4/28 Fri						
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm
Aberdeen	18↑	18↑	30↓	44↓	44↓	43↓	38↓	32↓	28↓	23↓	23↓
Britton	20↑	18↑	25↓	41↓	43↓	41↓	36↓	30↓	25↓	24↓	21↓
Brookings	24↑	24↑	20↓	15↓	12↓	20↓	29↓	35↓	33↓	30↓	26↓
Chamberlain	17↑	17↑	15↓	18↓	30↓	35↓	38↓	38↓	36↓	33↓	30↓
Eagle Butte	30↑	38↓	44↓	44↓	44↓	35↓	33↓	30↓	30↓	30↓	29↓
Eureka	21↑	22↑	32↓	41↓	38↓	33↓	28↓	26↓	29↓	28↓	25↓
Gettysburg	23↑	26↑	36↓	43↓	44↓	41↓	35↓	31↓	33↓	31↓	28↓
Huron	17↑	17↑	16↓	14↓	23↓	35↓	36↓	36↓	36↓	31↓	29↓
Kennebec	25↑	24↑	31↓	43↓	44↓	44↓	40↓	35↓	35↓	32↓	29↓
McIntosh	30↑	43↓	44↓	44↓	37↓	31↓	29↓	26↓	31↓	31↓	25↓
Milbank	18↑	18↑	16↓	20↓	31↓	35↓	38↓	30↓	30↓	26↓	21↓
Miller	22↑	23↑	21↓	32↓	40↓	41↓	38↓	31↓	30↓	29↓	28↓
Mobridge	22↑	30↓	38↓	40↓	37↓	29↓	25↓	26↓	28↓	26↓	24↓
Murdo	25↑	28↑	36↓	44↓	44↓	41↓	36↓	32↓	31↓	30↓	28↓
Pierre	22↑	22↑	35↓	44↓	44↓	39↓	30↓	26↓	26↓	26↓	25↓
Redfield	18↑	21↑	18↓	33↓	41↓	44↓	38↓	33↓	29↓	26↓	25↓
Sisseton	18↑	17↑	16↓	29↓	38↓	38↓	37↓	29↓	25↓	23↓	20↓
Watertown	21↑	21↑	17↓	15↓	30↓	38↓	38↓	32↓	30↓	26↓	23↓
Webster	21↑	22↑	18↓	30↓	43↓	44↓	43↓	36↓	32↓	28↓	24↓
Wheaton	16↑	17↑	17↓	22↓	29↓	31↓	30↓	26↓	24↓	23↓	20↓

*Table values in mph

Don't see your city? Check out weather.gov/forecastpoints

Wind Advisory issued for much of western & central SD this afternoon & evening



Winds will be on the increase today, shifting out of the north behind a cold front sinking across the area. A Wind Advisory has been issued for much of western and central SD for this afternoon and evening.

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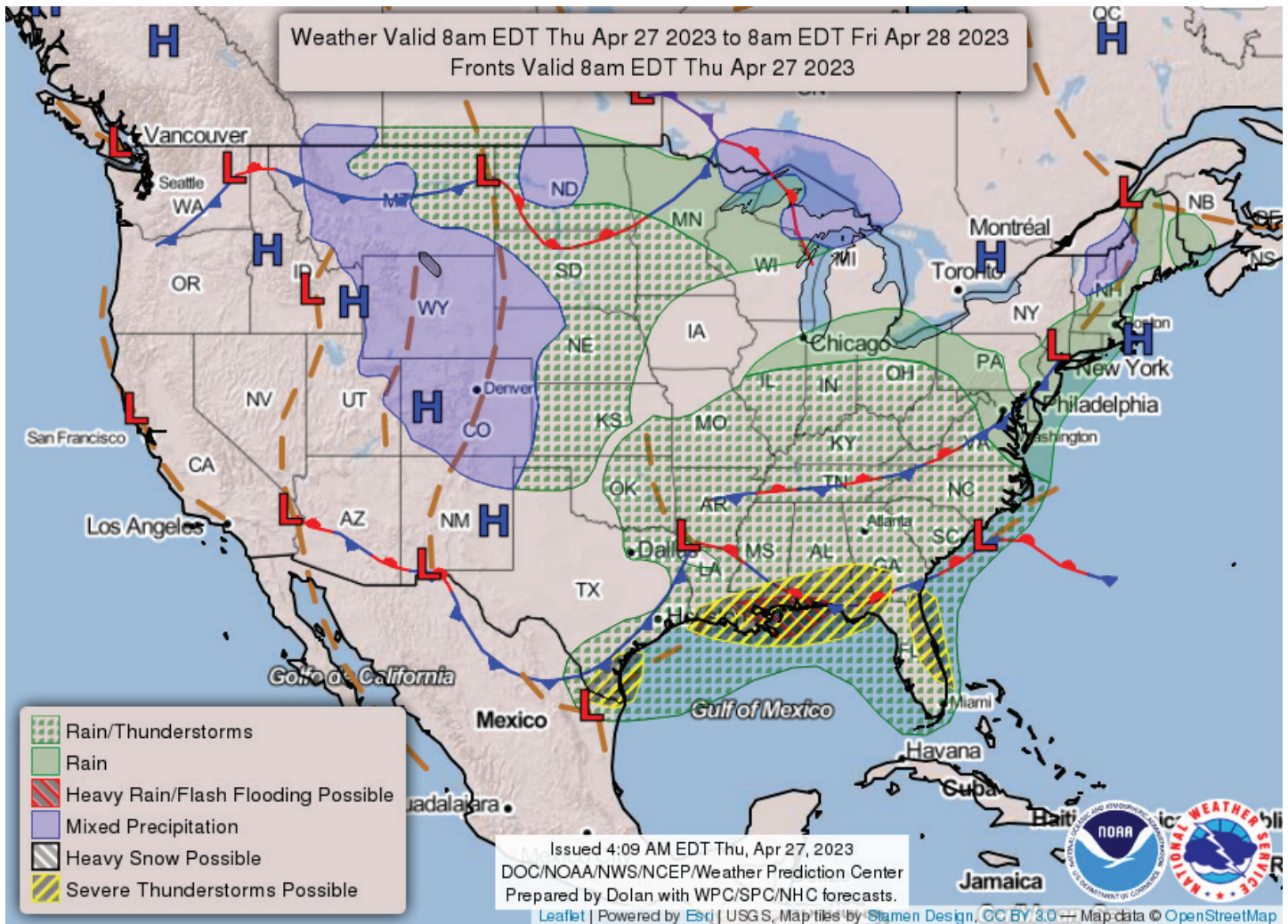
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 69 °F at 4:49 PM
Low Temp: 40 °F at 12:00 AM
Wind: 35 mph at 5:32 PM
Precip: : 0.08

Day length: 14 hours, 10 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 91 in 1897
Record Low: 217 in 2005
Average High: 63
Average Low: 36
Average Precip in April.: 1.63
Precip to date in April.: 1.67
Average Precip to date: 3.69
Precip Year to Date: 5.60
Sunset Tonight: 8:35:06 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:23:23 AM



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Today in Weather History

April 27, 1968: A significant snowstorm raged over the northern Black Hills blocking many highways near Gillette and Moorcroft with an estimated three to four feet of snow. Winds in the Sturgis area were nearly 90 mph.

1898: The first Weather Bureau kite was launched in Topeka, Kansas to report daily, early morning, atmospheric observations. By year's end, 16 additional launch sites would be in operation.

1899 - A tornado struck Kirksville, MO, killing 34 persons and destroying 300 buildings. (David Ludlum)

1912: The April 27-28, 1912 outbreak was the climax of a wild, week-long period of severe weather that occurred in Oklahoma. Strong to violent tornadoes struck portions of central and north-central Oklahoma on April 20, 1912. Also, a violent tornado hit Ponca City, OK on April 25, 1912. From the 27 through the 28th, 16 tornadoes rated F2 or greater touched down in the state with 6 of them rated F4. About 40 people were killed, and the storms injured 120 people.

1931: The temperature at Pahala, located on the main island of Hawaii, soared to 100 degrees to establish a state record.

1942 - A destructive tornado swept across Rogers County and Mayes County in Oklahoma. The tornado struck the town of Pryor killing 52 persons and causing two million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Forty-two cities in the western and south central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 87 degrees at Olympia WA was an April record, and highs of 92 degrees at Boise ID, 95 degrees at Monroe LA, and 96 degrees at Sacramento CA tied April records. (The National Weather Summary) More than 300 daily temperature records fell by the wayside during a two week long heat wave across thirty-four states in the southern and western U.S. Thirteen cities established records for the month of April. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1988 - Mount Washington NH reported seven feet of snow in ten days, pushing their snowfall total for the month past the previous record of 89.3 inches set in 1975. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Lower and Middle Mississippi Valley to Virginia and the Carolinas. Hail up to four and a half inches in diameter caused five million dollars damage around Omaha NE. Thunderstorms spawned eleven tornadoes, and there were 160 other reports of large hail and damaging winds. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in eastern Texas and the Lower Mississippi Valley. Severe thunderstorms spawned thirteen tornadoes in Texas and twelve in Louisiana. A tornado southwest of Coolidge TX injured eight persons and caused more than five million dollars damage. There were also eighty-five reports of large hail and damaging winds, with baseball size hail reported at Mexia TX and Shreveport LA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) Forty-three cities in the eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Records highs included 94 degrees at Charleston WV, 95 degrees at Baltimore MD and 96 degrees at Richmond VA. (The National Weather Summary)

2003: For only the 11th time since records began in 1871, hail was observed in Key West Florida. A severe thunderstorm produced hail to 1.75 inches in diameter which easily broke the previous record of a half an inch in diameter which was set on May 10, 1961.

2011 - An estimated 305 tornados between the 27th and 28th sets a record for the largest outbreak ever recorded, including two EF-5s, four EF-4s and 21 EF-3s. Arkansas through Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, southern Tennessee, Virginia to Pennsylvania and New York were all affected. An estimated 300 died including 210 in Alabama alone. This brought the April total past 600, the most in any month in recorded US weather history.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FROM FAILURE TO FORTUNE

Harlan Sanders had just turned forty. No matter what he tried, he failed. Nothing he did succeeded. He was discouraged and disheartened.

Then, one day someone said to him, "Life begins at forty!"

He decided to open a gas station. Shortly afterward, he added a luncheonette. People said that his chicken was tasteless. Rather than giving up on his tasteless chicken, he worked on new and different seasonings. One day he finally combined the right seasonings in the right amounts for his now famous recipe and called it Harlan Sanders' Fried Chicken. It soon brought him fame and fortune and the governor of Kentucky made him a "Kentucky Colonel." It was the beginning of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Through his faith in God he turned failure into fortune and tragedy into triumph and gave God the credit for his success. Life began at forty for the Colonel because he worked hard and trusted God. Hard work, trusting God and being faithful to the Lord is a winning combination. Follow the formula daily. It works.

Prayer: Father, help us to realize that failing does not make us a failure, but our lack of faith will. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13



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:
04.25.23

8 29 46 47 48 12

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$38,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 4
DRAW: Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.26.23

2 11 12 27 46 9

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,550,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 4
DRAW: Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.26.23

20 26 28 38 43 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 34 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.26.23

1 7 13 27 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$40,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 4
DRAW: Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.26.23

18 26 31 49 51 18

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
04.26.23

2 15 30 35 49 6

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$51,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

North Dakota governor vetoes 1 library bill, signs another

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

North Dakota's governor vetoed a bill Wednesday that would have required librarians under threat of criminal penalty to screen sexually explicit materials from children, but signed another barring explicit materials from the children's sections of local and school libraries.

The Senate voted 33-14 to override Republican Gov. Doug Burgum's veto hours later, though a similar House vote would be needed to make a veto override successful. The House had passed the bill on a 54-38 vote last week, several votes shy of a veto-proof majority.

"Protecting children from explicit sexual material is common sense," Burgum said in a statement explaining why he signed one of the bills into law.

But he said the bill he vetoed would have created "an enormous burden" on hundreds of public libraries by imposing — under the threat of criminal prosecution — an expensive requirement that libraries review materials that have already been screened for age appropriateness. His statement said it would cost the state \$300,000 initially to conduct such screening and \$150,000 per year thereafter.

"This bill is unnecessary, vague, and will not only cause immediate hardship to our schools and libraries, but also opens the door to costly, and unnecessary litigation," library coordinator Misti Frink had said in testimony against the bill this month. "Robust checks and balances are already in place for print and digital resource selections."

Republican Sen. Janne Myrdal, of Edinburg, spoke on the Senate floor in urging her colleagues to override the governor's veto, saying exposure to sexually explicit material "is devastating for young people's brains and lives."

"We deal with millions of dollars here. \$150,000 is like a drop in the bucket to protect our children," Myrdal said.

Language in the vetoed bill said prosecutors could charge a person with a class B misdemeanor — up to 30 days in prison and \$1,500 in fines — for willfully displaying sexually explicit material at newsstands or any other business establishment visited by minors. It said this would not include colleges, universities, museums or art galleries but would include public libraries and public school libraries, among some other places.

Opponents, including the American Civil Liberties Union of North Dakota, have said the now-vetoed bill would promote government censorship and violate First Amendment rights to say, think, read and write whatever one wants without fear of government retaliation.

Across the country, attempted book bans and restrictions on libraries have surged, setting a record in 2022, according to a recent report by the American Library Association.

Some books have been targeted by liberals citing racist language — notably Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" — according to Deborah Caldwell-Stone, who directs the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom.

But the vast majority of complaints have come from conservatives, directed at works with LGBTQIA+ or racial themes, Caldwell-Stone has said.

Bills to restrict books have been proposed or passed in Arizona, Iowa, Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Florida and other states.

Trisha Ahmed is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

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Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined
Madison Daily Leader. April 19, 2023.

Editorial: Open primaries deserve consideration in South Dakota

Petitions are starting to circulate to put a measure on the general election ballot in 2024. It's a measure to change our election process from party primaries to an open primary, in which all South Dakota voters can select the candidates who will run in each general election.

Today, Republicans and Democrats in South Dakota go to the polls in June in even-numbered years, using different ballots, with the intention of nominating a candidate for offices such as governor, the legislature and our members of Congress. Registered Independents (more than 120,000 South Dakotans) cannot vote in primaries.

And the primaries are where most legislative elections are determined. In the South Dakota Senate, 21 of 35 seats were determined in the 2022 Republican primary, so neither Independents nor Democrats were able to vote for the senator in their district. The majority of House of Representatives seats were also determined in the Republican primary.

The result of such one-sided party domination is hyper partisanship. In a more balanced situation, candidates need to get votes from all types of South Dakotans, including Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Today, candidates only need to get votes from Republicans to win, causing candidates to adhere tightly to the party platform.

The proposed constitutional amendment would allow all South Dakotans to vote in a common primary, which would have all candidates on the same ballot distributed to all voters. The top two candidates – of whatever party or affiliation – would advance to the general election. (In state House elections, the top four candidates will make it to the general election ballot, where two winners will be selected).

The point is to allow all South Dakotans to vote in the primary and cause all candidates to speak to all South Dakotans during campaigns.

About half of U.S. states offer some sort of open primary, of which there are several types. It appears to appeal equally to red and blue states. In surveys, Americans say overwhelmingly that they dislike hyper partisanship, as each party is getting more extreme in their views and leaving out those in the middle.

It's a long way to deciding this issue in November, 2024. But we like what we hear and encourage all voters to consider this measure thoughtfully.

Yankton Press & Dakotan. April 18, 2023.

Editorial: SD's Social Studies Issue And The People

The people were the big winners of Monday's 5-2 vote by the South Dakota Board of Education Standards (BOES) to adopt controversial new social studies guidelines pushed by Gov. Kristi Noem ...

That is, the winners were the people who helped shape this agenda that revamps the curriculum into a more single-minded, patriotic platform, which takes effect beginning in the 2025-2026 school year. These people include the governor herself, as well as members of Hillsdale College who have promoted this agenda in states across the country. It also includes some legislators who backed the proposal and criticized state educators, and it includes the five BOES members who defied calls to reject the standards. (Of the seven members of the BOES, only three are certified educators, according to South Dakota Searchlight.)

Thus, in this instance, the term "the people" does not include the following:

- It doesn't include those who filed comments opposing this proposed curriculum. These comments reportedly outnumbered those submitted by supporters of the new standards by about a 9-to-1 margin.
- It doesn't include the members of the many groups that came out against the new standards. That list includes the South Dakota Education Association, the South Dakota Association of Elementary School Principals, the South Dakota Association of Secondary School Principals, the South Dakota Counsel of Administrators of Special Education, the South Dakota Association of Supervision of Curriculum Development, the South Dakota School Superintendents Association and all nine South Dakota tribal nations, among many other entities.

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- It doesn't include the members of the 27 school boards around the state that passed resolutions opposing the new standards. The Yankton school board was among those in opposition.
 - It doesn't include the more than 40 members of the original task force who worked on crafting new social studies standards two years ago, only to see their final version mysteriously rewritten to conform with the Hillsdale vision that Noem advocated.
 - It doesn't include the teachers around the state whose work and judgment are, in effect, being questioned and overridden by a second 15-person work group, created after Noem, under fire, declared a do-over in the process. The second group included a retired educator from Hillsdale College who served as its facilitator. Former Huron superintendent Terry Nebelsick, who is on the BOES and was one the two "no" votes Monday, took exception to some of the criticisms lobbed at educators and administrators during this process. "We are not a bunch of union workers in a non-union state," he said. "Your comments are mean-spirited and totally unfounded by the work that we do."
 - It doesn't include the school districts in general, who now must figure out by 2025 how to pay for and implement these new proposals.
 - And, honestly, it doesn't include the students. They will see opportunities for critical thinking and analysis of American history de-emphasized and replaced by rote memorization and, to be frank, patriotic training that will likely shy away from closely examining the flaws and mistakes this nation has made and from which it has emerged stronger due to such introspection. According to SDNA president Loren Paul, teachers "truly believe these standards will fail our students."
- Other than ALL that, the people were apparently the winners ...
- Which perhaps offers some historical insight. South Dakota's cherished motto is "Under God the People Rule." That adage simply never makes clear which people that applies to at any given moment.
- END

Funding to support oral histories in boarding school era

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — The U.S. government is embarking on an effort to record the oral histories of survivors and descendants of boarding schools that sought to "civilize" Indigenous students, often through abusive practices.

The Interior Department announced a partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities on Wednesday to document the experiences of thousands of Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students at federally funded schools across the country.

The National Endowment for the Humanities contributed \$4 million for the project and will look for other ways to support research, educational programming and gatherings, the group said.

"The first step toward addressing the intergenerational consequences of these schools is to squarely acknowledge and examine the history of a federal system intended to separate families, erase Native languages and cultures, and dispossess Native peoples of their land," National Endowment for the Humanities' Chair Shelly Lowe said in a statement.

The endowment has supported other efforts, including a permanent exhibit on boarding schools at the Heard Museum in Phoenix and a project to digitize and transcribe records at the Genoa Indian School in Nebraska.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, who is a member of Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico, has prioritized publicly examining the trauma caused by the schools. The department released a first-of-its kind report pointing out 408 schools the federal government supported. Religious and private institutions that ran many of the schools received federal funding and were willing partners in assimilating Indigenous students.

The U.S. enacted laws and policies in 1819 to support the schools, most of which closed long ago. None still exist to strip students of their identities.

Victims and survivors of government-backed boarding schools have been sharing emotional stories during a "Road to Healing" tour organized by the Interior Department. They have recalled being locked in basements as punishment, hair being cut to stamp out their identities, and physical and mental abuse.

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Lowe, who is Navajo, attended sessions in Many Farms on the Navajo Nation and in Tulalip and heard former boarding school students talk about the effect the schools had their adult lives, and within their families and communities. Those include the diminishment of Native languages and cultures, she said.

"It is also clear tribal leaders and family members want to find avenues for healing for these former students while strengthening and expanding the teaching, use, and revitalization of Indigenous languages and cultural practices across their tribal nations," she told The Associated Press.

The Interior Department found in the first volume of an investigative report on boarding schools that at least 500 children died at some of the schools, though the number is expected to increase dramatically as research continues. A second volume is expected by the end of the year, the agency said.

Interior used existing resources to begin the work. Congress allocated \$14 million over the past two fiscal years, the agency said.

The tour has made stops in Oklahoma, South Dakota, Michigan, Arizona, the Navajo Nation and, most recently in Washington on the Tulalip Indian Reservation.

The oral history collection is an extension of the tour and comes at the request of Indigenous communities, Haaland said. It will ensure that future generations can learn from those stories, she said in a statement. "This is one step, among many, that we will take to strengthen and rebuild the bonds within Native communities that federal Indian boarding school policies set out to break," Haaland said.

Florida Gov. DeSantis says Disney lawsuit is political

By MOSHE EDRI and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Thursday shrugged off Disney's lawsuit against him as politically motivated, and that it was time for the iconic company to stop enjoying favorable treatment in his state.

Disney sued DeSantis on Wednesday over the Republican's appointment of a board of supervisors in its self-governed theme park district, alleging the governor waged a "targeted campaign of government retaliation" after the company opposed a law critics call, "Don't Say Gay."

The legal filing is the latest salvo in a more than year-old feud between Disney and DeSantis that has engulfed the governor in criticism as he prepares to launch an expected 2024 presidential bid.

"They're upset because they're having to live by the same rules as everybody else. They don't want to pay the same taxes as everybody else and they want to be able to control things without proper oversight," DeSantis said during a visit to Israel. "The days of putting one company on a pedestal with no accountability are over in the state of Florida."

DeSantis was speaking on the third leg of an international trip meant to burnish his foreign policy credentials ahead of a potential campaign for the Republican presidential nomination as a key rival to former President Donald Trump.

DeSantis has dived headlong into the fray with Disney, a major driver of tourism and a font for employment in Florida, as business leaders and White House rivals have bashed his stance as a rejection of the small-government tenets of conservatism.

The fight began last year after Disney, in the face of significant pressure, publicly opposed a state law that bans classroom lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in early grades, a policy critics call "Don't Say Gay."

DeSantis then took over Disney World's self-governing district and appointed a new board of supervisors to oversee municipal services in the sprawling theme parks. But before the new board came in, the company pushed through an 11th-hour agreement that stripped the new supervisors of much of their authority.

The Disney lawsuit asks a federal judge to void the governor's takeover of the theme park district, as well as the DeSantis oversight board's actions, on the grounds that they were violations of the company's free speech rights.

In a speech to a conference at Jerusalem's Museum of Tolerance, DeSantis spelled out his Middle East policy, speaking of the importance of the U.S.-Israel alliance. He said Israel was the only authority that

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could protect freedom of worship for all in combustible Jerusalem and that the U.S. embassy was rightfully moved to the city by the Trump administration, despite opposition from Palestinians.

He repeated his opposition to the deal that aimed to rein in Iran's nuclear program, saying it empowered that country's rulers rather than held them back. The Iran nuclear deal passed under Obama. His successor, Trump, revoked the U.S. agreement to it.

DeSantis also said the U.S. shouldn't interfere in the way Israel chooses to be governed, a direct critique of President Joe Biden, who has voiced concerns about a contentious Israeli government plan to overhaul the country's judiciary.

DeSantis began his multi-country trip in Japan and then traveled to South Korea. After Israel, he heads to Britain.

Goldenberg reported from Tel Aviv, Israel.

Take Our Kids to Work Day turns 30, hopes donations rebound

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — At Michigan State University, children of employees can spend Thursday seeing what it's like to staff a dairy farm, work in sports or plant a tree at the school's first in-person Take Our Kids to Work Day since the pandemic began.

Some 1,500 employees and kids have registered and the university has invited staff to bring any child in their life to explore the campus.

"This is a way that people can see each other and meet their families, show off MSU, which is designated a family friendly university," said Jaimie Hutchison, director of the university's WorkLife Office. "It also allows people to see what others do across campus and have more pride in the institution that they work for."

MSU's plans recall the roots of Take Our Kids to Work Day, which celebrates its 30th anniversary on Thursday. However, much has changed since then.

The idea of Take Our Kids to Work Day seemed like part of a bygone era in recent years because, due to the pandemic, there weren't a lot of workplaces to take them.

Many parents were always taking their kids to work — or taking their work to wherever the kids were — in the dawn of the work-from-home era caused by COVID-19. And for parents who needed to head to a workplace, precautions over limiting the spread of the disease generally kept their kids away.

This year, though, The Take Our Daughters And Sons To Work Foundation, the nonprofit that promotes the day, hopes to remind people of the importance of showing kids where their parents work. The foundation also hopes to get some help to ensure its survival.

The foundation, which marks the day annually on the third Thursday in April, was led for years by Carolyn McKecuen, an entrepreneur, artist and MacArthur Fellow, who Dave Oliveria, the foundation's interim executive director, called the linchpin of the organization. She died in November.

"The board is trying to pick up the pieces to just keep it going," Oliveria said. The foundation lost money last year and currently has no employees.

This year, it is partnering with Junior Achievement USA to host a virtual event that will include a game-show format where panelists will answer questions about their careers.

In the coastal town of Brigantine, New Jersey, school superintendent Glenn Robbins is encouraging his staff to bring their children to school and for students to accompany their parents to their workplaces Thursday. He estimates that around 30% of students will participate.

"It makes them appreciate things that they might not see when they're stuck in a school building every day for five days a week," he said.

Over the years, educators and schools have complained that having some students taken out of class is more disruptive than helpful.

Thirty years ago, the head of the Ms. Foundation for Women, Marie Wilson, was inspired by research into the flagging self-esteem of girls when they reached adolescence to suggest that parents bring their

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daughters to work to expand their sense of possibility.

The foundation's cofounder, Gloria Steinem, mentioned the idea in an interview and in the spring of 1993, "Take Our Daughters to Work" day exploded into reality.

"It challenged the workplace to be responsive to the family needs in some ways, even making people aware that many people had children at home," said Teresa Younger, president and CEO of the Ms. Foundation for Women.

Women's participation in the work force has been largely flat since 2000, after picking up in the 1990s. About three-quarters of women aged 25 through 54, a group that filters out students and retirees, were in the workforce in 1993, a figure that reached nearly 78% this year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The pandemic disproportionately drove women out of the workforce and they returned more slowly even after lockdown measures ended and available jobs again increased.

The name and date of the day has changed since it started, including boys officially in 2003, though many workplaces have used "kid" or "child" for years. Also, companies and workplaces are free to organize a day for employees to bring their children to work whenever and however they like, said Oliveria.

Around 1,000 kids have registered for this year's livestream, Junior Achievement US said. But it has always been difficult to measure participation, Oliveria said, but this year's participation likely represents a sharp decline from the 18 million kids that the organization said participated between 2005 and 2009.

"I don't see evidence of a million people, but I think that many companies can do their own thing and we wouldn't know," Oliveria said. "That's just a tough thing to put your arms around."

Younger said she understands the difficulty of continuing to meet the needs of the current moment.

"That's the challenge of every legacy organization, is: how do we respond to the challenges of now and continue to integrate the work as it needs to be?" she asked.

Bringing a child to work is still a meaningful way to create a more economically and socially equitable society, she said. "It holds industry accountable for the opportunities that they provide for the next generation and the exposure they provide."

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

Tense face-off: Philippines confronts China over sea claims

By JIM GOMEZ Associated Press

ABOARD BRP MALABRIGO (AP) — A Chinese coast guard ship blocked a Philippine patrol vessel steaming into a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, causing a frightening near-collision in the latest act of Beijing's aggression in the strategic waterway.

The high seas face-off Sunday between the larger Chinese ship and the Philippine coast guard's BRP Malapascua near the Second Thomas Shoal was among the tense moments it and another Philippine vessel encountered in a weeklong sovereignty patrol in one of the world's most hotly contested waterways.

The Philippine coast guard had invited a small group of journalists, including three from The Associated Press, to join the 1,670-kilometer (1,038-mile) patrol for the first time as part of a new Philippine strategy aimed at exposing China's increasingly aggressive actions in the South China Sea, where an estimated \$5 trillion in global trade transits each year.

In scorching summer heat but relatively calm waters, the Malapascua and another Philippine coast guard vessel, the BRP Malabrigo, journeyed to the frontlines of the long-seething territorial conflicts. They cruised past a string of widely scattered Philippine-occupied and claimed islands, islets and reefs looking for signs of encroachment, illegal fishing and other threats.

In areas occupied or controlled by China, the Philippine patrol vessels received radio warnings in Chinese and halting English, ordering them to immediately leave what the Chinese coast guard and navy radio callers claimed were Beijing's "undisputable territories" and issuing unspecified threats for defiance.

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Hostilities peaked Sunday morning in the Philippine-occupied Second Thomas Shoal.

As the two patrol vessels approached the shoal's shallow turquoise waters for an underwater survey, the Chinese coast guard repeatedly warned them by radio to leave the area, which is about 194 kilometers (121 miles) west of the Philippine island province of Palawan.

After several radio exchanges, a Chinese coast guard caller, sounding agitated, warned of unspecified adversarial action.

"Since you have disregarded our warning, we will take further necessary measures on you in accordance with the laws and any consequences entailed will be borne by you," the Chinese speaker said.

A Chinese coast guard ship rapidly approached and shadowed the smaller Malapascua and the Malabrigo. When the Malapascua maneuvered toward the mouth of the shoal, the Chinese ship suddenly shifted to block it, coming as close as 36 to 46 meters (120 to 150 feet) from its bow, said Malapascua's skipper, Capt. Rodel Hernandez.

To avoid a collision, Hernandez abruptly reversed his vessel's direction then shut off its engine to bring the boat to a full stop.

Filipino personnel aboard the vessels — and journalists, who captured the tense moment on camera — watched in frightened silence. But the Malapascua steered just in time to avoid a potential disaster.

Hernandez later told journalists that the "sudden and really very dangerous maneuver" by the Chinese coast guard ship had disregarded international rules on collision avoidance. He had the Philippine vessels leave the area after the encounter for the safety of the ships and personnel.

Earlier, a huge Chinese navy ship shadowed the two Philippine patrol vessels in the dark of night as they cruised near Subi, one of seven barren reefs China has transformed in the last decade into a missile-protected island base. The Chinese navy ship radioed the Philippine vessels "to immediately leave and keep out."

The coast guard radioed back to assert Philippine sovereign rights to the area before steaming away.

China has long demanded that the Philippines withdraw its small contingent of naval forces and tow away the actively commissioned but crumbling BRP Sierra Madre. The navy ship was deliberately marooned on the shoal in 1999 and now serves as a fragile symbol of Manila's territorial claim to the atoll.

Chinese ships often block navy vessels delivering food and other supplies to the Filipino sailors on the ship, including just a few days earlier, Hernandez said.

In another Philippine-claimed reef called Whitsun, the Philippine patrol vessels spotted more than 100 suspected Chinese militia ships arrayed side by side in several clusters in the shallows. China says the huge trawler-like ships are fishing vessels, but Manila's coast guard suspects they are being used for surveillance or to hold the reef for future development.

Filipino coast guard personnel aboard two motor boats approached the Chinese ships and ordered them through a loudspeaker to leave, but none did.

Philippine officials required participating journalists to not immediately release information about the trip to ensure the safety of the mission and to give the coast guard time to brief defense, justice and foreign affairs officials in charge of handling the touchy territorial conflicts.

Faced with a militarily far-superior China in the disputed waters, the Philippines launched the campaign early this year to expose the Asian superpower's aggression, hoping public awareness and criticism will force Beijing to abide by international law.

Philippines coast guard spokesperson Commodore Jay Tarriela said the strategy was working. He noted the Chinese ambassador in Manila was prompted to hold a news conference to explain Beijing's side amid outrage over a publicly released video that showed a Chinese coast guard ship aiming a military-grade laser in early February that temporarily blinded two crewmembers of the Malapascua off the Second Thomas Shoal.

The territorial conflicts involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have long been regarded as an Asian flashpoint and a delicate fault line in the rivalry between the United States and China in the region.

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While the U.S. lays no claims to the South China Sea, it has deployed its warships and fighter jets for patrols and military exercises with regional allies to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight, which it says is in America's national interest.

Beijing has criticized a recent agreement by the Philippines and the U.S. to grant American forces access to additional Filipino military camps. China fears the access would provide Washington with military staging grounds and surveillance outposts in the northern Philippines across the sea from Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its territory, and in provinces facing the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety.

Washington has repeatedly warned that it would help defend the Philippines — its oldest treaty ally in Asia — if Philippine forces, ships or aircraft are attacked in the South China Sea.

With multiple conflicts looming in what appears to be a placid expanse of sea, where dolphins and starlit night skies send seafarers grabbing for their cameras, Malabrigo's skipper Julio Colarina III said he would always strive to stay on the right side of a geopolitical minefield.

"As much as possible we'll avoid conflict in the area," he said. "All these competing interests just need one spark."

Associated Press journalists Joeal Calupitan and Aaron Favila contributed to this report.

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

Food prices fall on world markets but not on kitchen tables

By PAUL WISEMAN and EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

A restaurant on the outskirts of Nairobi skimps on the size of its chapatis — a flaky, chewy Kenyan flatbread — to save on cooking oil. Cash-strapped Pakistanis reluctantly go vegetarian, dropping beef and chicken from their diets because they can no longer afford meat. In Hungary, a cafe pulls burgers and fries off the menu, trying to dodge the high cost of oil and beef.

Around the world, food prices are persistently, painfully high. Puzzlingly, too. On global markets, the prices of grains, vegetable oil, dairy and other agricultural commodities have fallen steadily from record highs. But the relief hasn't made it to the real world of shopkeepers, street vendors and families trying to make ends meet.

"We cannot afford to eat lunch and dinner on most days because we still have rent and school fees to pay," said Linnah Meuni, a Kenyan mother of four.

She says a 2-kilogram (4.4-pound) packet of corn flour costs twice what she earns a day selling vegetables at a kiosk.

Food prices were already running high when Russia invaded Ukraine in February last year, disrupting trade in grain and fertilizer and sending prices up even more. But on a global scale, that price shock ended long ago.

The United Nations says food prices have fallen for 12 straight months, helped by decent harvests in places like Brazil and Russia and a fragile wartime agreement to allow grain shipments out of the Black Sea.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's food price index is lower than it was when Russian troops entered Ukraine.

Yet somehow exorbitant food prices that people have little choice but to pay are still climbing, contributing disproportionately to painfully high inflation from the United States and Europe to the struggling countries of the developing world.

Food markets are so interconnected that "wherever you are in the world, you feel the effect if global prices go up," said Ian Mitchell, an economist and London-based co-director of the Europe program at the Center for Global Development.

Why is food price inflation so intractable, if not in world commodity markets, then where it counts — in bazaars and grocery stores and kitchen tables around the world?

Joseph Glauber, former chief economist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, notes that the price of

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specific agricultural products — oranges, wheat, livestock — are just the beginning.

In the United States, where food prices were up 8.5% last month from a year earlier, he says that “75% of the costs are coming after it leaves the farm. It’s energy costs. It’s all the processing costs. All the transportation costs. All the labor costs.”

And many of those costs are embedded in so-called core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and has proven stubbornly hard to wring out of the world economy. Food prices soared 19.5% in the European Union last month from a year earlier and 19.2% in the U.K., the biggest increase in nearly 46 years.

Food inflation, Glauber says, “will come down, but it’s going to come down slowly, largely because these other factors are still running pretty high.”

Others, including U.S. President Joe Biden, see another culprit: a wave of mergers that have, over the years, reduced competition in the food industry.

The White House last year complained that just four meatpacking companies control 85% of the U.S. beef market. Likewise, just four firms control 70% of the pork market and 54% of the poultry market. Those companies, critics say, can and do use their market power to raise prices.

Glauber, now a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute, isn’t convinced that consolidation in agribusiness is to blame for persistently high food prices.

Sure, he says, big agribusinesses can rake in profits when prices rise. But things usually even out over time, and their profits diminish in lean times.

“There’s a lot of market factors right now, fundamentals, that can explain why we have such inflation,” he says. “I couldn’t point my finger at the fact that we just have a handful of meat producers.”

Outside the United States, he says, a strong dollar is to blame for keeping prices high. In other recent food-price crunches, like in 2007-2008, the dollar wasn’t especially strong.

“This time around, we’ve had a strong dollar and an appreciating dollar,” Glauber said. “Prices for corn and wheat are quoted in dollars per ton. You put that in local currency terms, and because of the strong dollar, that means they haven’t seen” the price drops that show up in commodity markets and the U.N. food price index.

In Kenya, drought added to food shortages and high prices arising from the impact of war in Ukraine, and costs have stayed stubbornly high ever since.

Corn flour, a staple in Kenyan households that is used to make corn meal known as ugali, has doubled in price over the last year. After the 2022 elections, President William Ruto ended subsidies meant to cushion consumers from higher prices. Nonetheless, he has promised to bring down corn flour prices.

Kenyan millers bought wheat when global prices were high last year; they also have been contending with high production costs arising from bigger fuel bills.

In response, small Kenyan restaurants like Mark Kioko’s have had to raise prices and sometimes cut back on portions.

“We had to reduce the size of our chapatis because even after we increased the price, we were suffering because cooking oil prices have also remained high,” Kioko says.

In Hungary, people are increasingly unable to cope with the biggest spike in food prices in the EU, reaching 45% in March.

To keep up with rising ingredient costs, Cafe Csiga in central Budapest has raised prices by around 30%.

“Our chef closely follows prices on a daily basis, so the procurement of kitchen ingredients is tightly controlled,” said the restaurant’s general manager, Andras Kelemen. The café even dropped burgers and French fries from the menu.

Joszeff Varga, a fruit and vegetable seller in Budapest’s historic Grand Market Hall, says his wholesale costs have risen by 20% to 30%. All his customers have noticed the price spikes — some more than others.

“Those with more money in their wallets buy more, and those with less buy less,” he said. “You can feel it significantly in people, they complain that everything is more expensive.”

In Pakistan, shop owner Mohammad Ali says some customers are going meatless, sticking to vegetables

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and beans instead. Even the price of vegetables, beans, rice and wheat are up as much as 50%.

Sitting at her mud-brick home outside the capital of Islamabad, 45-year-old widow Zubaida Bibi says: "Our life was never easy, but now the price of everything has increased so much that it has become difficult to live."

This month, she stood in a long line to get free wheat from Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's government during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Bibi works as a maid, earning just 8,000 Pakistani rupees (\$30) a month.

"We need many other things, but we don't have enough money to buy food for our children," she said.

She gets money from her younger brother Sher Khan to stay afloat. But he's vulnerable, too: Rising fuel costs may force him to close his roadside tea stall.

"Increasing inflation has ruined my budget," he said. "I earn less and spend more."

Wiseman reported from Washington and Musambi from Nairobi, Kenya. AP reporters Munir Ahmed in Islamabad, Pakistan; Justin Spike in Budapest, Hungary; and Courtney Bonnell in London contributed.

See AP's complete coverage of the food crisis at <https://apnews.com/hub/food-crisis>.

Reported fighting in Sudan's Darfur mars fragile truce

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Fighting intensified in Sudan's war-ravaged province of Darfur during a fragile three-day truce between the country's battling top generals, killing an estimated dozens of people, residents said Thursday.

The truce eased fighting in the country's capital, creating a lull that allowed foreign governments to evacuate thousands of their nationals. Tens of thousands of Sudanese traveled to their country's land borders with Egypt, Chad and Ethiopia, and to a port city on the country's Red Sea.

The new clashes targeted civilians in the capital city of Genena, the residents said, an area that is regularly roiled by outbursts of brutal tribal violence. They described attacks by fighters, mostly wearing the uniforms of the country's powerful paramilitary, on several neighborhoods across the city early Thursday, forcing many families to leave their homes.

"The attacks come from all directions," said Amany, a Genena resident who asked to withhold her family name for her safety. "All are fleeing."

Much attention has been centered on the capital's intense fighting, including airstrikes and artillery and drone strikes, since the country's military and its powerful paramilitary known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) started battling for key government institutions and military bases on April 15.

The fighting in the capital has created dire conditions for many struggling to obtain food and water, and electricity is cut off across much of the capital and other cities. Multiple aid agencies have had to suspend operations, a heavy blow in a country where a third of the population of 46 million relies on humanitarian assistance.

But there are now more indications that other remote provinces are witnessing deadly violence.

Fighting in Genena first escalated earlier this week. Residents reported widespread looting and destruction of government offices and aid agencies' compounds in the city including U.N. premises and the headquarters of the Sudanese Red Crescent.

Adam Haroun, a political activist in West Darfur, said dozens of people were killed over the past two days in Genena. He said the fighting "with light and heavy weapons" has already turned into tribal violence.

Speaking over the phone from Genena's western neighborhood of Gamarek, Haroun said tribal fighters were roaming the streets, destroying and looting "whatever they found." He said Genena's main open market was completely destroyed.

"The battles are raging right now," he said over the phone, the sound of gunfire overtaking his voice at times. "It's scorched-earth war."

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Volker Perthes, the U.N. envoy for Sudan, said late Wednesday that the Genena clashes have been centered on civilians and run the risk of kicking off a dangerous cycle of violence between rival tribes.

Meanwhile, in Khartoum, residents reported hearing gunfire and explosions in some parts of the capital. They said the military's warplanes bombed RSF position in the upscale neighborhood of Kafouri. The RSF confirmed that its camp in the neighborhood was bombed.

And international pressures increased for the generals to reach even a short-term sort of peace, with the latest offer coming from Sudan's neighbor, South Sudan, which split from Sudan in 2011 after years of civil war.

South Sudan's President Salva Kiir on Wednesday urged the warring sides to extend the cease-fire for three more days to allow civilians access to food and other services, including health care.

Addressing a joint press conference at the president's office in Juba, acting Foreign Minister Deng Dau Deng said Kiir has engaged with the leaders of the military and the RSF to launch negotiations to end the crisis.

Deng said Sudan's army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan has accepted the proposal, while Kiir was still engaging with the RSF commander Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

The Sudanese military said it "initially accepted" an initiative brokered by the eight-nation East Africa trade bloc known as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, or IGAD, extend the current cease-fire for another three days after it expires Thursday.

The diplomatic initiative would also include direct negotiations between the military and the RSF in South Sudan's capital, Juba.

Why the US evacuation from Sudan left Americans behind

By LOLITA C. BALDOR, MATTHEW LEE and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Warring factions trying to seize control of the east African nation of Sudan have plunged the country into chaos, and thousands are fleeing the capital of Khartoum and nearby battle zones. Some countries, including the U.S., have shuttered their embassies and many are coordinating daring evacuations of their staffs and other residents in an array of convoys, flights and frantic getaway drives.

But over the past week there have been dramatically different responses by various governments as they try to get their citizens and embassy personnel to safety. The U.S. has come under scrutiny for evacuating roughly 70 embassy staff in a helicopter mission by elite SEAL commandos over the weekend, while warning thousands of private American citizens in Sudan there would be no similar evacuation for them.

The State Department, which has advised U.S. citizens for years not to travel to Sudan, continues to advise Americans to shelter in place. Most of the estimated 16,000 Americans believed to be in Sudan right now are dual U.S.-Sudanese nationals and only a fraction of them have expressed a desire to leave.

But at least some of those who want to leave have managed to get to Port Sudan where they can take a ferry to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, or have gotten seats on flights operated by other countries.

A look at the situation:

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SUDAN

It all boils down to a struggle for power between two powerful generals and their armies: Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, who leads the Sudanese armed forces, and Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, the head of a paramilitary group known as the Rapid Support Forces.

Four years ago, a popular uprising in Sudan helped depose long-time autocrat Omar al-Bashir. But in 2021, the two generals — Burhan and Dagalo — jointly orchestrated a coup that derailed efforts to develop a civilian government. Both men have a history of human rights abuses, and their forces have cracked down on pro-democracy activists.

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

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violence on April 15.

Each side has tens of thousands of troops in and around Khartoum and the city of Omdurman on the opposite bank of the Nile River. On Wednesday, the second day of the latest fragile ceasefire, sporadic fighting continued.

HOW THE US GOT EMBASSY STAFF OUT

As security conditions worsened late last week, including damage to the civilian airport and an attack on a U.S. diplomatic convoy in Khartoum, the State Department concluded that "the only way we could do this safely for all of our diplomatic personnel was to rely on the capabilities of our military colleagues," said Ambassador John Bass, State Department undersecretary for management.

On Saturday, the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum suspended its operations and ordered staff to leave the country.

The Department of Defense had begun moving resources to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti to prepare for a possible evacuation. On Saturday, three MH-47 Chinook helicopters carrying elite SEAL commandos took off from Djibouti enroute to Ethiopia, where they refueled and then made the three-hour flight to Khartoum.

"The operation was fast and clean, with service members spending less than an hour on the ground in Khartoum," said Lt. Gen D.A. Sims, director of operations at the Joint Staff. The helicopters flew in and out of Khartoum without taking any fire.

AMERICANS STILL IN SUDAN

While embassy staff was airlifted out, there were no plans to provide similar evacuations for potentially thousands of Americans still in Sudan.

In a security alert Tuesday, the State Department reiterated 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."

Instead, it provided details on border crossings that are available and the requirements needed at each location. It cautioned that fighting continues and that many routes are dangerous and unpredictable.

American citizens who get to Port Sudan overland and can take a ferry to Jeddah will be assisted by the U.S. consulate there. Right now, the U.S. assistance for Americans is largely limited to phone and virtual help.

The U.S. could send Navy vessels to Port Sudan to ferry Americans to Jeddah or another location where they could get transportation back to the United States. However, officials say this would depend on the security situation and whether it is safe for ships to dock. The U.S. has developed other options, such as opening a temporary consulate in Port Sudan, beefing up its consulate in Jeddah to assist Americans as they arrive, or using a nearby airfield that other European countries have used to fly citizens out.

U.S. officials believe the security situation in Port Sudan is better than in the capital, but remain concerned about the potential for an escalation of violence.

WHAT OTHER COUNTRIES ARE DOING

While the U.S. says it's too dangerous to get its citizens out, other countries are proceeding with evacuations of their nationals.

France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Holland, Turkey, Japan, South Korea, Jordan, South Africa, Egypt and Saudi Arabia are among the countries that have evacuated their citizens and those of other countries.

Germany's defense ministry said in a tweet Tuesday it had ended its evacuation flights after flying more than 700 people out of Sudan including 200 Germans and hundreds more from more than 20 other nations. France said it had evacuated more than 500 people from 41 countries, and would keep a Navy frigate at Sudan's main Red Sea port to continue assisting rescue operations for foreigners. The United

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Kingdom was continuing its military evacuations of civilians from an airport outside Khartoum. Brig. Dan Reeve told reporters Wednesday the situation was "calm" and that Sudan's armed forces were maintaining good security around the airport.

Saudi Arabia's state run news service said Tuesday it had evacuated about 2,150 people by ship from Sudan, including 114 Saudi citizens and more than 2,000 evacuees from 62 other nations. And Egypt, which had evacuated more than 1,500 of its citizens, said its diplomatic mission won't leave Sudan until it ensures the evacuation of all those who want to leave. An administrator with the Egyptian embassy in Khartoum was shot dead Monday, the Foreign Ministry said.

IS THE US RESPONSE UNUSUAL?

While many Americans may recall the dramatic 2021 evacuation of diplomats and private citizens alike from Afghanistan, those circumstances were far different. In most cases, the U.S. does not evacuate private citizens when it closes an embassy.

The situation in Afghanistan was different because the U.S. was ending a 20-year military presence in the country. It was trying to extricate the residual American presence there, much of which was directly tied to Washington's role in propping up the Afghan government. No such situation existed or exists in Sudan.

More typical has been the practice in places like Yemen, Syria and Venezuela, where the U.S. suspended diplomatic operations and removed personnel because of turmoil, but did not evacuate private citizens.

The U.S. also briefly shuttered the embassy in Kyiv because of the Russia invasion, but there was no military evacuation for either diplomats or private citizens, and the embassy has since re-opened.

In contrast with the situation in Afghanistan, the U.S. was not involved militarily in the Sudan conflict and had no military presence on the ground apart from the small number of Marine guards at the Khartoum embassy.

Also, the U.S. has warned Americans for several years not to travel to Sudan and told them that consular assistance at the embassy was extremely limited.

Associated Press writers Ellen Knickmeyer in Washington, Jill Lawless in London and Sam Magdy in Cairo contributed to this report.

King's coronation part of long evolution for Queen Camilla

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — When Camilla, Britain's queen consort, is crowned alongside her husband next week, the moment will mark the culmination of a remarkable - and painstakingly slow - transformation over five decades of a figure once reviled as the other woman and considered a huge liability to the British monarchy.

With the coronation of King Charles III days away and his first seven months on the throne under his belt, many in Britain have grown to accept Camilla, though some experts and observers say she will always walk in the shadow of her past.

"Without really trying too hard, but just by giving it time and going gently, gently, she has managed to show people the real person that she is — that she's not this villainess, and that she's there to do the hard work," said Ingrid Seward, editor-in-chief of Majesty magazine. "But the most important thing about Camilla is the way she appears to support her husband and back him up."

Camilla, 75, was mercilessly torn apart by the tabloids for years. Seward said she earned respect by putting her head down and steadily getting on with her duties. She's won over much of the British public with her down-to-earth personality and her charitable work, notably against domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse — causes she says she'll continue to support as queen.

But some say she'll never fully shake her reputation as the third person in the marriage between Charles and Princess Diana.

"I would actually argue that she still is the other woman, and probably will remain the other woman," said Arianne Chernock, a professor specializing in modern British history at Boston University. "Diana will

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very much be a presence in the room in Westminster Abbey in May 6 — I think it's hard not to see her when you look at Charles and Camilla.

"And the challenge remains even going forward, even as Queen Camilla, which at one point would have been unthinkable."

Camilla Rosemary Shand — born July 17, 1947 to a family with long links with Britain's royal family — reportedly first met Charles at a polo match in 1970, when she was 23. The pair quickly became close, but their romance was interrupted when Charles went on naval duty.

In his absence, Camilla married her longtime boyfriend, army officer Andrew Parker-Bowles, in 1973. Charles married Diana in 1981. In the early '90s, Diana went public with her resentment of Charles and Camilla's relationship. The sensational details that followed caused an embarrassing scandal for the royal family.

Camilla and her husband divorced in 1995, shortly after Charles gave an explosive television interview admitting the affair. Charles and Diana divorced the following year. In 1997, Diana died in a car crash; a global outpouring of grief followed. Camilla and Charles waited until 2005 to marry in a private civil ceremony.

Mindful of lingering public hostility toward Camilla, palace officials cautiously managed her public appearances over the decades. Camilla made dozens of official visits with charities each year, and her warm personality and ease at connecting with people no doubt helped her image makeover; those who've met her often describe her as warm, unstuffy and likeable.

"When you meet her, she doesn't appear to be aloof in any way whatsoever," Seward said. "She's just always the same as she was. And I think this is one probably one of her biggest assets."

Sensitivity about Camilla's status as Charles' second wife long made the question of what title she'd hold when he became king a subject of contention. Queen Elizabeth II settled the matter last year, when she gave the blessing for Camilla to be known as queen consort. The endorsement was widely seen as a formal sign that the royal family had finally accepted Camilla as a respected senior member.

Earlier this month, Buckingham Palace's official coronation invitations referred to Camilla as "Queen Camilla" for the first time. Queen consorts do not formally share the sovereign's powers, and dropping the "consort" part of the title won't change that. Nonetheless, the change marked another step in Camilla's long road to rehabilitating her image.

But the change in her title "does not necessarily suggest full public approval," Chernock said. "Camilla, regardless of what she does, will always be divisive."

In March, Camilla dazzled crowds at her first state visit as queen consort, donning a diamond tiara belonging to the Queen Mother and a diamond necklace from Elizabeth II for a state banquet in Berlin.

Her image makeover hit a snag when her stepson, Prince Harry, stirred up old grievances and painted her as a schemer who played "the long game," with a campaign aimed at "marriage and eventually the crown."

In his memoir "Spare" and in interviews promoting the book, Harry accused Camilla of trading private information about him and others to the media as part of a drive to forge friendly relationships with journalists and improve her reputation.

Harry said he and his elder brother, Prince William, had urged their father not to marry Camilla, but both reluctantly accepted her into their lives.

Camilla's son, Tom Parker Bowles, hit back at Harry's claims last week: "I don't care what anyone says — this wasn't any sort of end game. She married the person she loved and this is what happened."

Camilla rarely speaks about her private life. In an interview with British Vogue last year, she acknowledged she was "scrutinized for such a long time that you just have to find a way to live with it."

"Nobody likes to be looked at all the time and, you know, criticized," she said. "But I think in the end, I sort of rise above it and get on with it."

She focuses her energy on the causes she champions: promoting children's literacy and animal welfare, and speaking out about domestic sexual abuse and gender-based violence.

Chernock said that while Camilla and Charles' relatively advanced years mean they have limited scope to reshape perceptions of the monarchy, it isn't too late for her to tackle more complex topics and win wider respect.

"She has this incredible opportunity in front of her, this tremendous platform," she said. She suggested the pair could "provide a space for some of the more challenging conversations that not just Britain, but global audiences want the royal family to be having right now — especially questions about legacies of racism, slavery, elitism."

But Seward believes that may be too ambitious for a woman she believes never envisioned becoming queen.

"She'll carry on with all these charities, but she's going to get bombarded with a lot more," she said. "She won't be able to be too outspoken and won't really want to be because, you know, everybody that cares knows what she thinks already.

"She'll just get on with it. And that is really her mantra."

Follow AP's coverage of King Charles III at <https://apnews.com/hub/king-charles-iii>

Tunisia rounds up migrants at sea in unprecedented numbers

By MEHDI EL-AREM and ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

OFF THE COAST OF SFAX, Tunisia (AP) — A young man wearing a baseball cap emblazoned with "Dior," women clutching babies wrapped in blankets, children bundled in winter coats. All gingerly stepped from rickety boats into the sturdy craft of the Tunisian Maritime National Guard — and away from their dreams of life in Europe.

Cold, wet and heartbroken, they are among hundreds caught daily in overnight sweeps for migrant boats on the Mediterranean Sea.

"Sit down! Sit down! Sit down!" The shouted order confirmed the group was no longer in charge of their destiny. A woman sobbed.

On an overnight expedition with the National Guard last week, The Associated Press witnessed migrants pleading to continue their journeys to Italy in unseaworthy vessels, some taking on water. Over 14 hours, 372 people were plucked from the fragile boats.

Migrants, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, are undertaking the perilous journey in unprecedented numbers. In the first three months of this year, 13,000 migrants were forced from their boats off the eastern Tunisian port city of Sfax, the main launching point. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of migrants heading to Europe, mostly to Italy but also to Malta, nearly doubled.

In a single day in March, a record 2,900 migrants were stopped in the Sfax region, which also includes the coastal city of Mahdia and the Kerkennah Islands, off the Sfax coast, said National Guard Brig. Gen. Sabeur Younes.

Migration to Europe has been on an upward climb, peaking in 2022 to 189,620, according to the International Organization for Migration. That's the most since 2016, when close to 400,000 left their homelands, and one year after more than 1 million people, mostly Syrians fleeing war, sought refuge in 2015.

For many sub-Saharan Africans — who don't need a visa to travel to Tunisia — the North African country serves as a stepping stone to Europe, while others come from Libya, which shares a border with Tunisia.

Each night, National Guard vessels comb the waters. Pulling up the dead is the grimmest part of the job. The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights said that 580 migrants died or disappeared at sea in 2022.

This week, Sfax officials were rushing to bury some 90 bodies washed up on beaches in the Sfax region in recent days, the official TAP news agency reported Tuesday. The morgue at the main hospital is full, making burials critical. No deaths or disappearances were reported the night the AP was present.

The groups of people plucked from the water during numerous sorties by small crafts are collected on a waiting National Guard mother ship and returned to Sfax.

Considered victims, not lawbreakers, those stopped en route are set free at the port, many to try again.

As of Monday, 36,610 migrants — including 2,882 Tunisians — had reached Italy since the start of the year. That is about four times the number who arrived in each of the two previous years, the Italian In-

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terior Ministry said. Many head to Lampedusa, an island south of Sicily, some 180 kilometers (110 miles) from Sfax, a voyage that requires large measures of desperation and bravado.

"We are ready to drown and die to improve our situation," said a Syrian who identified himself only as Mohamed, fearful like many migrants caught at sea of revealing his full name. "You know the situation in Syria, war and instability," he said, adding that he had lost four family members in the war.

Italy is trying to stem the flow from Tunisia, and stabilize the North African country in the midst of its deepest economic crisis in a generation, with growing social and political tensions. This month Rome declared a state of emergency to help cope with the influx, then sweetened pressure on Tunisia, vowing a host of investments plus help in tough negotiations for an International Monetary Fund loan.

But those incentives won't stop the recent, furious drive by people from sub-Saharan Africa and a booming business in cheaper metal boats that have fed the surge in migration from Tunisia.

Sub-Saharan Africans, some living illegally in Tunisia for years and working at low wages, began trying to make a quick exit after Tunisia's increasingly authoritarian President Kais Saied demanded urgent measures in February to crack down on Black Africans, claiming they are part of a plot to erase his country's identity. Some countries airlifted their citizens back home.

Many sub-Saharan Africans looked toward Europe as a getaway.

"If a Black man does something bad in Tunisia, then Tunisians see us all as bad and chase us away," said a man from Ivory Coast who refused to give his name over concerns about the tense situation for Black Africans in Tunisia. "It's not logical. We are all humans."

Younes, the National Guard chief, suggested that the furor over sub-Saharan Africans contributed to increased attempted crossings. "After what happened, voila. They no longer have the means to stay here," he said. "They'll try everything to get to the other side."

But another factor has enticed people to risk their lives for Europe.

Flimsy, hand-made metal boats — cheaper but less stable than wooden vessels — began appearing on the seas last year and quickly became a flourishing business. The boats are made clandestinely in the Sfax region.

Arrests are made, "but unfortunately there are always other artisans to build them," Younes said.

Even foreigners are being recruited, like Egyptians to do the welding, he said. But only a fine awaits boat builders who are caught because officials have so far failed to establish a link with smugglers.

For the National Guard official, a critical link with Italy is missing.

"We need direct contact with the Italians for boats that risk sinking" but have exited Tunisia's zone of rescue, Younes said, rejecting suggestions Tunisia is not doing enough to stop the influx of migrants.

For the migrants, Tunisia is already doing too much — dashing their dreams.

"We want to leave Tunisia! Let us die at sea. It's our choice," cried out some forced off the boats. "It's our destiny."

Among those removed was an infant bundled in a camouflage fleece suit, her head covered by a hat with kitty ears, seemingly dressed for a special event that was abruptly canceled by the National Guard. ____

Ganley reported from Paris. Bouazza Ben Bouazza in Tunis, Tunisia, contributed.

Follow AP's coverage of global migration at <https://apnews.com/hub/migration>

What is the latest on Netanyahu's corruption trial?

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption trial has resumed after a month-long break, refocusing the spotlight on the long-serving leader's legal woes after a wave of protests over his government's plan to overhaul the country's judiciary.

Netanyahu is charged with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate scandals involving powerful media moguls and wealthy associates. He denies wrongdoing.

Critics say that Netanyahu is driven to weaken the courts and change the judicial system as a way to

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open an escape route from his trial, claims he dismisses as untrue.

The corruption charges also have been at the center of a protracted political crisis that sent Israelis to the polls five times in less than four years — each vote essentially a referendum on Netanyahu's fitness to rule. After losing power in 2021 to a coalition of opponents, Netanyahu returned as prime minister late last year, despite his legal problems. Under Israeli law, the prime minister has no obligation to step aside while on trial.

Here is a look at the ongoing trial:

WHERE DO THINGS STAND?

The trial, which began in May 2020, has featured more than 40 prosecution witnesses, including some of Netanyahu's closest former confidants who turned against the premier. Witness accounts have shed light not only on the three cases but also revealed sensational details about Netanyahu's character and his family's reputation for living off the largesse of taxpayers and wealthy supporters. One former aide and a key prosecution witness called him a "control freak" when it came to his public image in the media. Another witness described expensive gifts lavished on Netanyahu and his wife, including pink champagne and cigars.

The trial was jolted by Israeli media reports that police used sophisticated phone-hacking spyware on a crucial state witness. With the trial now resuming after the Jewish Passover holiday, a top police investigator is testifying. The defense, in its cross examination, will likely try to poke holes in the way the police carried out its investigation.

WHY IS THE TRIAL TAKING SO LONG?

Netanyahu is on trial in three complex affairs — dubbed Case 1,000, Case 2,000 and Case 4,000 — in which prosecutors claim he exchanged regulatory favors with media titans for favorable press coverage and advanced the personal interests of a billionaire Hollywood producer in exchange for lavish gifts.

In building their case before the judges during the thrice-weekly hearings, prosecutors are chipping away at a list of more than 300 witnesses. At least three witnesses on the list have died as the trial has stretched on, and the witness list is expected to be trimmed somewhat.

Beyond the Israeli courts system's reputation for being sluggish, some legal analysts say the defense has purposely tried to drag out the trial, repeatedly asking for delays, prolonging cross examinations and other tactics. A person close to the defense team denied that, blaming the prosecution for calling so many witnesses. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the details of the trial with the media.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

In the next few weeks, the prosecution is set to call several high-profile witnesses, including the current opposition leader, Yair Lapid, the country's ambassador to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan, as well as a former Netanyahu chief of staff-turned-state witness, Ari Harow. Those testimonies could further embarrass Netanyahu.

Once the prosecution completes its list, which is expected to happen in the next year or so, the defense will begin to call its own witnesses, possibly including Netanyahu himself. While there's no official completion date, experts expect a ruling in about two years.

Netanyahu claims the cases against him are crumbling, but analysts say there's no indication of that and there's no way to know how the three-judge panel will eventually rule. If convicted, Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, would be forced to step down after over 15 years in the position.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES?

The court could convict Netanyahu on some or all of the charges, which would trigger a sentencing process to determine his punishment. Depending on the ruling, Netanyahu and the state could each choose to appeal the ruling. Doing so would take the case to the country's Supreme Court, further prolonging a resolution on Netanyahu's fate.

Before the current court even reaches a decision, there is a possibility the sides will seek a plea deal, an option that has emerged in the past and again more recently, according to media reports. That would likely send Netanyahu into political exile.

and severe maternal risks to hundreds of thousands of expectant or breastfeeding women.

Rod Beadle, head of relief and humanitarian affairs at Food for the Hungry, said almost 15 million children are exposed to acute malnourishment.

"Despite the recent rains in North Kenya, the pressure from previous failed seasons makes for a dire situation. The flooding has impacted livestock and many pastoralists lost their primary livelihoods. The drought conditions have resulted in severely compacted soil that cannot absorb the water; hence the floods are more severe. The country is also facing severe outbreaks of cholera and other diseases as more refugees arrive," Beadle said.

Development gains in the countries have been offset by a long history of natural disasters, famine and disease, said Guyo Malicha Roba, a food security expert who heads the Jameel Observatory, which works on food insecurity issues in dryland nations.

Roba said the food situation in the region's drylands has addressed by raising money and with food distributions from governments and humanitarian partners, but more work needs to be done to use early-warning systems to respond more quickly to "food shocks."

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Montana lawmaker silenced but not silent, vows to fight on

By AMY BETH HANSON and SAM METZ Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Moves to stifle the voice of the first transgender woman elected to Montana's legislature over her stand on gender-affirming care for children may have silenced her in the chambers of the state House, but Rep. Zooey Zephyr said she's confident they've only amplified her message to constituents at home and others watching across the nation.

"There are many more eyes on Montana now," Zephyr said in an interview with The Associated Press. "But you do the same thing you've always done. You stand up in defense of your community and you ... stand for the principles that they elected you to stand for."

Zephyr was thrust into the national spotlight last week when she was prevented from speaking in the House after telling lawmakers backing a bill to ban gender-affirming medical care for minors that they would have blood on their hands. The Republican response to her comments, and her refusal to apologize for them as demanded, have transformed the lawmaker into a prominent figure in the nationwide battle for transgender rights and placed her at the center of the ongoing debate over the muffling of dissent in statehouses.

The attention is a new phenomenon for Zephyr, a 34-year-old serving her first term representing a western Montana college town after being elected last November. She will spend her first day in legislative exile when the Montana House reconvenes Thursday morning, a day after the Republican majority voted to bar her from the House floor for the rest of the session.

Lawmakers made the move in retaliation for her participation in a protest that disrupted Monday's floor session. Protestors upset that she was prevented from taking part in House debates after making her comments packed the gallery and chanted "Let her speak!"

She stood by the remarks even after House Speaker Matt Regier said they violated decorum rules and demanded she apologized.

"The Montana House will not be bullied," Regier said this week. He said the only person preventing Zephyr from speaking was Zephyr herself.

In her interview with the AP, Zephyr likened efforts to silence her to the decision by Tennessee lawmakers to expel two Black representatives for disrupting proceedings when they participated in a gun control protest after a school shooting in Nashville that killed three children and three adults. The two were quickly reinstated.

"That's exactly what I'm talking about, is when young Black men stand up and say 'We have a gun vio-

The contentious plan to overhaul the judiciary also weighs heavily over Netanyahu's future, said Amir Fuchs, a senior researcher at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank.

The plan has been paused for now, after ferocious public pressure. But if it moves ahead after all, Netanyahu could remove the current attorney general and install one amenable to throwing out the charges against him. He also could gain influence in appointing the judges who hear any future appeal. In that way, he could evade conviction or have his trial canceled outright.

Bank: Asia must quit coal faster to stem worst climate woes

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Asia must rapidly cut fossil fuel subsidies and plow more money into a clean energy transition to avoid catastrophic climate change that puts its own development at risk, according to a new report Thursday from the Asian Development Bank.

The region's economic development is being fueled in a carbon-intensive way that is well above the world average, said David Raitzer, an ADB economist and one of the authors of the report. He urged quick action on an energy transition for greater benefits and lower costs.

"Ambitious action on climate change with well-designed policies can have a massive payoff," Raitzer said.

Several countries are developing new coal-fired power plants in Asia, which accounts for 94% of the global pipeline of coal-fired power plants under construction, planned, or announced, according to the report.

Even as China, India and Indonesia accounted for a third of all emissions of planet-warming gases in 2019, six of the top 10 countries most affected by extreme weather in the first two decades of this century were in Asia, according to earlier studies. It's estimated that up to \$1.5 trillion in losses and damage to property were recorded in the region during that period, including unprecedented flooding in Pakistan that affected 33 million people last year.

The report estimated that 346,000 lives would be saved annually by 2030 if developing countries in Asia meet their goals for shifting to clean energy, leading to reduced air pollution. And it projected social and economic benefits from the shift equal to five times the cost of climate change impacts.

But investment in clean energy is lacking. Developing countries in Asia spent \$116 billion in 2021 on subsidizing fossil fuels — much more than subsidies for renewables. Raitzer said international coordination is essential to change that.

"To reduce emissions efficiently, perverse subsidies for fossil fuels that exist now must be removed and there should be no new coal," said Raitzer.

Other energy experts agree.

"A lot of development in Asia is linked to fossil fuel systems, which becomes a problem," said Swati D'Souza, a New Delhi-based energy analyst with the Institute for Energy, Economics and Financial Analysis who has been researching Asia's energy transition for most of a decade.

New investments in fossil fuels should be avoided, D'Souza said.

"They will become stranded assets and the costs of dealing with them will fall on governments and ultimately the local communities and people," she said.

The report said \$397 billion has been invested in the clean energy transition in Asia's developing countries, but an average annual investment of \$707 billion is needed in those countries to keep global temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) called for in the Paris agreement to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

The report recommends reducing subsidies for fossil fuels, putting a price on greenhouse gas emissions and providing more policy incentives for clean energy. It said a carbon price of \$70 per ton of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030 and \$153 by 2050 would help achieve net-zero goals.

Carbon pricing can take many forms, but generally is a way to make companies or governments pay the potential costs of climate change — heat waves, unseasonable rains, health effects — made worse by their emissions.

"Kicking the can down the road by waiting until after 2030 to strongly reduce emissions will not be in

the region's or the world's best interest," said Raitzer.

Follow Sibi Arasu on Twitter at @sibi123

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Jolie, Salonga, Chloe Kim glam up state dinner for SKorea

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Actor Angelina Jolie, home improvement duo Chip and Joanna Gaines and Olympic snowboarder Chloe Kim headlined the list of big names from politics, business, sports and entertainment glamming up a fancy black-tie dinner that President Joe Biden hosted Wednesday for South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Broadway's Lea Salonga, one of the night's entertainers, confessed as she arrived that she was "freaking out" over the whole experience, allowing, "It feels like being in the middle of a fairy tale." Kim, for her part, served up a classic understatement as she strolled in, telling reporters, "I heard the food's going to be very good." Jolie wasn't inclined to chat as she arrived in a vintage Chanel jacket and a flowing cream gown, but her date, 21-year-old son Maddox, at least offered that his favorite thing about Seoul was "the people."

A smattering of politicians made the guest list, too, and most were determinedly on message, talking a lot of shop. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., held forth on infrastructure, debt reduction and the budget. Rep. Judy Chu, D-Calif., talked abortion rights. Former Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker, a big Democratic donor from Illinois, talked up plans for the Democratic convention in Chicago in 2024, promising, "of course" it will go well.

Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, proudly showed off her traditional hanbok gown, saying it was important to showcase cultural diversity. She added that the big challenge was "not to trip over it."

Also among the nearly 200 guests were Arthur Blank, a co-founder of Home Depot; "Pachinko" author Min Jin Lee; and former Major League Baseball pitcher Chan Ho Park. Republican Sen. Mitt Romney of Utah also attended, as did the governors of Delaware, New Jersey and Vermont.

On a perfect spring evening, guests entered the White House by strolling through the Jacqueline Kennedy garden in the East Wing and being directed to a cocktail reception before dinner in the East Room, where tables were topped with towering centerpieces of cherry tree boughs in full bloom. On the menu: crabcakes, beef ribs and banana splits.

While most guests were strolling in through the garden, Biden and wife Jill welcomed Yoon and wife Kim Keon Hee on a red carpet on the steps of the North Portico, where the president flashed a thumbs-up for the assembled cameras. Kim wore a cream-colored jacket over her gown, which was also creamy. Jill Biden wore a mauve sheath gown by Reem Acra.

In their toasts before dinner, President Biden said he believed Yoon's visit had "brought two nations even closer together."

Yoon, for his part, nodded to Biden's Irish heritage and love of Irish poets.

"There's an old saying, and Mr. President, this one is also Irish, that goes: A good friend is like a four-leaf clover, hard to find and lucky to have," Yoon said, offering a toast to our "ironclad alliance."

Guests seated at the head table with the presidents and first ladies included Jolie and her son, the Gaineses, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Chloe Kim.

The first lady, who oversaw planning for the administration's second state dinner, recruited Korean American celebrity chef Edward Lee to whip up a Korean-inspired menu. Lee is known for putting his Korean stamp on American food.

"It's not traditional Korean food but just gives you a little hint of Korean flavors," he said this week as the White House previewed the dinner setup.

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The crabcake appetizer was served with a cabbage, kohlrabi, fennel and cucumber slaw dressed with a vinaigrette made using gochujang, a red chili paste and a bowl of chilled yellow squash soup. The braised beef short rib main course was paired with sorghum-glazed carrots and served on a bed of grits made from butter beans instead of corn.

Dessert is a deconstructed banana split, an American classic, featuring lemon bar ice cream, caramelized bananas, fresh berries and mint ginger snap cookie crumble drizzled with a caramel sauce infused with doenjang, a fermented soybean paste.

Guests were ushered to the State Dining Room at the other end of the State Floor after dinner for entertainment by Broadway stars Salonga, Norm Lewis and Jessica Vosk.

Lewis, for all his experience, said he still gets nervous performing at big events.

"Oh God, always nerves," he said. "But you know what? It's for a good cause and I'm very excited to be here." He sang "This is the Moment" from "Jekyll and Hyde." Yoon got in on the action, singing a rendition of "American Pie," one of his favorite songs, to raucous applause.

Biden then surprised Yoon with the gift of a guitar signed by Don McLean, who wrote "American Pie."

One guest who displayed not one ounce of nerves: Schumer, D-N.Y., who wore a navy business suit rather than a tuxedo, and shrugged, "This is as tux-ey as I get."

Chip Gaines demurred when asked if he had any decorating tips for the White House, but added that for wife Joanna, "the white interior and exterior is just her thing." Joanna Gaines' mother is Korean.

A state visit, including an arrival ceremony on the South Lawn and a sparkly state dinner, is the highest diplomatic honor the U.S. bestows on its closest allies. Yoon was visiting as the U.S. and South Korea mark the 70th year of an alliance that began at the end of the Korean War and committed the U.S. to help South Korea defend itself, particularly from North Korea. Approximately 28,500 U.S. troops are currently based in South Korea.

Biden's first invitation for a state visit went to France last year and President Emmanuel Macron was toasted at a black-tie dinner last December with more than 300 guests inside a heated pavilion erected on the south grounds of the White House.

Scientists: Climate change worsened Eastern Africa drought

By WANJOHI KABUKURU Associated Press

MALINDI, Kenya (AP) — The ongoing drought in Eastern Africa has been made worse by human-induced climate change, which also made it much likelier to occur in the first place, an international team of climate scientists concluded.

The report Wednesday came from World Weather Attribution, a group that seeks to quickly determine whether certain extreme weather events were influenced by climate change. Nineteen scientists from seven nations assessed how climate change affected rainfall in the region.

"Climate change caused the low rainfall in the region," Joyce Kimutai, principal meteorologist at the Kenya Meteorological Department said. "Climate change has made the drought exceptional."

The scientists analyzed historical weather data, including changes in the two main rainfall patterns in the region alongside computer model simulations dating back to the 1800s. They found that the long rains season — March through May — was turning drier and the short rains season — typically October through December — was becoming wetter due to climate change. They called the region's experience with drought "one of a kind."

Friederike Otto, senior climate scientist at Imperial College London and the leader of the study, said it underscored how climate change's effects "strongly depend on how vulnerable we are."

While climate change has made drought more frequent and extreme in the Horn region, the scientists acknowledged that previous failed rainy seasons, high temperatures, conflict, fragile statehood and poverty are also to blame for the "devastating impacts."

The United Nations said more than 20 million people in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and South Sudan have been affected by the drought, with more than 2.2 million displaced in Somalia and Ethiopia

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lence problem in this country' and you are failing to recognize it, you're failing to take action on it," she said.

Tennessee lawmakers not only rejected gun control laws, but by expelling the lawmakers they sent a message saying: "Your voices shouldn't be here. We're going to send you away," Zephyr said.

GOP leaders in Tennessee had said their actions were necessary to avoid setting a precedent that lawmakers' disruptions of House proceedings through protest would be tolerated.

Zephyr's stand has drawn attention from lawmakers throughout the country. On Tuesday, Tennessee Rep. Justin Pearson, one of the lawmakers who was expelled earlier this month, called the Montana standoff anti-democratic.

"We will not let our democracy die without fighting for every voice. We are in this fight from Memphis to Montana!" he tweeted.

"The attack in Montana on Rep. Zephyr is an attack on all of us," said Nebraska state Sen. Megan Hunt.

Hunt, who has a transgender son, has spearheaded the charge against a similar proposal to ban gender-affirming care. She was served notice Wednesday of an official complaint filed against her that she said was an effort to silence her voice on the issue.

"It's so important that we not be silent about this from state to state to state. And it's so important that people stand up against this rising movement, this radical movement, and say it is not welcome," Hunt said.

Zephyr is undeterred. She said throughout the events of the past week, she has both aimed to rise and meet the moment and continue doing the job she was elected to do: representing her community and constituents.

"It's queer people across the world and it's also the constituents of other representatives who are saying 'They won't listen' when it comes to these issues. It's staff in this building who, when no one is looking, come up and say 'Thank you,'" she said.

Metz reported from Salt Lake City. Associated Press reporter Margery Beck in Omaha, Nebraska, contributed to this report.

Thai party hopes protesters will become pro-reform voters

By JERRY HARMER Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Three years ago, tens of thousands of mostly young people in Thailand took to the streets in heated demonstrations seeking democratic reforms. Now, with a general election coming in three weeks, leaders of the country's progressive movement are hoping to channel the same radical spirit for change through the ballot box.

One of those activists, Chonthicha Jangrew, is a candidate for the Move Forward Party. On the campaign trail on a recent morning at a market on the outskirts of Bangkok, she politely touted her party's pro-reform agenda. It covers much of the same ground that riled Thailand's traditional conservative establishment and triggered violent street confrontations between militant demonstrators and the authorities in a series of protests that gained traction in 2020.

An activist since her days in college almost 10 years ago, Chonthicha became a high-profile figure in the youth-dominated movement by fearlessly confronting the police during the mass street protests. Their demands included the resignation of the military-aligned government, a new more democratic constitution and, most controversially, reform of the powerful, untouchable monarchy.

Chonthicha's protest activities have left her facing 28 criminal charges, she said, including sedition and lese majeste — insulting the monarchy — with potential penalties totaling dozens of years in prison.

The 30-year-old activist, better known by her nickname Lookkate, said moving into Parliament would ensure that those voices from the street will be heard in the corridors of power.

"I might be useful to push some laws through Parliament, particularly those relating to human rights. I think I might be able to fulfill in Parliament those demands I once called for on the street," she said.

Move Forward, led by businessman Pita Limjaroenrat, is the only major party offering a progressive, left-leaning agenda, and its relatively youthful slate of candidates holds particular appeal to the same

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constituency that powered the street protests.

It grew out of the Future Forward Party, which came from nowhere to take 81 out of 500 seats in the last election. A year later, a court dissolved it over a funding irregularity. Many saw it as an effort by Thailand's political establishment to remove a troublesome upstart.

That ruling was the initial spark for the street protests, which then snowballed into a broader airing of grievances. The government eventually stifled the demonstrations with riot police and water cannons and the aggressive use of the justice system to arrest and prosecute leaders.

According to party chief Pita, who is his party's prime ministerial candidate, the repression reflected in the crushing of the street protests and dissolution of the Future Forward Party has left a legacy of anger that will propel the Move Forward vote on May 14.

"I'm sure the frustration is there and it will be shown in the balloting. For sure. This will prove that the ballot is stronger than the bullet, back like how President Abraham Lincoln said, 200 years ago, will happen in Thailand this year," Pita, who holds degrees from Harvard and MIT, told The Associated Press.

Prajak Kongkirati, a political scientist at Bangkok's Thammasat University, said Move Forward has made its mark already, firmly establishing a progressive agenda in Thai mainstream politics for the first time.

The party's supporters, he said, "represent a new generation, a new kind of voters in Thailand seeking real change, a structural change. So you cannot get rid of the party because they represent a larger political force than their own party."

Opinion polls suggest Move Forward is riding high, particularly with younger voters. Some say it is running second only to the juggernaut Pheu Thai party — which garnered the most seats in the last election — and that Pita is also the second favorite choice for prime minister.

The excitement the party and its leader generate was evident at a recent Move Forward rally in Bangkok, with the audience giving Pita the rock star treatment.

"They give hope to the young generation again that they don't have to put up with the old regime. I am glad that someone is fighting for the young generation," said 26-year-old online merchant Pannapha Hatthavijit, one of around 2,000 supporters there.

"This military-backed government is not qualified to run the country. It's time for them to leave," said 26-year-old quality control worker Waranya Chaiha. The incumbent prime minister, Prayuth Chan-ocha, though installed by a vote in Parliament after the 2019 general election, originally took power in 2014 by leading a military coup as army commander.

But despite such popular backing, it's unlikely that Move Forward is destined for power. The next government is expected to be a coalition, and other parties are unlikely to want to ally themselves with a party whose agenda includes reform of the monarchy, no matter how minor.

Kan Yuenyong of the Siam Intelligence Unit think tank believes Move Forward needs to become more practical politically if it wants to progress.

"They are very driven by ideology which is nice — not bad — but the problem is, in politics, it doesn't work like that. They need more compromise," he said. "I would like to see more nuance."

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

Harris faces new test of political skills in 2024 campaign

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — She swaggered, she jabbed, she inspired. She even joked.

Anyone looking for a glimpse of what Vice President Kamala Harris could bring to the campaign trail would have found it this week at Howard University, where she headlined a rally for reproductive rights. After two years of tightly scripted, uneven performances that often dismayed Democrats and cheered Republicans, Harris is looser, more forceful and more willing to speak off the cuff following her trip to Africa a month ago.

"That is the vice president that America is going to get a chance to get to know for the first time," said

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Laphonza Butler, a former adviser to Harris who leads EMILY's List.

Now Harris, the first woman and person of color in her position, will be put to the test as President Joe Biden seeks a second term. Although vice presidents are rarely decisive in reelection efforts, Harris is poised to be an exception. Not only is she leading the charge on Democrats' most potent issue, the battle over abortion rights, she's the running mate for the oldest president in history, increasing scrutiny over whether she's ready to step into the top job if necessary.

It's an issue that Nikki Haley, a former South Carolina governor who is seeking the Republican presidential nomination, raised on Wednesday in an interview with Fox News.

"If you vote for Joe Biden, you really are counting on a President Harris," Haley said. "Because the idea that he would make it until 86 years old" — the age Biden would be at the end of a second term — "is not something that I think is likely."

Harris' mission until Election Day will be energizing the voters that Democrats most need — specifically women, people of color and young people — while sustaining what will likely be an unrelenting barrage of Republican attacks.

"Vice presidential candidates, if they're going to make a difference, they're going to make it at the margin," said Joel Goldstein, a historian of the vice presidency. "But if you look at our recent history, a lot of our presidential elections have been decided at the margins."

Harris' appearance at her alma mater Howard University on Tuesday night, the same day that Biden announced his reelection bid, was a first look of how she'll approach the campaign. Her focus on abortion echoed her message during the midterm elections, but was even more barbed than usual as she targeted "extremists" she accused of taking away people's rights.

"Don't get in our way because if you do, we're going to stand up, we're going to organize and we're going to speak up and we're going to say we're not having that, we're not playing that!" Harris said.

Addressing herself to "so-called leaders" who want to restrict abortion, Harris told them to "open your medicine cabinet in the privacy of your bathroom, in the privacy of your home. I wonder what's sitting up in there."

The crowd roared with laughter. "You don't want me getting in your business, do you?" she said.

Harris linked efforts to restrict abortion to Republican attempts to tighten rules for voting and limit what can be taught in schools.

"Understand what's at play," she said. "You can't sleep on this."

Cornell Belcher, a Democratic pollster, said Harris is "probably better positioned to connect with, in an authentic way, that critical emerging cohort of the American electorate that we are absolutely positively dependent on to win a majority."

Not everyone has felt that way, and she's faced chatter from the sidelines over whether Biden should replace her as vice president. She consistently polls worse than Biden, whose own numbers are underwater.

In an AP-NORC poll conducted in January, 43% of U.S. adults had a favorable opinion of Biden, and 36% said the same about Harris. Among Democrats, Biden was at 78% and Harris was at 67%, while 10% said they didn't know enough about Harris to have an opinion.

However, Harris featured prominently in Biden's announcement video — walking alongside the president, embracing first lady Jill Biden, taking a selfie with a supporter and more.

Biden's campaign website is topped by the names "Biden Harris," and a pop-up fundraising solicitation includes a picture of the two leaders smiling together. Biden's Twitter account shared the same photo on Tuesday night, adding the caption "in this together."

"I was really put off by all the prognostication about whether she was a drag on the ticket," said Mini Timmaraju, the president of NARAL Pro-Choice America. "She's the biggest asset."

Harris' portfolio as vice president changed with last year's Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 case that legalized abortion nationwide. Although she had previously been assigned thorny issues with little political upside, such as stemming migration from Central America, Harris swiftly embraced a new role as the administration's most ardent defender of reproductive rights.

When a copy of the decision was leaked, Harris reviewed it with a small circle of aides in a West Wing

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office. "How dare they?" she kept repeating, according to a member of her staff at the time who requested anonymity to discuss the private conversation.

The phrase was swiftly included in a previously scheduled speech that night. Outrage over abortion helped Democrats limit their losses in the midterm elections, and the party expects it to remain a focus for voters.

"It's going to be a major mobilizing issue," said Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster who has worked with Biden. "Republicans keep doing things to keep the issue alive."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a likely candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, recently signed a state ban on abortions after six weeks. Women would have more time to get an abortion in cases involving rape or incest, but they would need to provide documentation such as a restraining order or police report.

Erin Perrine, a spokesperson for Never Back Down, a super PAC supporting DeSantis, scoffed at the idea that Harris would be helpful to Biden's reelection chances.

"She's not a good messenger," she said. "She is prone to not only stepping on the message, but putting out word salad answers, and then when she gets uncomfortable, getting into a laughing fit."

Judging by the poll numbers, Perrine said "you have two people that Democrats don't want running for president and vice president."

Former President Donald Trump, who is running for another term, suggested in a recent interview with Newsmax that running mates will ultimately be irrelevant in the campaign.

"There's never been a vice president that's done anything for the election. In other words, they vote for the one person," he said. "I don't think vice presidents have any impact at all on the vote."

However, Trump said, "It's such an important position. If something happens, that's going to be your president."

Democrats rely on Black women in elections, and Harris' support was evident during a February event at Georgia Tech University in Atlanta. Although the vice president had come to talk about the administration's energy policy, the crowd was eager to discuss their support for her as a barrier-breaking woman.

"In her own way, as a female, as an African American, she is stepping out," said Camille Zeigler, a 65-year-old retired educator. "What's happening is she's not stepping out in the way that society wants her to step out."

Zeigler said people want to put Harris in a box as "an angry Black woman or a mad Black woman or a Black woman with an attitude."

Instead, Zeigler said, Harris answers with "grace" and "poise," providing "a model for other African American women."

Beverly Rice, a 65-year-old who runs a nonprofit focused on literacy, celebrated Harris' ascension after a history of Black women being close to power — but not holding it.

"It's about time," she said. "We've been building America forever."

Associated Press writers Bill Barrow in Atlanta, and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

Releasing leak suspect a national security risk, feds say

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

Federal prosecutors will urge a judge Thursday to keep behind bars a Massachusetts Air National Guardsman accused of leaking highly classified military documents, arguing he may still have access to secret national defense information he could expose.

In court papers filed late Wednesday, the Justice Department lawyers said releasing 21-year-old Jack Teixeira from jail while he awaits trial would be a grave threat to the U.S. national security. Investigators are still trying to determine whether he kept any physical or digital copies of classified information, including files that haven't already surfaced publicly, they wrote.

"There simply is no condition or combination of conditions that can ensure the Defendant will not further disclose additional information still in his knowledge or possession," prosecutors wrote. "The damage the

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Defendant has already caused to the U.S. national security is immense. The damage the Defendant is still capable of causing is extraordinary.”

A detention hearing is scheduled for Thursday in the federal court in Worcester, Massachusetts, for Teixeira, who has been in jail since his arrest earlier this month on charges stemming from the highest-profile intelligence leak in years.

Prosecutors said in their filing that Teixeira’s attorneys have indicated they will urge the judge to release him to his father’s home. As of late Wednesday, Teixeira’s attorneys hadn’t filed court papers arguing for his release.

Teixeira has been charged under the Espionage Act with unauthorized retention and transmission of classified national defense information. He has not yet entered a plea, and his attorney declined after last week’s hearing to speak to reporters.

He is accused of distributing highly classified documents about top national security issues in a chat room on Discord, a social media platform that started as a hangout for gamers. The leak stunned military officials, sparked international uproar and raised fresh questions about America’s ability to safeguard its secrets.

In describing Teixeira as a danger to the community, prosecutors wrote that the suspect, who owned multiple guns, repeatedly had “detailed and troubling discussions about violence and murder” on the platform where authorities say he shared the documents. In February, he told another person that he was tempted to make a minivan into an “assassination van,” prosecutors wrote.

Prosecutors also disclosed that Teixeira was suspended during high school when a classmate overheard him discussing Molotov cocktails and other weapons and racial threats.

Prosecutors alleged in their filing that Teixeira took steps to destroy evidence after news outlets began reporting on the documents leak. Authorities who searched a dumpster at his home found a smashed laptop, tablet and Xbox gaming console, they said.

Teixeira’s detention hearing was supposed to be last week but was delayed at the last minute after defense attorneys said they needed more time to “address the issues presented by the government’s request for detention.” Teixeira, who has been in jail since his April 13 arrest, did briefly appear in court in Boston last week to waive his right to a preliminary hearing.

The leaked documents appear to detail U.S. and NATO aid to Ukraine and U.S. intelligence assessments regarding U.S. allies that could strain ties with those nations. Some show real-time details from February and March of Ukraine’s and Russia’s battlefield positions and precise numbers of battlefield gear lost and newly flowing into Ukraine from its allies.

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

The Justice Department has said its investigation is continuing, and the Pentagon has said it would conduct its own review of access to sensitive intelligence to prevent a similar leak in the future.

Billing records the FBI obtained from Discord were among the things that led authorities to Teixeira, who enlisted in the Air National Guard in September 2019.

His specialty in the Air National Guard was as a “cyber transport systems specialist,” essentially an IT specialist responsible for military communications networks. In that role, Teixeira would have had a higher level of security clearance because he would have also been tasked with responsibility to access and ensure protection for the network, a defense official told the AP.

Investigators say Teixeira was the leader of an online private chat group on Discord called Thug Shaker Central, where enthusiasts talked about their favorite types of guns, shared jokes and held a running discussion on wars that included talk of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A Discord user told the FBI that a username linked to Teixeira began posting what appeared to be classified information roughly in December.

Teixeira was detected on April 6 — the day The New York Times first published a story about the breach

of documents — searching for the word “leak” in a classified system, according to court papers. The FBI says that was reason to believe Teixeira was trying to find information about the investigation into who was responsible for the leaks.

US adult cigarette smoking rate hits new all-time low

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. cigarette smoking dropped to another all-time low last year, with 1 in 9 adults saying they were current smokers, according to government survey data released Thursday. Meanwhile, electronic cigarette use rose, to about 1 in 17 adults.

The preliminary findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are based on survey responses from more than 27,000 adults.

Cigarette smoking is a risk factor for lung cancer, heart disease and stroke, and it’s long been considered the leading cause of preventable death.

In the mid-1960s, 42% of U.S. adults were smokers. The rate has been gradually dropping for decades, due to cigarette taxes, tobacco product price hikes, smoking bans and changes in the social acceptability of lighting up in public.

Last year, the percentage of adult smokers dropped to about 11%, down from about 12.5% in 2020 and 2021. The survey findings sometimes are revised after further analysis, and CDC is expected to release final 2021 data soon.

E-cigarette use rose to nearly 6% last year, from about 4.5% the year before, according to survey data.

The rise in e-cigarette use concerns Dr. Jonathan Samet, dean of the Colorado School of Public Health. Nicotine addiction has its own health implications, including risk of high blood pressure and a narrowing of the arteries, according to the American Heart Association.

“I think that smoking will continue to ebb downwards, but whether the prevalence of nicotine addiction will drop, given the rise of electronic products, is not clear,” said Samet, who has been a contributing author to U.S. Surgeon General reports on smoking and health for almost four decades.

Smoking and vaping rates are almost reversed for teens. Only about 2% of high school students were smoking traditional cigarettes last year, but about 14% were using e-cigarettes, according to other CDC data.

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.

US economic growth likely slowed in January-March quarter

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Despite surging interest rates, punishing inflation and global turbulence, the U.S. economy stood firm last year. From employers to consumers, the picture was one of surprising resilience.

This year may be shaping up as a more downbeat story. The economy is widely expected to decelerate steadily and to slip into a recession sometime this year.

Some early such signs could begin to emerge Thursday, when the Commerce Department will issue its first estimate of the economy’s performance in the first three months of 2023.

Forecasters have predicted that the gross domestic product — the broadest measure of economic output — grew at a 1.9% annual rate from January through March, according to a survey by the data firm FactSet. That would mark a significant slowdown from the 3.2% growth rate from July through September and the 2.6% rate from October through December.

The obstacles the economy faces are growing more troublesome. The biggest among them is the dramatically higher cost of borrowing. The Federal Reserve, in its fight against an inflation rate that last year hit a four-decade high, has raised its benchmark rate nine times in just over a year.

As those higher rates spread through the economy, it is becoming steadily more expensive for consumers and businesses to borrow and spend. The cost of a loan to buy a house or a car or to expand a business

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can become prohibitively expensive.

Many economists say the cumulative impact of the Fed's rate hikes has yet to be fully felt. Yet the central bank's policymakers are aiming for a so-called soft landing: Cooling growth enough to curb inflation yet not so much as to send the world's largest economy tumbling into a recession.

There is widespread skepticism that the Fed will succeed. An economic model used by the Conference Board, a business research group, puts the probability of a U.S. recession over the next year at 99%.

The Conference Board's recession-probability gauge had hung around zero from September 2020, as the economy rebounded explosively from the COVID-19 recession, until March 2022, when the Fed started raising rates to fight inflation.

Already, higher rates have clobbered the housing market, which depends on the ability of buyers to take out long-term mortgages. Investment in housing plummeted at an annual rate of 27% from July through September and 25% from October through December.

Consumers, whose spending accounts for roughly 70% of U.S. economic output, seem to be starting to feel the chill. Retail sales had enjoyed a strong start in January, aided by warmer-than-expected weather and bigger Social Security checks. But in February and again in March, retail sales tumbled.

"The U.S. economy is unwell, and it's starting to show," said Gregory Daco, chief economist at the consulting firm EY.

Tumult in the banking sector — the United States endured its second- and third-biggest bank failures ever last month — poses another threat. After depositors yanked money out of troubled Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank, forcing regulators to shut them down, many banks are cutting back on lending to conserve money to handle potential bank runs.

The worst fears of a 2008-style financial crisis have eased over the past month. But lingering credit cutbacks, which were mentioned in the Fed's survey this month of regional economies, is likely to hobble growth.

"We place a roughly 55%-60% chance of a mild recession in the U.S.," Tony Roth, Wilmington Trust's chief investment officer, said in a research note. "Recent bank stress has subsided, but the risk of tighter financial conditions increases these recession risks."

Political risks are growing, too. Congressional Republicans are threatening to let the federal government default on its debts, by refusing to raise the statutory limit on what it can borrow, if Democrats and President Joe Biden fail to agree to spending restrictions and cuts. A first-ever default on the federal debt would shatter the market for U.S. Treasuries — the world's biggest — and possibly cause a global financial crisis.

The global backdrop is looking bleaker, too. The International Monetary Fund this month downgraded its forecast for worldwide economic growth, citing rising interest rates around the world, financial uncertainty and chronic inflation. American exporters could suffer as a consequence.

Still, the U.S. economy has surprised before. Recession fears rose early last year after GDP had shrunk for two straight quarters. But the economy roared back in the second half of 2022, powered by surprisingly sturdy consumer spending.

A strong job market has given Americans the confidence and financial wherewithal to keep shopping: 2021 and 2022 were the two best years for job creation on record. And hiring has remained strong so far this year, though it has decelerated from January to February and then to March.

The jobs report for April, which the government will issue on May 5, is expected to show that employers added a decent but still-lower total of 185,000 jobs this month, according to a survey of forecasters by FactSet.

San Francisco to repeal boycott of anti-LGBT states

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — San Francisco is repealing a ban on city-funded travel to 30 states that it says restrict abortion, voting and LGBTQ rights after determining the boycott is doing more harm than good.

The Board of Supervisors voted 7-4 on Tuesday to repeal a section of the city's administrative code that prohibits staff from visiting and city departments from contracting with companies headquartered in the

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states, which include Texas, Florida and Ohio.

California, meanwhile, is considering the repeal of a similar law.

City supervisors will hold a second and final vote next Tuesday. Mayor London Breed is expected to sign the measure.

The progressive city passed the boycott in 2016, after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. At first, the boycott applied only to states that it considered restricted the rights of LGBTQ people. Later, the list was expanded to include states that limit access to voting and abortion.

The idea was to exert economic pressure on those conservative states. Instead, a report released last month by the city administrator concluded that the policy was raising costs and administrative burdens for the city. Because of restrictions, there were fewer bidders for city work and that ending the boycott might reduce contracting costs by 20% annually, the report concluded.

In addition, the city had approved hundreds of exemptions and waivers for some \$800 million worth of contracts, the report said.

Meanwhile, "no states with restrictive LGBTQ rights, voting rights, or abortion policies have cited the city's travel and contract bans as motivation for reforming their law," the review concluded.

The measure "was a well-intentioned effort at values-based contracting but ultimately did not accomplish the social change it sought to effect," Board President Aaron Peskin, who co-sponsored the repeal, said in a statement. "Instead, this onerous restriction has led to an uncompetitive bidding climate and created serious obstructions to everything from accessing emergency housing to being able to cost-effectively purchase the best products and contracts for the City."

Scott Wiener, a former supervisor-turned-state senator who authored the original ban, agreed that the measure hadn't produced the intended results.

"We believed a coalition of cities and states would form to create true consequences for states that pass these despicable, hateful laws," the San Francisco Democrat said in a statement. "Yet, as it turned out, that coalition never formed, and the full potential impact of this policy never materialized. Instead, San Francisco is now penalizing businesses in other states — including LGBTQ-owned, women-owned, and people of color-owned businesses — for the sins of their radical right wing governments."

In addition, city staff have been unable to fly to many states for cooperative work on issues ranging from HIV prevention to transportation, Wiener said.

Similar problems have led California to consider mothballing its own 2016 ban on state travel to states it deems discriminate against LGBTQ people.

California now bans state-funded travel to nearly half of the country following a surge of anti-LGBTQ legislation in mostly Republican-led states.

The prohibition means sports teams at public colleges and universities have had to find other ways to pay for road games in states like Arizona and Utah. And it has complicated some of the state's other policy goals, like using state money to pay for people who live in other states to travel to California for abortions.

Last month, state Senate leader Toni Atkins announced legislation that would end the ban and replace it with an advertising campaign in those states that promotes acceptance and inclusion for the LGBTQ community. The bill would set up a fund to pay for the campaign, which would accept private donations and state funding — if any is available.

House Republicans pass US debt bill, push Biden on spending

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans narrowly passed sweeping legislation Wednesday that would raise the government's legal debt ceiling by \$1.5 trillion in exchange for steep spending restrictions, a tactical victory for Speaker Kevin McCarthy as he challenges President Joe Biden to negotiate and prevent a catastrophic federal default this summer.

Biden has threatened to veto the Republican package, which has almost no chance of passing the Democratic Senate anyway, and the president has so far refused to negotiate over the debt ceiling which

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the White House insists must be lifted with no strings to ensure America pays its bills.

But McCarthy's ability to swiftly unite his slim majority and bring the measure to passage over opposition from Democrats and even holdouts in his own party gives currency to the Republican speaker's strategy to use the vote as an opening bid forcing Biden into talks. The two men could hardly be further apart on how to resolve the issue.

The bill passed by a razor-thin 217-215 margin.

"We've done our job," McCarthy said at the U.S. Capitol after the vote.

"The president can no longer ignore by not negotiating," he said. "Now he should sit down and negotiate."

As the House debated the measure, Biden on Wednesday indicated he was willing to open the door to talks with McCarthy, but not on preventing a first-ever U.S. default that would shake America's economy and beyond.

"Happy to meet with McCarthy, but not on whether or not the debt limit gets extended," Biden said. "That's not negotiable."

Passage of the sprawling 320-page package in the House is only the start of what is expected to become a weeklong political slog as the president and Congress try to work out a compromise that would allow the nation's debt, now at \$31 trillion, to be lifted to allow further borrowing and stave off a fiscal crisis.

The nation has never defaulted on its debt, and the House Republican majority hopes to maneuver Biden into a corner with its plan to roll back federal spending to fiscal 2022 levels and cap future spending increases at 1% over the next decade, among other changes.

McCarthy worked nonstop to unite his fractious Republican majority, the "five families" including the conservative Freedom Caucus and others, making post-midnight changes in the House Rules Committee in the crush to win over holdouts.

Facing a revolt from Midwestern Republicans over doing away with biofuel tax credits that were just signed into law last year by Democrat Biden, GOP House members relented and allowed the tax credits to stay on the books in their bill.

"Our delegation has stood united for Iowa's farmers and producers fighting to amend the bill to protect biofuels tax credits," said the four House Republicans from Iowa in a joint statement announcing their support for the bill.

Republicans also agreed to more quickly launch the bolstered work requirements for recipients of government aid, starting in 2024 as proposed by another holdout, Freedom Caucus' Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla. — who has led previous challenges to McCarthy and ultimately voted against the bill.

Republicans hold a five-seat House majority and faced several absences this week, leaving McCarthy with almost no votes to spare. In the end the speaker lost four Republican no votes, and all Democrats opposed.

"This bill is unacceptable, it's unreasonable, it's unworkable, it's unconscionable — and it's un-American," said the Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York. "That's why we oppose it."

Democrats derided the Republican plan as a "ransom note," a "shakedown" and "an unserious bill" that was courting financial danger.

But as McCarthy worked to shore up support, some of the most conservative rank-and-file Republican members who have never voted for a debt ceiling increase in their quest to slash spending said they were preparing to do just that, rallying behind the speaker's strategy to push Biden to the negotiating table.

Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., a member of the Freedom Caucus, said he "wanted double" the deficit savings contained in the bill but would vote for it "because it starts the ball, it gets us in the arena to solve the debt problem."

It's a first big test for the president and the Republican speaker, coming at a time of increased political anxiety about the ability of Washington to solve big problems amid the need to raise the federal debt limit in a matter of weeks.

The Treasury Department is taking "extraordinary measures" to pay the bills, but funding is expected to run out this summer. Economists warn that even the serious threat of a federal debt default would send

full of inconsistencies and not credible.

A mistrial was declared at the end of his first trial in November, with fewer than half of jurors voting to convict him on any of the three counts. Prosecutors opted to retry him when the women agreed to testify again.

Why China is trying to mediate in Russia's war with Ukraine

By JOE McDONALD Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese leader Xi Jinping said Wednesday that Beijing will send an envoy to Ukraine to discuss a possible “political settlement” to Russia’s war with the country.

Beijing has previously avoided involvement in conflicts between other countries but appears to be trying to assert itself as a global diplomatic force after arranging talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March that led them to restore diplomatic relations after a seven-year break.

Xi told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a phone call that a Chinese envoy, a former Chinese ambassador to Russia, would visit Ukraine and “other countries” to discuss a possible political settlement, according to a government statement.

It made no mention of Russia or last year’s invasion of Ukraine and didn’t indicate whether the Chinese envoy might visit Moscow.

The Xi-Zelenskyy phone call was long anticipated after Beijing said it wanted to serve as a mediator in the war.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

China is the only major government that has friendly relations with Moscow as well as economic leverage as the biggest buyer of Russian oil and gas after the United States and its allies cut off most purchases.

Beijing, which sees Moscow as a diplomatic partner in opposing U.S. domination of global affairs, has refused to criticize the invasion and used its status as one of five permanent U.N. Security Council members to deflect diplomatic attacks on Russia.

Zelenskyy earlier said he welcomed a Chinese offer to mediate.

WHY DID CHINA DO THIS?

Xi’s government has pursued a bigger role in global diplomacy as part of a campaign to restore China to what the ruling Communist Party sees as its rightful status as a political and economic leader and to build an international order that favors Beijing’s interests.

That is a sharp reversal after decades of avoiding involvement in other countries’ conflicts and most international affairs while it focused on economic development at home.

In March, Saudi Arabia and Iran issued a surprise announcement, following talks in Beijing, that they would reopen embassies in each other’s capitals following a seven-year break. China has good relations with both as a big oil buyer.

Last week, Foreign Minister Qin Gang told his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts that his country is ready to help facilitate peace talks.

Wednesday’s statement warned against the dangers of nuclear war, suggesting Beijing might also have been motivated by what it sees as the growing danger of a more destructive conflict.

Mediating between Ukraine and Russia would increase China’s presence in Eastern Europe, where Beijing has tried to build ties with other governments. That has prompted complaints by some European officials that China is trying to gain leverage over the European Union.

Political science professor Kimberly Marten of Barnard College at Columbia University in New York doubted China would succeed in a peacemaker role.

“I have a hard time believing that China can act as peacemaker,” she said, adding that Beijing has been “too close to Russia.”

WHAT ARE CHINA’S RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA?

China is the closest thing President Vladimir Putin’s isolated government has to a major ally.

Xi and Putin issued a joint statement ahead of the February 2022 invasion that said their governments had a “no limits friendship.”

shockwaves through the economy.

In exchange for raising the debt limit by \$1.5 trillion into 2024, the bill would roll back overall federal spending and:

- Claw back unspent COVID-19 funds.
- Impose tougher work requirements for recipients of food stamps and other government aid.
- Halt Biden's plans to forgive up to \$20,000 in student loans and
- End many of the landmark renewable energy tax breaks Biden signed into law last year. It would tack on a sweeping Republican bill to boost oil, gas and coal production.

A nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office analysis estimated the Republican plan would reduce federal deficits by \$4.8 trillion over the decade if the proposed changes were enacted into law.

Several Republicans from the party's right wing, eager for even stricter spending cuts, said the bill was at least a starting point as they prepared to vote for McCarthy's strategy and bolster his hand in talks with Biden.

Freshman Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., said: "It's our obligation to get Speaker McCarthy to the table."

Others though, remained noncommittal or flat-out no's.

Rep. Andy Biggs, the former chairman of the Freedom Caucus who voted against the bill, said he had wanted Republicans to do more to end deficit spending. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., also a "no" vote, said of the nation's nearly \$32 trillion in debt, "that's my major concern."

In the Senate, leaders were watching and waiting.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said House passage of the legislation would be a "wasted effort" and that McCarthy should come to the table with Democrats to pass a straightforward debt-limit bill without GOP priorities and avoid default.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who stepped aside to give McCarthy the lead, said the speaker has been able to unite the House Republicans.

Now, he said, Biden and McCarthy must come to agreement. Otherwise, he said, "We'll be at a standoff. And we shouldn't do that to the country."

In a statement late Wednesday, the White House press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said congressional Republicans "must act immediately and without conditions to avoid default. ... That is their job."

Associated Press writers Josh Boak, Mary Clare Jalonick and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Appeals court rejects Trump effort to block Pence testimony

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court on Wednesday night moved former Vice President Mike Pence closer to appearing before a grand jury investigating efforts to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election, rejecting a bid by lawyers for former President Donald Trump to block the testimony.

It was not immediately clear what day Pence might appear before the grand jury, which for months has been investigating the events preceding the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and efforts by Trump and his allies to subvert the election outcome. But Pence's testimony, coming as he inches toward a likely entrance in the 2024 presidential race, would be a milestone moment in the investigation and would likely give prosecutors a key first-person account as they press forward with their inquiry.

The order from the three-judge panel of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was sealed and none of the parties are mentioned by name in online court records. But the appeal in the sealed case was filed just days after a lower-court judge had directed Pence to testify over objections from the Trump team.

A lawyer for Pence and a spokesman for Trump did not immediately return emails seeking comment, and a spokesman for the Justice Department special counsel leading the investigation declined to comment.

The appeal was decided by Judge Gregory Katsas, a Trump appointee, and judges Patricia Millett and Gregory Wilkins, both appointees of former President Barack Obama. It was not clear if lawyers for Trump might ask the entire appeals court to hear the matter.

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Pence was subpoenaed to testify earlier this year, but lawyers for Trump objected, citing executive privilege concerns. A judge in March refused to block Trump's appearance, though he did side with the former vice president's constitutional claims that he could not be forced to answer questions about anything related to his role as presiding over the Senate's certification of votes on Jan. 6.

A spokesman for Pence subsequently said that the former vice president would not appeal and that his arguments about the Constitution's speech or debate clause, which is intended to protect members of Congress from being questioned about official legislative acts, had been vindicated.

"We'll obey the law, we'll tell the truth," Pence said in an interview with CBS News's "Face the Nation" that aired Sunday. "And the story that I've been telling the American people all across the country, the story that I wrote in the pages of my memoir, that'll be the story I tell in that setting."

Pence has spoken extensively about Trump's pressure campaign urging him to reject Biden's victory in the days leading up to Jan. 6, including in his book "So Help Me God." Pence, as vice president, had a ceremonial role overseeing Congress' counting of the Electoral College vote, but did not have the power to affect the results, despite Trump's contention otherwise.

Pence has said that Trump endangered his family and everyone else who was at the Capitol that day and history will hold him "accountable."

"For four years, we had a close working relationship. It did not end well," Pence wrote, summing up their time in the White House.

The special counsel leading the investigation, Jack Smith, has cast a broad net in interviews and has sought the testimony of a long list of former Trump aides, including ex-White House counsel Pat Cipollone and former adviser Stephen Miller.

Smith is separately investigating Trump over the potential mishandling of hundreds of classified documents at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, as well as possible efforts to obstruct that probe. On Wednesday, Trump's lawyers in that investigation called the Justice Department investigation "severely botched" and "politically infected" and urged the House Intelligence Committee to step in by holding hearings and introducing legislation to correct classified document handling procedures in the White House and standardize procedures for presidents and vice presidents for when they leave office.

"DOJ should be ordered to stand down, and the intelligence community should instead conduct an appropriate investigation and provide a full report to this Committee, as well as your counterparts in the Senate," the lawyers wrote.

It is not clear when either of the special counsel's investigations will end or who, if anyone, will be charged.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Tucker Carlson emerges on Twitter, doesn't mention Fox News

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tucker Carlson emerged Wednesday, two days after Fox News fired him, with a two-minute, campaign-style monologue that didn't address why he suddenly became unemployed.

He posted a video on Twitter shortly after 8 p.m. Eastern, the time his Fox show used to begin, that talked about a lack of honest political debate in the media.

Carlson said one of the things he noticed, "when you step away from the noise for a few days," is how nice some people are, and how hilarious some are.

"The other thing you notice when you take a little time off is how unbelievably stupid most of the debates you see on television are," he said. "They're completely irrelevant. They mean nothing. In five years we won't even remember we heard them. Trust me, as somebody who participated."

Fox fired its most popular personality on Monday without explanation, less than a week after settling a lawsuit concerning the spread of lies about the 2020 presidential election.

The mystery about why Fox Corp. leadership, Rupert Murdoch and his son Lachlan, decided to suddenly dismiss Carlson lingered. The company has not explained it, although some media reports Wednesday

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centered on material uncovered during Dominion Voting Systems' lawsuit but redacted from court papers. Private messages sent by Carlson with "highly offensive and crude remarks" were a "catalyst" in Fox's decision to cut him loose, according to The New York Times.

Both The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post said one redacted message included a slur against a senior Fox executive. Each of the reports relied on sources that were not identified.

Some of the Dominion evidence that was publicly revealed showed some offensive remarks by Carlson, including use of a vulgarity to refer to Sidney Powell, the Trump supporter who was pushing bogus election conspiracy theories on Fox and elsewhere.

A Fox News representative did not comment on the reports or Carlson's reemergence, instead referring to Monday's statement where the company said, "we thank him for his service."

Carlson dressed in a suit and tie for his Twitter message. While he didn't mention Fox, it was reminiscent of the monologues he delivered on the network for the last six years, talking about "the people in charge" hurting the country. Debates on big topics like war, civil liberties, emerging science, demographic change and corporate power are not permitted by corporate media or political parties, he said.

"Where can you still find Americans saying true things?" he said. "There aren't many places left but there are some and that's enough. As long as you can hear the words, there is hope. See you soon."

Montana transgender lawmaker barred by GOP from House floor

By AMY BETH HANSON, SAM METZ and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana Republicans barred transgender lawmaker Zooey Zephyr from the House floor on Wednesday, wielding "decorum" rules after she rebuked colleagues supporting a ban on gender-affirming care for children and protested their efforts to silence her.

The punishment marks the first time in nearly half a century that Montana lawmakers have sought such disciplinary action against one of their own. It caps a weeklong standoff between Zephyr and House Republican leaders and formalizes their decision to silence her for saying that those voting in favor of the ban would have blood on their hands.

Zephyr will still be able to vote and participate in committees, but not discuss proposals and amendments under consideration in the full House. The legislative session is set to end in early May.

The fight over Zephyr's remarks has brought the nationwide debate over protest's role in democracy to Montana, where lawmakers punished her for voicing dissent, an increasingly prevalent move in statehouses.

Supporting Zephyr's attempts to regain her voice, protesters interrupted proceedings earlier this week by chanting "Let her Speak" in a boisterous rally that came after they protested outside the Capitol and unfurled a banner that read "Democracy Dies Here."

After days of rebuffing Zephyr's request to speak, Republican leaders finally granted her the floor to give a statement before they ultimately voted to discipline her Wednesday. She said her initial "blood on your hands" remark and subsequent decision to thrust a microphone into the air toward protesters in the House gallery were an effort to stand up for the LGBTQ+ community and her constituents in Missoula.

House Speaker Matt Regier's decision to turn off her microphone, she said, was an attempt to drive "a nail in the coffin of democracy."

"If you use decorum to silence people who hold you accountable, then all you're doing is using decorum as a tool of oppression," Zephyr told her colleagues.

House Republicans who supported barring Zephyr from the floor have accused her of placing lawmakers and staff at risk of harm for disrupting House proceedings and inciting protests in the chamber on Monday.

But lawmakers were on the floor Monday when protesters were in the gallery, and there have been no reports of damage to the building.

"Freedom in this body involves obedience to all the rules of this body, including the rules of decorum," House Majority Leader Sue Vinton said.

Authorities arrested seven people in the confrontation, who Zephyr said were defending democracy. Her opponents said ensuring government can conduct business on behalf of the people without interruption

was a critical precedent to set.

"This is an assault on our representative democracy, spirited debate, and the free expression of ideas cannot flourish in an atmosphere of turmoil and incivility," Republican David Bedey said on the House floor.

The episode comes weeks after two Black lawmakers, Tennessee state Reps. Justin Jones and Justin Pearson, were expelled for participating in a protest in favor of gun control after another school shooting. Similarly, Zephyr's punishment has ignited a firestorm of debate about governance and who has a voice in an elected body during this politically polarizing time.

Post-expulsion, the fate of the two Tennessee lawmakers were sent to their county commissions, which swiftly voted to reinstate them. Zephyr told The Associated Press after the vote that Republican leaders were likely aware that a similar sequence of events could be triggered, had they expelled her.

"My community and the Democratic Party in Missoula would send me back here in a heartbeat because I represent them and I represent their values by standing up for democracy," she said.

In Missoula, the county Democratic Party Chair Andy Nelson said Zephyr's constituents and supporters were disheartened to see her disciplined.

"What it comes down to is the silencing of not just Rep. Zephyr, but the 11,000 people she serves," he said after the decision.

The punishment comes two days after protesters later packed into the gallery at the Statehouse and brought House proceedings to a halt chanting "Let her speak" as Zephyr lifted her microphone toward them. Seven subsequent arrests galvanized both her supporters and those saying Zephyr's actions constitute an unacceptable attack on civil discourse.

The far-right Montana Freedom Caucus, which had pushed for Zephyr to be censured, said in a statement that her actions in support of the protesters were "nothing more than an ego trip." The caucus again on Wednesday deliberately misgendered Zephyr by using incorrect pronouns when referring to her.

"There needs to be some consequences for what he has been doing," said Rep. Joe Read, a member of the caucus who frequently and inconsistently used incorrect pronouns for Zephyr.

He claimed Zephyr gave a signal to her supporters just before Monday's session was disrupted. He declined to say what that was other than a "strange movement."

"When she gave the signal for protesters to go into action, I would say that's when decorum was incredibly broken," Read added.

Zephyr told the AP that she felt the moment was calling on her to stand up for democracy.

"Every time that one of these votes came; every time the speaker refused to allow me to speak; when the protesters came and demanded, my thought was twofold," she said. "Pride in those who stood up to defend democracy and a hope that in some small way, I could rise to that moment individually and do the work they sent me to do."

Metz reported from Salt Lake and Brown reported from Billings, Montana.

First pill for fecal transplants wins FDA approval

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. health officials on Wednesday approved the first pill made from healthy bacteria found in human waste to fight dangerous gut infections — an easier way of performing so-called fecal transplants.

The new treatment from Seres Therapeutics provides a simpler, rigorously tested version of stool-based procedures that some medical specialists have used for more than a decade to help patients.

The Food and Drug Administration cleared the capsules for adults 18 and older who face risks from repeat infections with *Clostridium difficile*, a bacteria that can cause severe nausea, cramping and diarrhea.

C. diff is particularly dangerous when it reoccurs, leading to between 15,000 and 30,000 deaths per year. It can be killed with antibiotics but they also destroy good bacteria that live in the gut, leaving it more susceptible to future infections. The new capsules are approved for patients who have already received

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antibiotic treatment.

More than 10 years ago, some doctors began reporting success with fecal transplants — using stool from a healthy donor — to restore the gut's healthy balance and prevent reinfections.

The FDA approved the first pharmaceutical-grade version of the treatment last year from a rival drug-maker, Ferring Pharmaceuticals. But that company's product — like most of the original procedures — must be delivered via the rectum.

Cambridge Massachusetts-based Seres will market its drug as a less invasive option. The treatment will be sold under the brand name Vowst and comes as a regimen of four daily capsules taken for three consecutive days.

Both of the recent FDA approvals are the product of years of pharmaceutical industry research into the microbiome, the community of bacteria, viruses and fungi that live in the gut.

Currently most fecal transplants are provided by a network of stool banks that have popped up at medical institutions and hospitals across the country.

While the availability of new FDA-approved options is expected to decrease demand for donations from stool banks, some plan to stay open.

OpenBiome, the largest stool bank in the U.S., said it will keep serving patients who aren't eligible for the FDA-approved products, such as children and adults with treatment-resistant cases. It has supplied more than 65,000 stool samples for C. diff patients since 2013.

"OpenBiome is committed to maintaining safe access to 'fecal transplantation' for these patients as a vital last line of defense," said Dr. Majdi Osman, the group's medical chief.

OpenBiome's standard stool treatment costs less than \$1,700 and is typically delivered as a frozen solution within days of ordering. Seres did not disclose the price it will charge for its capsules in a statement Wednesday evening.

"We want to make the commercial experience for physicians and patients as easy as possible," said Eric Shaff, the company's chief executive officer, in an interview ahead of the announcement. "Ease of administration — in our view — is one of the aspects of the value we're delivering."

Seres will co-market the treatment with Swiss food giant Nestle, which will also split the profits. Seres will receive a \$125 million milestone payment from Nestle in connection with the FDA approval.

Overseeing the fledgling industry of U.S. stool banks has created regulatory headaches for the FDA, which doesn't traditionally police homemade products and procedures used in doctor's offices. In the early days of the trend, the FDA warned consumers about the risks of potential infections from the fecal transplants, as some people sought out questionable "do it yourself" methods from videos and websites.

Seres executives say their manufacturing process relies on the same techniques and equipment used to purify blood products and other biologic therapies.

The company starts with stool provided by a small group of donors who are screened for various health risks and conditions. Their stool is likewise tested for dozens of potential viruses, infections and parasites.

The company then processes the samples to remove the waste, isolate the healthy bacteria and kill any other lingering organisms. Thousands of capsules can be made from each stool sample, making it a more efficient process than current fecal transplants, according to the company.

The FDA warned in its approval announcement that the drug "may carry a risk of transmitting infectious agents. It is also possible for Vowst to contain food allergens," the agency noted.

The FDA approved the treatment based on a 180-patient study in which nearly 88% of patients taking the capsules did not experience reinfection after 8 weeks, compared with 60% of those who received dummy pills.

Common side effects included abdominal swelling, constipation and diarrhea.

This story has been corrected to show that Eric Shaff is the chief executive officer of Seres Therapeutics, not its chief financial officer.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP_FDWriter ____

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Danny Masterson lawyer challenges new details in rape story

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — An attorney for Danny Masterson challenged his former longtime girlfriend during cross-examination Wednesday on why her trial testimony alleging the actor raped her in 2001 included several new details that were missing from the accounts she gave authorities at the beginning of the investigation.

"Is your testimony today that you can now remember things in 2023 that you didn't remember in 2017?" Masterson's lawyer Shawn Holley asked the model and actor who is the first witness to take the stand in the Los Angeles courtroom at Masterson's trial on three rape charges.

The woman responded that her memory had not improved, but that she "opened up more than I have before" a day earlier when she described an attack from Masterson, then her boyfriend of five years, in their Hollywood-area home.

She testified Tuesday that she woke to find Masterson on top of her and raping her, that she shouted for him to stop, that he put his full weight on her and pinned her arms down, and that she finally got him to stop by pulling his hair. He responded by hitting her in the face and spitting on her.

Holley dwelled on each of these elements in her cross-examination, asking why she had not mentioned in her initial interviews with Los Angeles police detectives and a prosecutor in 2017 that she had said that she was merely trying to go to sleep when she found Masterson trying to have sex with her.

"That's the same thing to me," she responded, "I'm Southern, we say trying to when we mean you're doing it."

Holley also suggested that her testimony didn't make physical sense when she said Masterson was looking at her with "dead eyes" the entire time while also putting his full body weight on her.

"I'm trying to understand how a person's dead weight can be on your body and how his head can be suspended above your head?" Holley said.

The woman responded that "I just remember seeing his face and feeling him on me I don't remember where his hands were."

Holley also asked why she made no mention of Masterson pinning her arms down above her head in the hours she spent talking to police and prosecutors in 2017.

The woman explained that she did not reveal every detail in those initial interviews, and that she had not understood at the time how precise and careful she would need to be. Now that she has given multiple officials interviews and testified in court both at Masterson's preliminary hearing and his first trial last year, she knows better.

"I wish I understood that in the very first interview that you give with a detective or a prosecutor that you have to make sure your words are very literal, and that you have to give every detail," the woman said. "Because, respectfully, someone like you is going to challenge me on that. I don't like to talk about things and it takes me a long time to speak about things, and I was doing the best I can and I was being honest."

She breathed uneasily, apologized often, and occasionally grew emotional under cross-examination, but remained composed.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they have been sexually abused.

The model and actor was in a relationship with Masterson from 1996 until 2002. She first went to police to report him late in 2016.

Masterson was eventually charged with raping three women at his home between 2001 to 2003, when he was at the height of his fame as a star of the sitcom "That '70s Show."

Masterson, 47, could get 45 years in prison if convicted of all three counts.

He has pleaded not guilty and his attorneys have said the decades-old stories told by the women are

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Beijing has tried to appear neutral but has repeated Russian justifications for the invasion.

Xi received a warm welcome from Putin during a visit to Moscow in March. The Chinese defense minister visited Russia this month.

China has stepped up purchases of Russian oil and gas for its energy-hungry economy, helping to offset lost revenue resulting from Western sanctions. In exchange, China gets lower prices, though details haven't been disclosed.

Marten said the Xi-Zelenskyy call was "kind of a slap at Russia, because Russia has been very keen to portray China as its ally." She said the direct China-Ukraine contact "indicates China is taking at least a step away from Russia."

WHAT ARE CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE?

China was Ukraine's biggest trading partner before the invasion, though on a smaller scale than Chinese-Russian trade.

In 2021, Ukraine announced plans for Chinese companies to build trade-related infrastructure.

Zelenskyy's government was more ambivalent toward Beijing after it was clear Xi wouldn't try to stop Putin's war, but the two sides have remained amicable.

"Before the full-scale Russian invasion, China was Ukraine's number one trading partner. I believe that our conversation today will give a powerful impetus to the return, preservation and development of this dynamic at all levels," an official Ukrainian readout of the call reported.

Qin, the foreign minister, promised this month China wouldn't provide arms to either side, a pledge that benefits Ukraine, which has received tanks, rockets and other armaments from the United States and European governments.

The Chinese ambassador to France set off an uproar in Europe when he suggested former Soviet republics — a group that includes Ukraine — might not be sovereign nations. That was in line with Putin's comments denying Ukrainian sovereignty.

Beijing then reassured former Soviet states it respected their sovereignty and said the ambassador's comments were a personal opinion, not official policy.

Elizabeth Wishnick, of the U.S.-based think tank CNA and Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asian Institute, said in an email: "I wonder if Xi's call was set up quickly to deflect attention" from the uproar over the Chinese ambassador's remarks.

Andrew Katell in New York contributed to this report.

Montana transgender lawmaker silenced: What to know

By AMY BETH HANSON, SAM METZ and MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — The latest high-profile example of statehouses deciding who can be heard during legislative debates is playing out in Montana, where a transgender lawmaker on Wednesday was barred from speaking on the House floor for the remainder of the session.

For days before voting to discipline her, legislative leaders in the GOP-controlled statehouse had not allowed Rep. Zooney Zephyr to speak during debates because she said colleagues who voted to ban gender-affirming care for youth would have "blood" on their hands.

The remark provoked outrage from Republicans who said the language was belittling and an affront to civil discourse. Zephyr rebuffed demands from legislative leaders to apologize for her remarks, leading to days of standoff between her and lawmakers in the majority party over how to move forward.

The silencing of Zephyr's microphone drew hundreds of protestors to the Montana Capitol. After Zephyr's request to speak on a proposal was denied Monday, they erupted in chants of "Let her speak!" and forced the House to temporarily adjourn. Police in riot gear were sent in to clear the gallery, leading to seven protestors being arrested on trespassing charges.

The standoff between Zephyr and House Republicans originated in a debate over gender-affirming care for minors. It's evolved to dovetail with a nationwide debate over the robustness of democracy in politi-

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cally polarizing times.

Montana is among the wave of GOP-controlled states passing legislation to ban gender-affirming care over ardent objections from the transgender community and its advocates. Montana lawmakers advanced a measure last week, sending it to Gov. Greg Gianforte, who has indicated he will sign it.

Here's what you need to know:

WHO IS THE TRANSGENDER LAWMAKER AT THE CENTER OF THIS?

Last year, Zephyr became the first openly transgender woman elected to the Montana Legislature — putting her among a record number of transgender lawmakers who began serving across the U.S.

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

Following her November election, she said she wanted to enlist moderate Republicans to push back on what she called "extreme and dangerous attacks" and help people understand transgender adults like her.

Instead, she and fellow members of the Democratic minority have been powerless to stop Republicans from passing proposals focused on transgender kids. In addition to banning gender-affirming care for minors, lawmakers also passed legislation that says misgendering or deadnaming students is not illegal discrimination unless it rises to the level of bullying.

Deadnaming refers to using the name a transgender person used prior to transitioning.

Zephyr has been unfazed by calls from Republican leaders and legislative staffers to apologize, scale back her remarks or calm protesters.

In a speech on Monday, Zephyr likened gender-affirming care bans like the one that passed in Montana to "eradication," echoing fears raised throughout the transgender community that stripping transgender youth of access to care endangers their lives and mental health.

WHAT STARTED THIS DISPUTE?

On April 18, as the House debated the governor's proposed amendments to a measure banning gender-affirming care for minors, Zephyr spoke against the bill while making a reference to the body's opening prayer.

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

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

The move to discipline Zephyr and keep her from the House floor for the remainder of the legislative session stemmed from her participation in Monday's protests, not the initial remarks themselves.

WHAT DOES THE DISCIPLINARY ACTION DO?

The House voted along party lines to prevent Zephyr from participating in debates — speaking or voting — from the floor of the Montana House of Representatives or the gallery. It allows her to participate and vote remotely but effectively prevents her from speaking during debates on proposals and amendments for the remainder of the legislative session, which is scheduled to end in early May.

It does not limit her participation in committee hearings, House Speaker Matt Regier told reporters after the vote.

DOES THIS HAVE PRECEDENT?

The only known attempt to censure lawmakers in the Montana Legislature was almost a half-century ago, according to Eve Byron with the Montana Historical Society.

In 1975, Democratic lawmakers sought to reprimand three Republicans who were accused of placing false and misleading election advertisements, according to news articles provided by Byron.

The censure motion failed after a House committee determined the ads were misleading but not out of line with advertisements placed by other lawmakers, according to an article that appeared in the Inde-

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pendent Record newspaper.

There are no further records of Montana legislators being expelled or censured, Byron said.

WHO HAS LED THE CHARGE TO SILENCE ZEPHYR?

Although Montana has long leaned Republican, for years voters crossed party lines and elected Democrats to the U.S. Senate and governor's mansion. But the state has recently shifted rightward. Republicans now command control of state government, which they've used to push legislation restricting abortion and loosening gun laws.

One reflection of such a shift is the newly influential Montana Freedom Caucus, which includes at least 21 of the Legislature's 102 GOP lawmakers.

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

Efforts to punish Zephyr originated in the caucus, whose members said Zephyr's comments displayed a "hateful rhetoric" and called for a "commitment to civil discourse" — similar to criticisms leveled against Democrats who were expelled from the Tennessee statehouse for joining in gun control demonstrations. The caucus later issued a statement calling Monday's protest and arrests an "insurrection" and accused Zephyr of encouraging it.

No property damage or threats to lawmakers have been reported. But Republicans from the statehouse to Montana's congressional delegation have called the protesters violent and condemned their interruptions.

WHO IS THE HOUSE SPEAKER ENFORCING THE GAG ORDER?

Zephyr's punishment has thrust leaders in Montana's Republican-majority Legislature into the spotlight, including Regier, who was elected House Speaker in January.

Throughout his tenure, Regier, a real estate investor from a northwestern Montana political family, has spearheaded legislation to restrict local governments from enacting gun control measures. His proposal to ban the type of abortion most commonly used after 15 weeks passed the Legislature this year. Gianforte hasn't acted on the bill.

Kalispell, where Regier is from, is the largest city in Montana's deeply Republican Flathead County. County commissioners there opposed mask requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Library directors and staff have resigned over efforts to ban books about gender identity, sexuality and race.

The region is known for agriculture and as a tourist gateway to Glacier National Park.

IS THIS RELATED TO THE TENNESSEE LAWMAKERS BEING EXPELLED?

Not directly, but the dispute reflects tensions and harsh rhetoric around culturally divisive issues — including firearms, racial justice and rights for the LGBTQ+ community — that currently dominate much of America's political discourse.

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

In her Monday speech, Zephyr connected the fight over her words to the struggles facing marginalized groups throughout the country, including those "who have the audacity to stand up and say this legislation gets us killed" and have been met with punishment.

On Tuesday, Tennessee state Rep. Justin Pearson, who was expelled and reinstated as an interim lawmaker this month, called the Montana standoff anti-democratic. "We will not let our democracy die without fighting for every voice. We are in this fight from Memphis to Montana!" he tweeted.

Metz reported from Salt Lake City and Brown reported from Billings.

Polarization means punishment for minority party lawmakers

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — Montana transgender lawmaker Zoey Zephyr was silenced by her Republican colleagues on Wednesday in a vote that bars her from participating on the House floor for the remainder of the 2023 session.

The crackdown followed a standoff between Montana Democrats and Republicans after Zephyr told Republican colleagues in the House they would “see the blood” on their hands if they banned gender-affirming medical care for transgender youth.

It’s the latest harsh punishment meted out to an outspoken lawmaker by colleagues in state legislatures. Here are other examples.

TENNESSEE

Republicans voted Democratic Reps. Justin Jones and Justin Pearson out of their offices for taking to the front of the Tennessee House and chanting with gun control supporters who packed the gallery after a Nashville school shooting that killed six people last month, including three children.

Expulsions in the Tennessee General Assembly are extremely rare and typically center on criminal activity.

The pair were joined a fellow Democrat, Rep. Gloria Johnson, in standing with demonstrators calling for stronger gun restrictions — particularly a ban on so-called assault weapons. Only Pearson and Jones, who are both Black, were expelled by the Republican-controlled legislature. Johnson, who is white, was not.

Pearson and Jones have since been reinstated by local officials, returning them to their positions on an interim basis. The state has set Aug. 3 as the special election date for their seats, preceded by a June 15 primary election. Both lawmakers have said they intend to run.

Jones, Pearson and Johnson met with President Joe Biden at the White House on Monday.

OKLAHOMA

Last month, Oklahoma Republicans formally censured a nonbinary Democratic colleague after state troopers said the lawmaker blocked them from questioning a transgender rights activist accused of assaulting a police officer during a protest over anti-trans legislation.

The party-line vote removed Rep. Mauree Turner, who uses they/them pronouns, from all committee assignments. Turner could have kept the positions by issuing a formal apology, including to the Highway Patrol, which provides security at the Capitol complex.

“I think an apology for loving the people of Oklahoma is something that I cannot do,” said Turner, the first openly nonbinary and Muslim person elected to the Legislature in Oklahoma.

Recent efforts by the GOP-controlled Oklahoma Legislature to prohibit gender-affirming medical care for trans children and pass other anti-trans legislation have led to demonstrations at the Capitol. One protest in March became heated when a protester was accused of pouring water on a state representative and scuffling with a trooper before being arrested.

Officers eventually questioned and arrested the activist, who was inside Turner’s legislative office.

Turner, who is Black and represents a diverse constituency that includes Oklahoma City, said one of their goals is making sure all people are welcome at the Capitol.

ARIZONA

Earlier this month, the Arizona House of Representatives expelled a Republican lawmaker who organized a presentation making unsubstantiated accusations that a wide range of politicians, judges and public officials of both parties took bribes from a Mexican drug cartel.

Rep. Liz Harris, a prominent supporter of discredited election conspiracies, was kicked out of the Legislature in a bipartisan vote. The lawmaker’s ouster came a day after the House Ethics Committee determined Harris had engaged in “disorderly behavior” in violation of the chamber’s rules.

The committee’s report said Harris knew the person she invited to a legislative hearing in February would accuse her colleagues of criminal activity without any proof, that she took steps to hide it from House

leaders ahead of time and then misled the committee investigating her actions.

Rep. David Livingston, a Republican who voted to expel Harris, said the integrity of the institution was at stake.

Harris, who was sworn into her first term in January, did not speak ahead of the expulsion vote. Immediately afterward, she carried boxes to her car, placed them in her trunk with the help of a handful of supporters and left. She called the ethics report "a lie."

Disney sues DeSantis, calling park takeover 'retaliation'

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Disney sued Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Wednesday over the Republican's takeover of its theme park district, alleging the governor waged a "targeted campaign of government retaliation" after the company opposed a law critics call "Don't Say Gay."

The lawsuit was filed in Tallahassee minutes after a Disney World oversight board appointed by DeSantis voted to void a deal that gave the company authority over design and construction decisions in its sprawling properties near Orlando.

"Disney regrets that it has come to this," the case said. "But having exhausted efforts to seek a resolution, the Company is left with no choice but to file this lawsuit to protect its cast members, guests, and local development partners from a relentless campaign to weaponize government power against Disney in retaliation for expressing a political viewpoint unpopular with certain State officials."

The legal filing is the latest salvo in a more than year-old feud between Disney and DeSantis that has engulfed the governor in criticism as he prepares to launch an expected presidential bid in the coming months.

DeSantis, who has framed himself as a Republican firebrand able to deftly implement his conservative agenda without drama, has dived headlong into the fray with the beloved company and major tourism driver, as business leaders and White House rivals bash his stance as a rejection of the small-government tenets of conservatism.

"We are unaware of any legal right that a company has to operate its own government or maintain special privileges not held by other businesses in the state," said DeSantis spokeswoman Taryn Fenske. "This lawsuit is yet another unfortunate example of their hope to undermine the will of the Florida voters and operate outside the bounds of the law."

The fight began last year after Disney, in the face of significant pressure, publicly opposed a state law that bans classroom lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in early grades, a policy critics call "Don't Say Gay."

As punishment, DeSantis took over Disney World's self-governing district and appointed a new board of supervisors that would oversee municipal services in the sprawling theme parks. But before the new board came in, the company pushed through an 11th-hour agreement that stripped the new supervisors of much of their authority.

The DeSantis board on Wednesday said Disney's move to retain control over their property was effectively unlawful and performed without proper public notice.

"Disney picked the fight with this board. We were not looking out for a fight," said Martin Garcia, chair of the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District, before the vote, adding "bottom line, what our lawyers have told us, is factually and legally what they created is an absolute legal mess. It will not work."

DeSantis has also vowed additional retribution, with proposals to enhance state oversight of the resort's rides and monorail, as well as a suggestion to build a prison nearby. Also Wednesday, the Florida Senate passed a bill seeking to put those retributions in place and to undo agreements made by the Reedy Creek board before the state took it over. The House still needs to approve before it can move forward.

Disney has said all agreements made with the previous board were legal and approved in a public forum. Disney CEO Bob Iger has also said that any actions against the company that threaten jobs or expansion at its Florida resort was not only "anti-business" but "anti-Florida."

The Disney lawsuit asks a federal judge to void the governor's takeover of the theme park district, as well as the DeSantis oversight board's actions, on the grounds that they were violations of company's free speech rights.

"A targeted campaign of government retaliation — orchestrated at every step by Governor DeSantis as punishment for Disney's protected speech — now threatens Disney's business operations, jeopardizes its economic future in the region, and violates its constitutional rights," the lawsuit said.

Fugees rapper Pras found guilty of political conspiracy

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Fugees rapper accused in multimillion-dollar political conspiracies spanning two presidencies was convicted Wednesday after a trial that included testimony ranging from actor Leonardo DiCaprio to former U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

Prakazrel "Pras" Michel was accused of funneling money from a now-fugitive Malaysian financier through straw donors to Barack Obama's 2012 reelection campaign, then trying to squelch a Justice Department investigation and influence an extradition case on behalf of China under the Trump administration.

A jury in Washington, D.C., federal court found him guilty of all 10 counts, including conspiracy and acting as an unregistered agent of a foreign government.

The defense argued the Grammy-winning rapper from the 1990s hip-hop group the Fugees simply wanted to make money and got bad legal advice as he reinvented himself in the world of politics.

Michel declined to comment after the verdict, but his attorney said he's "extremely disappointed" in the outcome of the case and plans to appeal.

"This is not over," attorney David Kenner said. "I remain very, very confident we will ultimately prevail."

Michel first met Malaysian financier Low Taek Jho in 2006, when the businessman usually known as Jho Low was dropping huge sums of money and hobnobbing with the likes of Paris Hilton. Low helped finance Hollywood films, including "The Wolf of Wall Street." DiCaprio testified Low had appeared to him as a legitimate businessman and had mentioned wanting to donate to Obama's campaign.

Michel also testified in his own defense. He said Low wanted a picture with Obama in 2012 and was willing to pay millions of dollars to get it. Michel agreed to help and used some of the money he got to pay for friends to attend fundraising events. No one had ever told him that was illegal, he said.

Prosecutors said Michel was donating the money on Low's behalf, and later tried to lean on the straw donors with texts from burner phones to keep them from talking to investigators.

After the election of Donald Trump, prosecutors say Michel again took millions to halt an investigation into allegations Low masterminded a money laundering and bribery scheme that pilfered billions from the Malaysian state investment fund known as 1MDB. Low is now an international fugitive and has maintained his innocence.

Michel also got paid to try and persuade the U.S. to extradite back to China a government critic suspected of crimes there without registering as a foreign agent, prosecutors said.

On that charge, the defense pointed to testimony from Sessions, who was Trump's top law enforcement officer until he resigned in 2018. Sessions said he'd been aware the Chinese government wanted the extradition but didn't know Michel. The rapper's ultimately futile efforts to arrange a meeting on the topic didn't seem improper, the former attorney general said.

Rep. Zoey Zephyr's town feels divide from rest of Montana

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

MISSOULA, Montana (AP) — In the college town of Missoula, pride flags are as common a sight as the peaks of Montana's Rattlesnake Mountains. Even a downtown crosswalk is rainbow-colored.

Often described as a blue island in a vast red state, Missoula sent the first openly transgender legislator in Montana history to the state capital. Its voters, fully aware that they are vastly outnumbered by conservatives statewide, were still shocked at what happened next.

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Their new representative, Zooey Zephyr, was barred last week from speaking on the floor of the Legislature by the Republican majority, which accused her of violating decorum by saying they had "blood on your hands" for approving a bill barring gender-affirming care for minors. On Wednesday, Republicans voted to bar Zephyr from the House floor for the remainder of the legislative session, scheduled to end next month.

Zephyr was elected with 80% of the vote in November in her heavily liberal district, which runs through the oddly-aligned section of central Missoula known as the Slant Streets and stretches to the doorstep of the University of Montana, the 7,000-student school that has long fueled the town's liberal sensibility.

Nestled in a narrow valley at the northwestern edge of the state, Missoula is proud of its funky, countercultural style. This week, the hot ticket was the International Wildlife Film Festival, featuring a parade in which people dressed in animal costumes marched through downtown.

Zephyr's constituents were both shocked and reminded of the growing distance between them and the rest of their state.

"When she first ran I thought, 'They're going to do something to limit her power,'" said Erin Flint, 28, a native who plans to enroll in the university for a graduate degree in art education. But she didn't expect a step as dramatic as gagging the new lawmaker, or barring her from the floor.

Montana has long leaned to the right, but with more of a libertarian bent than a zest for culture wars. That allowed Democrats to win the governorship regularly over the decades, and occasionally to win control of one or more houses of the Legislature.

Andy Nelson grew up in a town of 750 in eastern Montana, and only felt comfortable coming out as gay as a senior at the University of Montana, when he volunteered at The Center, a LGBTQ+ community group in Missoula where he is now executive director. He remembered long discussions about whether such a group was still necessary after same-sex marriage was legalized nationally in 2015. But that all changed in 2016, with the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump.

Trump handily won the state that year and in 2020. Republicans now hold both congressional seats and all statewide offices, although one of the state's two U.S. Senate seats is held by Democrat Jon Tester, a top GOP target in 2024. Last year, as Zephyr was elected in her Missoula district of about 11,000 residents, Republicans rode a surge in popular support to win a supermajority in both chambers of the Legislature.

Zeke Cork, 62, one of The Center's board members, recalled the 1970s as a great time to come out in Missoula, though he acknowledged he still had to follow certain rules to be safe. A railroad dispatcher, Cork has lived all over the United States but came back to Montana in 2015. He felt safe enough to transition fully two years ago.

But today, Cork said, the state's "live and let live" sensibility seems to be ebbing. Conservative protesters, often armed, disrupt pride events. "Now, you don't know who's going to be the one who unloads on you and your community," he said.

Cork has been traveling up to the Capitol in Helena to speak against the legislation affecting transgender people since it was first introduced. After Zephyr was silenced, he joined dozens of others from Missoula at the Capitol this week, where they began crying, "Let her speak!" after she was gagged yet again. Seven demonstrators were arrested.

"We would much rather be living quiet lives, out of the spotlight, living under the radar, living our best lives," Cork said. "I don't want to be having this battle."

But, "she speaks for me, and I sent her to that house," said Cork, who lives in Zephyr's district. "We're fighting for democracy right now."

Legislative Republicans contend they're the ones preserving democracy by following their chamber's rules and gagging Zephyr for maligning her colleagues. "We will uphold the people's will that sent 68 Republicans to Helena," several said in a statement Monday evening, after activists — including dozens from Missoula — jeered them from the House gallery.

In the minds of many other Montanans, it's Missoula that has changed, not them.

"Missoula used to be a wonderful place," said Ken Sayler, 64, who grew up in the town when its primary industry was saw mills. Those all closed, and the town began to look a lot more like the university, driving

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him in disgust to a remote house in the mountains, where he manufactures boat parts.

"If you're transgender, I don't care," Saylor said, adding he had little sympathy for Zephyr. "She stepped out of bounds."

Saylor was drinking a beer in a bar about 20 miles south of Missoula, where plenty of patrons jeered the idea of a transgender lawmaker. The bar sits in a small town in the district of state Sen. Theresa Manzella, the chair of a group of conservative state lawmakers called the Montana Freedom Caucus who pushed for the measure silencing Zephyr with a statement that intentionally misgendered her.

Jim McConnell, a 69-year-old machinist, was dubious of the idea of someone like Zephyr serving in the statehouse. But he didn't like the idea of muzzling her.

"They have a right to speak," said Jim McConnell. "But in Montana, they're barking up the wrong tree."

Experts say intense cultural battles are out of character for Montana politics.

"This is a conservative, libertarian state, as opposed to a conservative, authoritarian one," said Paul Pope, a political scientist at Montana State University in Billings, noting that a far less liberal town's zoo received an influx of support after conservative activists attacked its drag story hour recently. "Even if they have some short-term success here," he added of the GOP, "long term, this is going to hurt them."

But for now, many in Missoula are simply stunned.

"They've stripped 11,000 Montanans of their voice," said Ignatius Fitzgerald, a University of Montana freshman who grew up in the district. "Republicans have left us without a voice and without recourse."

Even some who disagreed politically with Zephyr said they didn't think the Legislature should silence her.

"Even if I don't agree with her policies, I feel she has the right to speak," Addie Glidewell, a 19-year-old journalism student who supports banning gender-affirming care for minors, said of Zephyr. "I don't believe she should be shut down."

Danny Wainwright, a 56-year-old middle school teacher in Zephyr's district, said he doesn't always back aggressive protests or bombastic political rhetoric. But he felt Zephyr's actions were appropriate.

"When you're the minority and Republicans have a supermajority, you've got to be heard somehow, that's your job," Wainwright said.

Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

This story has been updated to correct the spelling of Sen. Tester's first name to Jon, instead of John.

Man City beats Arsenal 4-1, Premier League title in sight

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

MANCHESTER, England (AP) — Kevin de Bruyne scored twice as Manchester City beat first-place Arsenal 4-1 on Wednesday to take control of the Premier League title race.

While the defending champions remain second in the standings, Arsenal's lead was cut to two points, with City having two games in hand.

A third league title in as many years is now in sight for manager Pep Guardiola, whose team is in contention for a treble of trophies including the Champions League and FA Cup.

Arsenal proved no match for City in a game that always looked likely to have a major say in determining who would be crowned champions.

Mikel Arteta's team has led the way for much of the season but never recovered from De Bruyne's seventh minute opener at Etihad Stadium.

Aaron Ramsdale produced a string of fine saves to keep Arsenal in the game until John Stones headed in a second for City in first-half stoppage time.

Any hopes of an unlikely comeback were ended nine minutes into the second half when De Bruyne scored his second of the match.

Rob Holding pulled one back for Arsenal in the 86th, but it was too late to change the outcome.

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Erling Haaland completed the rout to make it 4-1 in stoppage time.

It is the third time City has beaten Arsenal this season, including victory in the FA Cup, and extends its winning sequence against the Londoners to eight games.

While nothing is decided yet, Arsenal needed to win the game to ensure it remained in control of the title race after a recent slump had handed the initiative to City.

Three successive draws against Liverpool, West Ham and Southampton had delivered a major blow to the club's hopes of a first title in 19 years.

City, meanwhile, was on the back of a 16-game unbeaten run in all competitions and producing its best form of the season.

The confidence flowing through the team was evident from the start.

Leading 2-0 at halftime, it could have been even further ahead after dominating the first 45 minutes.

City had two penalty appeals early on before De Bruyne struck from a swift break that was a sign of things to come.

Stones' long clearance was held up by Haaland just inside Arsenal's half and the Norwegian then laid off to De Bruyne. The Belgian playmaker burst forward and unleashed a low shot past Ramsdale from around 20 meters.

De Bruyne looked set to the double City's lead with another breakaway, but on this occasion Ben White's last ditch block denied him.

City kept coming, with Haaland seeing three efforts stopped by Ramsdale as Arsenal edged toward the break only one goal behind.

The visitors' resistance was broken, however, in first-half stoppage time when Stones headed in De Bruyne's free kick, with VAR awarding the goal after it had initially been ruled out for offside.

De Bruyne scored his second when played in by Haaland again within 10 minutes of the second half, slipping a close-range shot past Ramsdale.

With the game effectively over, Holding fired in a consolation for Arsenal.

But Haaland struck his 49th goal of the season in stoppage time to confirm City's superiority.

James Robson is at <https://twitter.com/jamesalanrobson>

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

Judge says Nunes not defamed by story about Iowa dairy farm

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A federal judge in Iowa has ruled against former U.S. Rep. Devin Nunes, who filed lawsuits claiming he was defamed by articles published by Esquire magazine about his family's Iowa dairy farm.

U.S. District Judge C.J. Williams ruled Tuesday in favor of reporter Ryan Lizza and Esquire publisher Hearst Magazines in a lawsuit Nunes filed, according to the Des Moines Register.

Nunes served for 19 years representing California in the U.S. House before leaving Congress to run the social media platform Truth Social, which is largely owned by former President Donald Trump.

Nunes filed the lawsuits in 2019 after Lizza's story on the Nunes family's dairy farm in northwest Iowa published in 2018. The article claimed the family kept their move from California to Iowa a secret and delved into questions about immigrants living illegally in Iowa who work at the state's dairy farms.

In his ruling, Williams said a reasonable jury couldn't find the article's statements defamatory.

It marks the second time the court has ruled against Nunes. Williams in 2020 also rejected Nunes' claims, but he appealed, and in 2021 the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals found Lizza may have committed a new defamatory act when in November 2019 he tweeted a link to the original article.

Williams noted in his second ruling that evidence supported the article's reporting about the Nunes family's immigrant workers. The judge said the family didn't offer material evidence that the story's claims were false.

An email sent to Nunes at his website wasn't immediately returned. Lizza now works for the news organization Politico, and an email left with Lizza at Politico wasn't immediately returned. An email left with Esquire magazine also wasn't immediately returned.

Supreme Court on ethics issues: Not broken, no fix needed

By JESSICA GRESKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is speaking with one voice in response to recent criticism of the justices' ethical practices: No need to fix what isn't broken.

The justices' response on Tuesday struck some critics and ethics experts as tone deaf at a time of heightened attention on the justices' travel and private business transactions. That comes against the backdrop of a historic dip in public approval as measured by opinion polls.

Deeply divided on some of the most contentious issues of the day — including abortion, gun rights and the place of religion in public life — the court's six conservatives and three liberals seem united on this particular principle: on ethics they will set their own rules and police themselves.

Charles Geyh, an Indiana University law professor and legal ethics expert, said everything the justices detailed Tuesday evening about ethics was essentially outlined in Chief Justice John Roberts' annual year-end report from 2011, more than a decade ago.

"They're basically saying ... What we've been doing is just fine. Let's just re-say it for those of you at the back...That just strikes me as, you know, pretty empty," Geyh said.

The most recent stories about the questionable ethics practices of justices began earlier this month. First came a ProPublica investigation that revealed that Thomas has for more than two decades accepted luxury trips nearly every year from Republican megadonor Harlan Crow without reporting them on financial disclosure forms. Thomas responded by issuing a statement saying that he was not required to disclose the trips.

A week later, ProPublica revealed in a new story that Crow had purchased three properties belonging to Thomas and his family, a transaction worth more than \$100,000 that Thomas never disclosed. Politico reported more recently that when Justice Neil Gorsuch sold property he co-owned shortly after becoming a justice, he disclosed the sale but omitted that the property was purchased by a person whose firm frequently has cases before the high court.

And earlier this year, there were stories about the legal recruiting career of Chief Justice John Roberts' wife and whether it raised ethical concerns that she was paid large sums for placing lawyers at firms that appear before the court.

The series of revelations has provoked outcry and calls for reform particularly from Democrats. On Wednesday, Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Sen. Angus King, the independent from Maine, announced legislation that would require the Supreme Court to create a code of conduct and appoint an official to oversee potential conflicts and public complaints. Next week, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on Supreme Court ethics reform.

"The time has come for a new public conversation on ways to restore confidence in the Court's ethical standards. I invite you to join it," wrote Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., in a letter.

Roberts declined in his own letter made public Tuesday evening. He wrote that testimony by previous holders of his office before Congress is "exceedingly rare, as one might expect in light of separation of powers concerns and the importance of preserving judicial independence."

To his letter, however, Roberts attached a "Statement on Ethics Principles and Practices" signed by all nine justices describing the ethical rules they follow about travel, gifts and outside income. "This statement aims to provide new clarity to the bar and to the public on how the Justices address certain recurring issues, and also seeks to dispel some common misconceptions," the statement read.

But ethics experts and other court observers said the statement that followed and ran just over two pages was nothing new, just "the rehashing of things we already knew and found insufficient," said Gabe Roth of the watchdog group Fix the Court in a statement.

The statement signed by the justices essentially said that they consult a wide variety of sources to ad-

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dress ethical issues, decide for themselves when a conflict requires that they step away from a case and file the same annual financial disclosure reports as other judges.

The justices have previously resisted calls to write a formal code of conduct.

Kathleen Clark, a legal ethics professor at Washington University in St. Louis, said in her view the problem is that the justices "have not been subjected to basic accountability that just about everybody else in the federal government has to comply with."

What was striking to her about the statement, she said, was "a failure to grapple with the fundamental problem of lack of accountability." The justices "seem to be utterly clueless about the problem they have ... They're in a bubble apparently. They don't see what a big problem they have with the lack of accountability," she said.

Mark Sherman contributed to this report.

First Republic shares sink again, down nearly 60% in week

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

First Republic Bank's stock continued to slide Wednesday, an ongoing rout that has erased 60% of its value just this week on concerns about the bank's financial health in the wake of two other bank collapses.

Shares slumped almost 30%, following an even more severe tumble Tuesday, after the bank revealed that depositors withdrew more than \$100 billion last month following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank.

Trading in the bank's shares was halted several times for volatility.

The bank said late Monday that it was only able to stop the bleeding after a group of large banks stepped in to save it by depositing \$30 billion in uninsured deposits.

The San Francisco bank plans to sell off unprofitable assets, including low interest mortgages it provided to wealthy clients. It also has plans to lay off up to a quarter of its workforce, which totaled about 7,200 employees at the end of last year.

With deposits fleeing, First Republic was forced to borrow from federal programs to shore up its balance sheet. The interest the bank has to pay on those funds is much steeper than what it has to pay out on deposits, and the added expense will reduce net income.

Citi analyst downgraded First Republic on Wednesday, saying in a note to clients that there's still a large level of uncertainty in outcomes and expected losses beyond the next year.

"The high cost of its borrowings relative to its earning assets puts it under-water and likely generates losses until it can right-size the balance sheet," he wrote.

First Republic's stock closed at \$5.68 Wednesday, a fraction of the price it was a year ago when it traded for roughly \$170. The stock is down 95% so far this year.

First Republic reported first-quarter results Monday that showed it had \$173.5 billion in deposits before Silicon Valley Bank failed on March 9. On April 21, it had deposits of \$102.7 billion, which included the \$30 billion the big banks deposited. Deposits have been relatively stable since last March, the bank said.

Elsewhere, shares of other regional banks were mostly higher. PacWest Bancorp's stock rose more than 7% after the bank reported that its total deposits increased. PacWest said Tuesday that total deposits rose \$1.1 billion to \$28.2 billion as of March 31 compared with its most recent update of \$27.1 billion as of March 20. Deposit balances further increased approximately \$700 million as of Monday.

Brazilian dictionary adds Pelé as adjective, synonym of best

By MAURICIO SAVARESE AP Sports Writer

SAO PAULO (AP) — A Brazilian dictionary has added "Pelé" as an adjective to use when describing someone who is "exceptional, incomparable, unique."

The announcement by the Michaelis dictionary on Wednesday is part of a campaign that gathered more than 125,000 signatures to honor the late soccer great's impact beyond his sport.

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The three-time World Cup champion died in December at age 82 after a fight against colon cancer.

The dictionary entry reads: "The one that is extraordinary, or who because of his quality, value or superiority cannot be matched to anything or anyone, just like Pelé; nickname of Edson Arantes do Nascimento (1940-2022), considered the best athlete of all time; exceptional, incomparable, unique. Examples: He is the Pelé of basketball, she is the Pelé of tennis, she is the Pelé of Brazilian theater, he is the Pelé of medicine."

The Pelé Foundation, Santos FC — where he played most of his career — and many Brazilians celebrated the decision by the publishers of one of the country's most popular dictionaries.

"The expression that was already used to refer to the best at something is already eternal in the pages of the dictionary," Pelé's social media channels said after the announcement. "We made history together and put the name of the King of Soccer into the Portuguese language. Pelé means 'THE BEST'."

Pelé spent nearly two decades enchanting fans and dazzling opponents as the game's most prolific scorer with Brazilian club Santos and the Brazil national team. In the conversation about soccer's greatest, only the late Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo are mentioned alongside.

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

Black parents seek schools affirming their history amid bans

By CHEYANNE MUMPHREY AP Education Writer

DECATUR, Ga. (AP) — Every decision Assata Salim makes for her young son is important. Amid a spike in mass killings, questions of safety were at the top of her mind when choosing a school. Next on her checklist was the school's culture.

Salim and her 6-year-old, Cho'Zen Waters, are Black. In Georgia, where they live, public schools are prohibited from teaching divisive concepts, including the idea that one race is better than another or that states are fundamentally racist.

To Salim, the new rules mean public schools might not affirm Cho'Zen's African roots, or accurately portray the United States' history of racism. "I never want to put his education in the hands of someone that is trying to erase history or recreate narratives," she said.

Instead, Cho'Zen attends a private, Afrocentric school — joining kids across the country whose families have embraced schools that affirm their Black heritage, in a country where instruction about race is increasingly under attack. At Cho'Zen's school, Kilombo Academic & Cultural Institute in an Atlanta suburb, photos of Black historical figures hang on the walls. And every single student and teacher identifies as Black or biracial.

In recent years, conservative politicians around the country have championed bans on books or instruction that touch on race and inclusion. Books were banned in more than 5,000 schools in 32 states from June 2021 to June 2022, according to free-speech nonprofit PEN America. Instructional bans have been enacted in at least 16 states since 2021.

Even when a topic isn't explicitly banned, some teachers say the debates have caused them to back away from controversy. The situation has caused more Black families to leave public schools, opting for homeschooling or private schools that embrace their identity and culture. Public school enrollment of Black students between pre-K and 12th grade has declined each year measured in federal data since 2007.

"I think it is important to teach those harsh moments in slavery and segregation, but tell the whole story," said Salimah Hasan, a teaching assistant at Kilombo Institute. "Things have changed drastically, but there are still people in this world who hate Black people, who think we are still beneath them, and younger children today don't understand that. But that is why it is important to talk about it."

Kilombo goes further, focusing on the students' rich heritage, from both Africa and Black America. "I want him to know his existence doesn't start with slavery," Salim said of her son.

The private, K-8 school occupies the basement of Hillside Presbyterian Church just outside Decatur, an affluent, predominantly white suburb. Families pay tuition on a sliding scale, supplemented by donations.

Classrooms feature maps of Africa and brown paper figures wearing dashikis, a garment worn mostly in

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West Africa. In one class, the students learn how sound travels by playing African drums.

The 18-year-old school has 53 students, up a third since the start of the pandemic. Initially, more parents chose the school because it returned to in-person learning earlier than nearby public schools. Lately, the enrollment growth has reflected parents' increasing urgency to find a school that won't shy away from Black history.

"This country is signaling to us that we have no place here," said Mary Hooks, whose daughter attends Kilombo. "It also raises a smoke signal for people to come home to the places where we can be nourished."

Notably, the student body includes multiple children of public school teachers.

Simone Sills, a middle school science teacher at Atlanta Public Schools, chose the school for her daughter in part because of its smaller size, along with factors such as safety and curriculum. Plus, she said, she was looking for a school where "all students can feel affirmed in who they are."

Before Psalm Barreto, 10, enrolled in Kilombo, her family was living in Washington, D.C. She said she was one of a few Black children in her school.

"I felt uncomfortable in public school because it was just me and another boy in my class, and we stood out," she said.

Racial differences are evident to babies as young as three months, research has shown, and racial biases show up in preschoolers. Kilombo provides a space for kids to talk about their race.

"I'm Blackity, Black, Black!" said Robyn Jean, 9, while spinning in a circle. Her sister, Amelya, 11, said their parents taught them about their Haitian American heritage — knowledge she thinks all children should have. "I want them to know who they are and where they come from, like we do," Amelya said. "But in some schools, they can't."

Last year, Georgia passed a bill known as the Protect Students First Act, which prohibits schools from promoting and teaching divisive concepts about race. Elsewhere, bills that restrict or prohibit teaching about race- and gender-related topics passed in states including Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. In other states, such as Arkansas, restrictions have come via executive orders.

Proponents say the restrictions aim to eliminate classroom discussions that make students feel shame or guilt about their race and the history and actions of their ancestors.

The bills have had a chilling effect. One-quarter of K-12 teachers in the U.S. say these laws have influenced their choice of curriculum or instructional practices, according to a report by the RAND Corporation, a global policy think tank.

At Kilombo, daily instruction includes conversations about race and culture. Founder Aminata Umoja uses a Black puppet named Swahili to welcome her students, ask how they are doing and start the day with morals and values rooted in their African heritage.

The puppet might say: "Let's talk about iwa pele. What does that mean?" and then one of the children will tell us that it means good character," said Umoja, who teaches kindergarteners through second graders.

Teaching life skills and values, Umoja said, has its roots in freedom schools started during the Civil Rights Movement, in response to the inferior "sharecropper's education" Black Americans were receiving in the South.

The school follows academic standards from Common Core for math and language arts and uses Georgia's social studies standards to measure student success. But the curriculum is culturally relevant. It centers Black people, featuring many figures excluded in traditional public schools, said Tashiya Umoja, the school's co-director and math teacher.

"We are giving children of color the same curriculum that white children are getting. They get to hear about their heroes, she-roes and forefathers," she said.

The curriculum also focuses on the children's African heritage. A math lesson, for instance, might feature hieroglyphic numerals. Social studies courses discuss events in Africa or on other continents alongside U.S. history.

When she was in public school, Psalm said she only learned about mainstream Black figures in history, such as Barack Obama, Martin Luther King Jr. and Harriet Tubman. Now, she said, she is learning about civil rights activist Ella Baker, journalist Ida B. Wells and pilot Bessie Coleman.

Said Psalm: "Honestly, I feel bad for any kids who don't know about Black history. It's part of who we are."

Data journalist Sharon Lurye contributed reporting from New Orleans.

The Associated Press education team receives support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Supreme Court seems to favor woman who got \$0 in condo sale

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court seemed likely Wednesday to give a 94-year-old Minneapolis woman another day in court to try to recoup some money after the county kept the entire \$40,000 when it sold her condominium over a small unpaid tax bill.

The justices seemed in broad agreement with arguments by the lawyer for Geraldine Tyler that Hennepin County, Minnesota, violated the Constitution's prohibition on the taking of private property without "just compensation."

"At bottom, she's saying the county took her property and made a profit on her surplus equity. It belongs to her," Justice Clarence Thomas said.

Tyler, who now lives in an apartment building for older people, owed \$2,300 in unpaid taxes, plus interest and penalties, when the county took title to the one-bedroom apartment in 2015. The county said she did nothing to hold onto her one-time residence. The apartment sold the next year.

Justices Elena Kagan and Neil Gorsuch said the county's position appeared to be that it could seize million-dollar properties over tiny tax bills. "So a \$5 property tax, a million dollar property, good to go?" Gorsuch asked Neal Katyal, representing the county.

Katyal essentially said yes, noting that the Supreme Court in 1956 upheld New York City's decision to keep the \$7,000 it received for selling a property it seized over a \$65 water bill.

In this case, Katyal said, Tyler made clear she wanted nothing to do with the condo in the five years she owed back taxes.

"Why in the world would it be that Tyler walked away from her home? The reason, we think, is that there was no equity in the home," Katyal said. The justices could leave it to a lower court to sort out the money details.

Katyal tried to appeal to the conservative justices in particular by references to history dating back to 1272 and the invocation of the court's recent rulings overturning *Roe v. Wade* and expanding gun rights.

History and tradition figured prominently in those blockbuster rulings, but Katyal didn't appear to attract any conservative support in the court's final arguments until its new term begins in October.

"And I just don't understand what on earth any of that history has to do with this case," Gorsuch said.

Christina Martin, representing Tyler, went back even earlier than did Katyal to make a basic point about fairness, saying that the Magna Carta in 1215 spelled out "that the government could not take more than it was owed."

Minnesota is among roughly a dozen states and the District of Columbia that allow local jurisdictions to keep the excess money, according to the Pacific Legal Foundation, a not-for-profit public interest law firm focused on property rights that represented Tyler at the Supreme Court.

At least 8,950 homes were sold because of unpaid taxes and the former owners received little or nothing in those states between 2014 and 2021, according to Pacific Legal.

Other states are: Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and South Dakota, the group said.

There has been no explanation about why Tyler stopped paying her property taxes when she moved from the condo, where she had lived since 1999. She moved for "health and safety" reasons, Pacific Legal said.

The county said in court papers that Tyler could have sold the property and kept whatever was left after paying off the mortgage and taxes, refinanced her mortgage to pay the tax bill or signed up for a

tax payment plan.

Instead, she did nothing for five years, the county said, until after authorities followed state law and sold the condo. The county wrote: Tyler believes "the Constitution required the State to serve as her real estate agent, sell the property on her behalf, and write a check for the difference between the tax debt and the fair market value."

Lower courts sided with the county before the justices agreed to step in.

Minnesota and a handful of states and government associations are backing the county, warning that a Supreme Court ruling could tie the hands of local governments that rely on property taxes.

But the bulk of support in court filings is with Tyler, including AARP, business groups, real estate interests and other people who have gone through experiences similar to hers.

A Massachusetts man described his ongoing fight with authorities over a tax bill of \$900 on a property he says is worth at least \$330,000 in a beach town on Cape Cod Bay. In a filing from New York, property tax attorney David Wilkes and legal services groups wrote that New York's rules "excessively takes far more than what is due to the government and go well beyond an appropriate deterrent to those homeowners who would ignore a tax delinquency."

The Biden administration told the court that Tyler's claim that her property was taken without just compensation, in violation of the Fifth Amendment, is the stronger of her arguments.

Tyler also is raising a claim that Minnesota's law violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on excessive fines. But if the court rules in her favor based on the Fifth Amendment, it wouldn't have to decide the other issue.

Not until 2019 did the Supreme Court rule that the "excessive fines" clause applied to the states as well as the federal government.

A decision in Tyler v. Hennepin County, Minnesota, 22-166, is expected by late June.

We Build The Wall founder sentenced to 4 years in prison

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The co-founder of a fundraising group linked to Steve Bannon that promised to help Donald Trump construct a wall along the southern U.S. border was sentenced to four years and three months in prison on Wednesday for stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars from donors.

Brian Kolfage, a decorated Air Force veteran who lost both of his legs and an arm in the Iraq War, previously pleaded guilty for his role in siphoning donations from the We Build the Wall campaign.

A co-defendant, financier Andrew Badolato, was also sentenced to three years for aiding the effort. He had also pleaded guilty. A third man involved in siphoning funds from the wall project, Colorado businessman Tim Shea, won't be sentenced until June.

Kolfage and Badolato were also ordered to pay \$25 million in restitution to the victims.

Absent from the case was Bannon, Trump's former top political adviser. He was initially arrested aboard a luxury yacht and faced federal fraud charges along with the other men, but Trump pardoned him during his final hours in office.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg brought new, state charges against Bannon last year. He is awaiting trial. Presidential pardons apply only to federal crimes, not state offenses. Bannon has called the case "nonsense."

Kolfage, Badolato and Shea were not pardoned by Trump, leaving them to face the prospect of years in prison.

Prosecutors said the scheme was hatched by Kolfage, who served as the public face of the effort as it raised more than \$25 million from donors across the country. He repeatedly assured the public he would "not take a penny" from the campaign.

As money poured into the cause, Kolfage and his partner, Shea, turned to Bannon and Badolato for help creating a nonprofit, We Build the Wall, Inc. The four defendants then took steps to funnel the money to themselves for personal gain, prosecutors said.

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An attorney for Badolato, Kelly Kramer, described Bannon as “a leader and primary beneficiary” of the scheme, noting that his own client received a much smaller payout than the pardoned associate.

While prosecutors acknowledged that Badolato profited the least of the four defendants, they described him as the “connective tissue” between Kolfage and Bannon, helping to direct the kickbacks between the two parties.

Kolfage, 41, told Judge Analisa Torres that he was “remorseful, disgusted, humiliated.” He said he had not anticipated the scale of donations that would flood in for the cause and soon found himself drifting away from his initial goal, which he said was “putting a spotlight on the country’s broken immigration system.”

“I made a promise not to personally benefit and I broke that promise,” he said.

Torres said the defendants not only cheated their donors but contributed to a “chilling effect on civic participation” by tarnishing the reputation of political fundraising.

“The fraudsters behind We Build The Wall injured the body politic,” she said.

Kolfage received more than \$350,000 in donor funds, which he spent on personal expenses that included boat payments, a luxury SUV and cosmetic surgery, prosecutors said in a court filing.

Bannon was accused of taking more than \$1 million through a separate nonprofit, then secretly paying some of it back to Kolfage.

Badolato, 58, and Shea also stole hundreds of thousands from fundraisers as well, prosecutors said.

As part of a plea deal, Kolfage and Badolato agreed not to challenge a sentence within the agreed-upon range: between four to five years for Kolfage and 3 1/2 to four years for Badolato.

An attorney for Kolfage previously argued that his client should avoid prison time given his lack of criminal history and severe disability.

Some sections of a border barrier were built by We Build the Wall on private lands, but the nonprofit is now defunct.

Elizabeth Holmes delays going to prison with another appeal

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Disgraced Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes has avoided starting her more than 11-year prison sentence on Thursday by deploying the same legal maneuver that enabled her co-conspirator in a blood-testing hoax to remain free for an additional month.

Holmes’ lawyers on Wednesday informed U.S. District Judge Edward Davila that she won’t be reporting to prison as scheduled because she had filed an appeal of a decision that he issued earlier this month ordering her to begin her sentence on April 27.

The appeal, filed with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals late Tuesday, automatically delays her reporting date because she has been free on bail since a jury convicted her on four counts of fraud and conspiracy in January 2022. The verdict followed a four-month trial revolving around her downfall from a rising Silicon Valley star to an alleged scam artist chasing fame and fortune while fleecing investors and endangering the health of patients relying on Theranos’ flawed blood tests.

The tactic deployed by Holmes mirrored a move made last month by her former lover and subordinate, Ramesh “Sunny” Balwani, to avoid a prison reporting date of March 16. After the Ninth Circuit rejected his appeal three weeks later, Davila set a new reporting date of April 20.

Balwani, 57, is now serving a nearly 13-year prison sentence in a federal prison located in San Pedro, California after being convicted of 12 counts of fraud and conspiracy.

Although they had separate trials, Holmes and Balwani were accused of essentially the same crimes centered on a ruse touting Theranos’ blood-testing system as a revolutionary breakthrough in health care. The claims helped the company become a Silicon Valley sensation that raised nearly \$1 billion from investors.

Holmes, 38, last appeared in court about a month ago, shortly after giving birth to her second child in an attempt to persuade Davila to allow her to remain free while she appeals her conviction. Davila, who scolded Holmes for betraying Silicon Valley’s history of innovation when he sentenced her in November, subsequently rejected that request.

Davila had recommended Holmes be incarcerated at a low-security prison camp in Bryan, Texas, but it has not been publicly disclosed if that is where she has been assigned to serve her sentence.

The news of Holmes' latest legal maneuver emerged the same day that it was announced one of the federal prosecutors who helped convict her is leaving the U.S. Attorney's office in San Jose, California. Jeffrey Schenk, who also helped convict Balwani in that trial, will specialize in defending people accused of white-collar crimes as a partner for the law firm Jones Day in Silicon Valley.

Ukraine's Zelenskyy upbeat after talk with China's Xi

By DAVID RISING and JOE MCDONALD Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he and Chinese leader Xi Jinping had a "long and meaningful" phone call Wednesday, their first known contact since Russia invaded Ukraine over a year ago, and Beijing appointed an envoy to pursue a "political settlement."

The hour-long call came two months after Beijing, which has long been aligned with Russia, said it wanted to act as a mediator and a month after Xi visited Moscow. The call also coincided with indications that Ukraine is readying its forces for a spring counteroffensive.

Zelenskyy was upbeat about the conversation, which offered him the chance to insert his views into what had been a bilateral dialogue between Moscow and Beijing. Russian President Vladimir Putin is eager to keep Xi close as a counterweight to the United States, which has sided with Ukraine.

"I believe that this call, as well as the appointment of Ukraine's ambassador to China, will give a powerful impetus to the development of our bilateral relations," Zelenskyy said on Facebook.

An official readout on his website called the conversation "productive" and said it leads the way toward "possible interaction with the aim of establishing a just and sustainable peace for Ukraine."

Zelenskyy emphasized the need to regain all Ukrainian lands and stated, "There can be no peace at the expense of territorial compromises." In an indirect reference to U.S. reports that China had considered supplying weapons to Russia for its war, Zelenskyy's office said he asked countries to refrain from doing so because "any support -- even partial -- is converted by Russia into the continuation of its aggression, into its further rejection of peace." China has said it won't supply weapons to either side in the conflict.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said Beijing's "core stance is to facilitate talks for peace," announcing that an envoy — a former ambassador to Russia — would visit Ukraine to seek a "political settlement."

The ministry's statement struck a positive tone, giving a nod to Kyiv's insistence that its territory cannot be broken up by Russia's annexations and making clear that Beijing values its longstanding ties with Ukraine.

"Mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is the political foundation of China-Ukraine relations," the statement said. "China's readiness to develop relations with Ukraine is consistent and clear-cut. No matter how the international situation evolves, China will work with Ukraine to advance mutually beneficial cooperation."

Analysts expressed skepticism about the prospects for peace.

The call balances China's dialogue with Russia by showing it is "recognizing Ukraine's leadership and indicating Ukraine is an important entity," said political science professor Kimberly Marten of Barnard College at Columbia University in New York.

But, she added in an interview with The Associated Press, unless undisclosed details reveal otherwise, "it's a non-starter. It's pro-Russian. I would not guess that this holds a lot of significance for ending the war."

She noted the Chinese statement didn't call for Russia to leave occupied areas or brand Russia as an aggressor, and refers to the situation as "a crisis, rather than a war."

Elizabeth Wishnick, of the U.S.-based think tank CNA and Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asian Institute, noted in an email to AP that the Chinese statement about the call contains "no mention of a Russian troop withdrawal, which, to my mind, makes this a less than serious initiative and unlikely to contribute in any major way to ending the war, which will likely be decided on the battlefield."

In Moscow, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova commended China's approach, praising Beijing's "readiness to strive to establish a (peace) negotiations process," while slamming Kyiv's

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"rejection of any sound initiatives aimed at a settlement."

The White House described it as a positive development, allowing Xi to hear Ukraine's view of the "illegal, unprovoked invasion."

"We think that's a good thing," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

Talks between the two leaders had been anticipated for weeks, after China produced a 12-point proposal to end the fighting, although it did not contain details.

Russia and Ukraine are far apart in their terms for peace. The Kremlin wants Kyiv to acknowledge Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia, which most nations have denounced as illegal. Ukraine has rejected the demands and ruled out any talks with Russia until its troops pull back from all occupied territories.

Zelenskyy said in an interview with the AP last month that he hadn't spoken with Xi since the war began and invited him to visit Ukraine.

China has announced it was keen to act as mediator in the war that has reenergized NATO. Xi's position reinforces China's claim that it's neutral in the war, despite blocking U.N. efforts to condemn the Kremlin's invasion.

While Zelenskyy has moved his country closer to NATO and persuaded alliance members to send Ukraine sophisticated weapons to help defeat Russia, Beijing has echoed the Kremlin line in accusing the West of provoking the conflict and "fanning the flames" by arming Kyiv.

When China called in February for a cease-fire and peace talks between Ukraine and Russia, Zelenskyy cautiously welcomed Beijing's involvement but said success would depend on actions, not words.

Putin warmly welcomed Xi to the Kremlin, in what was seen as a powerful message to Western leaders that their efforts to isolate Moscow over the fighting in Ukraine have fallen short.

Also on Wednesday, Zelenskyy used the 37th anniversary of the world's worst nuclear disaster at Chernobyl to repeat his warnings about the threat of a new atomic catastrophe during his country's war with Russia.

Zelenskyy drew a parallel between the Chernobyl accident on April 26, 1986, to Moscow's brief seizure of that plant and its radiation-contaminated exclusion zone following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"Last year, the occupier not only seized the (Chernobyl) nuclear power plant, but also endangered the entire world again," Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post in English.

In other developments Wednesday:

—Ukrainian and Russian officials announced the latest prisoner exchange, saying 44 Ukrainian and 40 Russian POWs were released this week. The head of the Ukrainian presidential office, Andriy Yermak, said on Telegram that the Ukrainians included soldiers, sailors, border and national guards, and two civilians.

—The head of the southeastern Zaporizhzhia Regional Military Administration, Yuriy Malashko, said Russia struck 19 civilian areas with 53 artillery attacks, six rocket attacks, seven drone attacks and one airstrike overnight.

—At least two civilians were killed and 13 others were wounded in Ukraine since Tuesday, the presidential office said.

—An Italian journalist in Ukraine, Corrado Zunino, was injured and his interpreter Bogdan Bitik killed in the southern city of Kherson. Zunino, a correspondent for La Repubblica daily, told the newspaper he suspected Russian snipers hit him after passing through Ukrainian-manned checkpoints.

McDonald reported from Beijing. Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, and Andrew Katell in New York contributed.

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

3 teens arrested after Colorado driver killed by thrown rock

GOLDEN, Colo. (AP) — Three teenagers have been arrested on first-degree murder charges in connection to the death of a 20-year-old Colorado woman, who was struck by a rock that investigators say was thrown through her windshield while she was driving.

Alexa Bartell, of Arvada, was talking on the phone with a friend when she was hit by the rock northwest of Denver on April 19. After the call went silent, the friend tracked Bartell's location with a phone app and found the woman dead in her car, which had crashed into a field, said Karlyn Tilley, a spokesperson for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office.

Bartell was killed by the rock and not the crash, according to Tilley.

Joseph Koenig, Nicholas "Mitch" Karol-Chik and Zachary Kwak, all 18, were arrested at their homes in Arvada, Colorado, overnight Tuesday and Wednesday. Online jail records did not indicate if they have attorneys who can speak on their behalf.

Investigators believe the attack is linked to several other similar incidents in which rocks between 4 and 6 inches (10 and 15 centimeters) in diameter and weighing 3 to 5 pounds (1.4 to 2.7 kilograms) were thrown at cars in the area the night of Bartell's death.

The attacks started just after 10 p.m. and involved at least seven vehicles. In addition to Bartell's death, two drivers suffered minor injuries.

It's unclear which of the teens was driving during the attacks, but all three are suspected of throwing rocks at vehicles.

Investigators say mobile device forensics and tips from the public helped lead them to the suspects, who could face additional charges.

World powers pull their citizens as violence roils Sudan

By SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Leila Oulkebous' research for her doctorate from one of France's top universities was going well when the explosions started.

Oulkebous had stopped work on Ethiopia because of that country's civil war and her research in Sudan was going to be more straightforward, she thought.

Then Sudan exploded into violence. The chiefs of the country's army and its rival Rapid Support Forces rose to power after a popular uprising in 2019 prompted them to remove longtime autocratic ruler Omar al-Bashir. They started fighting this month amid tensions over a new plan to re-introduce civilian rule.

The bombing shook the house where Oulkebous was living in the capital, Khartoum, investigating the effects of dams on rivers that cross borders.

"We were hiding all the time under the bed," she said Wednesday at Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport as hundreds of people arrived in harrowing evacuations. World powers were rescuing people from Sudan on planes and warships in operations prompted by the eruption of the fighting that sent thousands of foreigners and many more Sudanese people fleeing for safety.

A French frigate carrying hundreds of evacuees docked Wednesday morning in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia as part of broader efforts involving several warships, in addition to airlifts.

French military spokesman Col. Pierre Gaudilliere said France evacuated more than 500 civilians from 40 nations by plane over the weekend after securing the airbase north of Khartoum Saturday, using its airbase in neighbouring Djibouti for the airlift.

Gaudilliere said the French military was the first to land, and organized the flow of its own and other nations' planes.

"You still had airstrikes as the operation was going on, crossfire in the streets, artillery fire, so it was and still is very intense fighting," Gaudilliere said. The French military had personnel on the ground to assess the situation during the operation, he said.

Several nations, including Japan, thanked France for rescuing their citizens.

Some other countries quickly joined evacuation efforts.

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Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said Wednesday three nationals have been evacuated with help from Germany, and his country is now working with Turkey to help evacuate two other citizens.

Greek national Christos Dedes, who was in Sudan for work, said he and his colleagues managed to leave their Khartoum hotel Tuesday via the Portuguese embassy, which sent a car to drive them to the airbase where there were Italian, French and German soldiers.

"We just happened to leave with the Italians, on a transport plane," he said on Greek TV channel Mega Wednesday, after he arrived in Athens.

From their Khartoum hotel, he said, they could see that "every day the battles were heavier. Both (sides) were using heavy weapons." He said they would hear explosions at night, and see bodies in the street.

More than 1,000 people from 58 countries were to arrive Wednesday by ship to the port of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, including many on the French warship Lorraine.

Saudi Arabia on Saturday organized the first evacuation convoy by land, via cars and buses bringing people to Port Sudan, where a navy ship took them to Jeddah.

The French foreign affairs ministry said a flight carrying 184 French nationals and their families and about 20 other nationals returned from Djibouti and landed in Paris Wednesday morning.

Among them was Oulkebous, a Moroccan PhD student at Bordeaux Montaigne University.

"The feeling I had since the first day of fighting was I felt really paralysed, I didn't know what to do, I didn't know how to get out, the airport was closed, we could not leave," she said, describing "the explosions, the smoke, so really, I didn't have the time to fully realise what was going on."

A Royal Air Maroc plane arrived at Casablanca's Mohammed V airport on Wednesday, carrying 136 Moroccan nationals evacuated from Sudan.

In contrast with France and some other nations, the U.S. and Britain didn't evacuate non-diplomats at first.

The British government has come under growing criticism for its failure to airlift civilians. On Tuesday, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak defended the government's approach, saying diplomats had been evacuated first "because they were being targeted."

The British government since said that 301 people have been evacuated on four U.K. flights from Sudan over the past 24 hours, and four more are scheduled Wednesday. Britain intends to keep running the flights for as long as possible. In addition, "rapid deployment teams" of U.K. officials are in Port Sudan assessing potential for a seaborne evacuation.

The Foreign Office says U.K. passport-holders are eligible, "and priority is given to family groups with children and/or the elderly or individuals with medical conditions."

Officials have said there are as many as 4,000 British citizens in Sudan, 2,000 of whom have registered for potential evacuation.

The White House said Monday the U.S. is helping from afar as thousands of Americans left behind in Sudan seek to escape fighting in the east African nation, after the U.S. Embassy evacuated all of its diplomatic personnel over the weekend and shut down.

The Biden administration is considering several options for assisting private American citizens in getting out of Sudan.

Two U.S. officials said one option being considered would be to send U.S. Navy vessels in, or en route to, the Red Sea to dock at Port Sudan and take Americans to Jeddah or another location. The officials said this would depend on the security situation and whether it was deemed safe for the ships to dock.

A U.S. official said the military has developed other options for getting Americans, including using an airfield that some European countries have used to fly out citizens. To date, it has not been told to do that, the official said.

The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to discuss sensitive matters.

Karel Janicek in Prague, Jill Lawless in London, Elena Becatoros in Athens, Tarik El-Barakah in Rabat, Matt Lee and Tara Copp in Washington contributed to the story.

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Medal of Honor recipient's remains ID'd 73 years after Korea

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The remains of a U.S. Army corporal killed during the Korean War and posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor have been identified 73 years after he was declared missing, President Joe Biden said Wednesday during a welcome ceremony at the White House for South Korea's president.

Luther H. Story of Buena Vista, Georgia, was last seen on Sept. 1, 1950 - wounded and fighting off North Korean attacks so his fellow soldiers could get to safety. U.S. officials said that Story "fearlessly stood in the middle of the road, throwing grenades" into a truck as his squad escaped.

"When last seen, he was firing every weapon available and fighting off another hostile assault," U.S. officials said.

He wasn't seen alive again, though his remains weren't found, and he wasn't taken as a prisoner. In 1951, Gen. Omar Bradley presented Story's father the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military honor, at a Pentagon ceremony in 1951. On Jan. 16, 1954, the corporal was declared unrecoverable — his remains still missing.

Then, in June 2021, 652 people killed in the Korean War were disinterred from the the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. In that process, scientists were able to identify Story using DNA, dental and anthropological analysis. His remains had been recovered near Sangde-po, South Korea.

"Today, we can return him to his family, and to his rest," Biden said from the South Lawn where he praised Story's bravery. "Because we never forget our troops."

On Tuesday evening, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and his wife, Kim Keon Hee, made an evening stop to the Korean War Memorial with Biden and first lady Jill Biden. They participated in a wreath-laying ceremony next to the memorial's Pool of Remembrance. While they were there, the leaders met with Story's living relative, his niece Judy Wade and her spouse Joseph Wade.

Both nations continue to work to identify all missing soldiers.

No one is driving this taxi. What possibly could go wrong?

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — I won't forget the first time I took a ride in a car without anyone sitting in the driver's seat.

It happened one night last September when a Chevy Bolt named Peaches picked me up outside a San Francisco bar. Our ensuing half-hour ride together produced, at first, a titillating display of technology's promise. Then an unexpected twist made me worry that the encounter had turned into a mistake I would regret.

Peaches and I were getting along great for most of our time together as the car deftly navigated through hilly San Francisco streets similar to those that Steve McQueen careened through during a famous chase scene in the 1968 film "Bullitt." Unlike McQueen, Peaches never exceeded 30 miles per hour (48 kilometers per hour) because of restrictions imposed by state regulators on a ride-hailing service operated by Cruise, a General Motors subsidiary, since it won approval to transport fare-paying passengers last June.

It was all going so smoothly that I was starting to buy into the vision of Cruise and Waymo, a self-driving car pioneer spun off from a Google project that is also trying launch a ride-hailing service in San Francisco.

The theory fueling the ambition is that driverless cars will be safer than vehicles operated by frequently distracted, occasionally intoxicated humans — and, in the case of robotaxis, be less expensive to ride in than automobiles that require a human behind the wheel.

The concept does sound good. And the technology to pull it off is advancing steadily, just like other artificial intelligence applications such as chatbots that can write college-level essays and produce impressive pieces of art within seconds.

But when something goes awry, as it did near the end of my encounter with Peaches, that sense of astonishment and delight can evaporate very quickly.

DESTINATION: UNCERTAIN

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As we approached my designated drop-off location near the Fairmont Hotel — where presidents have stayed and Tony Bennett first sang “I Left My Heart In San Francisco” — Peaches advised me to gather my belongings and prepare to get out of the car.

While I grabbed my bag as the robotaxi appeared to be pulling over to the curb, Peaches suddenly sped up and — inexplicably — started driving away in the opposite direction.

After seeing the dashboard display screen indicating I was now somehow an estimated 20 minutes away from my destination, I grew frantic. I asked Peaches what was going on. There was no response, so I used a feature on Cruise’s ride-hailing center that enables a passenger to contact a human in a call center.

The Cruise representative confirmed that Peaches had gotten confused, apologized and assured me the robotaxi had been reprogrammed to get me to my original destination.

Indeed, the car did seem to be headed back to where I requested. Then it started doing the old same thing again, making me wonder whether Peaches might like me a little too much to let me go. Feeling more like I was stuck on Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride at Disneyland than riding in an artificially intelligent car, I contacted Cruise’s call center. Peaches, they told me apologetically, seemed to be malfunctioning.

Suddenly, Peaches came to a halt right in the middle of the street. I bolted from the Bolt, marooned several blocks away from my destination shortly before 10 p.m.

Fortunately, I know my way around San Francisco, so I walked the rest of the way to where I needed to be. But what if this had happened to tourists? Would they know where to go? How would they feel being forced to walk around a strange neighborhood in a big city late at night?

MAYBE DON’T STOP HERE

When I discussed the incident during an interview for a recent story about robotaxis, Cruise CEO Kyle Vogt apologized and assured me the problem had been fixed.

Sure enough, I was picked up and dropped off at my designated destinations in rides I took with another Associated Press reporter in two different Cruise robotaxis — one named Cherry and the other Hollanda-ise — on a mid-February night in San Francisco. But Cherry chose to drop us off at a bus stop just as a bus was trying to pull up to pick up a bunch of passengers. They weren’t happy about their ride on mass transit being delayed; they began jeering us.

My experience apparently isn’t isolated. The San Francisco County Transportation Authority has raised a red flag about robotaxis making unexpected, prolonged stops in the middle of streets and identified other problems that threaten to cause headaches and potentially imperil public safety.

Earlier this month, Vogt revealed that Cruise had voluntarily recalled the software in 300 robotaxis after one of them rear-ended a bus in San Francisco and declared the problem that led to the fender-bender had been fixed. Not long after that, five Waymo vehicles blocked traffic after becoming disoriented in San Francisco’s famously foggy conditions and coming to a stop.

And my experience with Peaches? Whenever I reminisce about that ride, I am also reminded of another trip to New York that I took two days after the robotaxi couldn’t deliver me to my destination.

After I landed at JFK Airport, I hopped into an old-fashioned taxi driven by a fellow named Talid. I remember having a pleasant conversation with Talid, who chuckled as I recounted what happened with Peaches. At the end of the ride, Talid dropped me off at Grand Central Terminal, as I had requested. Then his cab drove off — with, of course, a human still behind the wheel.

Michael Liedtke covers technology for The Associated Press. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/liedtkeSFC>

Review: Judy Blume goes Hollywood in ‘Are You There God?..’

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

There is not a cynical molecule in the big-screen adaptation of “Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret,” a sweet, playful and reverential adaptation of Judy Blume’s famed coming-of-age novel about the everyday problems of an 11-year-old girl.

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Perhaps it shouldn't have been earthshattering for someone to write frankly about puberty for an audience who was going through it, but it was and, in many ways, still is.

In one scene, Margaret (Abby Ryder Fortson), who has not yet started menstruating, decides to get ready for it by buying some pads at the convenience store with her friend Janie (Amari Alexis Price). The two girls watch in horror as the older woman at the checkout counter leaves for a break right as they approach and is replaced with a shaggy-haired teenage boy. In a panic, Margaret throws a pack of mints on the boxes. Writer-director Kelly Fremon Craig ("The Edge of Seventeen") relishes in the excruciating awkwardness, letting time slow down as the conveyor belt screeches along.

It's one of many lovely moments that evoke the strangeness of being 11. Not only are you dealing with the normal pains of everyday existence and coming to terms with the fact that your parents just might be people too — you and all of your classmates are morphing at wildly different and confusing rates. In one of the too-few shots illustrating Margaret's literal point of view, the camera moves in to gaze at the armpit hair of a local boy, Moose.

The craziest thing about "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," which opens in theaters Friday, is that it took Blume this long — over 50 years — to let Hollywood do it, at least officially. There have been decades of films and series and books that have been created in the image of Blume and her perfectly imperfect young heroine, who may technically be stuck in 1970, but whose problems — faith, crushes, friends, bodies, parents — are evergreen.

This familiarity is both a strength and a weakness of the film. There is a wistful comfort to watching this turbulent year in Margaret's life during which her parents, Barbara (Rachel McAdams) and Herb (Benny Safdie), move the family away from New York City, her friends and her beloved grandmother Sylvia (Kathy Bates, resplendent in sparkly caftans and semi-matching sets) — and into the unknown: suburban New Jersey. But there's also a feeling that we've seen a lot of it before.

One of the things that made the book so meaningful to so many was its unabashed honesty. It didn't sound filtered or self-conscious. It was just the truth of a young girl's weird, complicated, naive, cruel, kind and fanciful mind and sometimes it was even unflattering and (gasp) unlikable. It was like peering into another person's diary that was sort of safe because it's not your own, but sort of dangerous and transgressive because you realize you've also had thoughts like this. In the end it was comforting to know that you weren't alone.

The film handles Margaret's confessionals in a haphazard way. Sometimes she talks out loud to herself in her bedroom, sometimes it's in voiceover. But a lot of that stream of consciousness goes unsaid. And what is said sometimes comes up short.

Without a history with the book, though, there is still plenty to enjoy — from the pleasant presence of Fortson to a truly great performance from McAdams, who elevates every scene she's in.

Blume, also the subject of a terrific documentary "Judy Blume Forever" (now streaming on Prime Video), called "Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret" a nostalgia piece, meant for women who grew up reading her. Perhaps she knows that for whatever reason, there is a distance between the viewer and Margaret in the film, which is the opposite of the experience of the book. At times, it even feels a little sanitized and rushed — checking off boxes, even dramatic climaxes — to get to the end of the year.

Eleven is a kind of magic age for moviegoing, or at least it was for me. It was the year I started seeing movies in theaters with friends, not parents. When movies are something you've chosen — or believe you've chosen — to see, they hit a little differently. Some stay with you always, regardless of quality. I had the good fortune to turn 11 in late 1994, when, for whatever reason, Hollywood seemed to be making movies just for me.

This is, of course, not true at all. At the very least, most of the movies were simply not NOT for me, and as a white, hetero girl in suburbia, it was not a niche target to hit. But there were a slew of not insignificant films made with a tween girl in mind: "Little Women," "Clueless," "A Little Princess" and "Now & Then," the most direct descendant of Blume and Margaret, and, on television, "My So-Called Life."

Movies like these barely exist anymore, and certainly not in theaters. Tween girls would do well to seek

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"Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret" out. It has all the makings of a classic for the next generation.

"Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret," a Lionsgate release in theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for "thematic material involving sexual education and some suggestive material." Running time: 105 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four.

MPA Definition of PG-13: Parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Follow AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr on Twitter: www.twitter.com/lbahr.

Freddie Mercury's eclectic collection of 'clutter' for sale

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — He was the king of Queen and his crown could be yours — for the right price.

Freddie Mercury's extensive collection of costumes, fine art, and even handwritten working lyrics for "We Are the Champions" and "Killer Queen" will be auctioned in September.

Queen's frontman had said he wanted to live a Victorian life surrounded by "exquisite clutter," and he left it all to his close friend, Mary Austin, when he died, at 45, of AIDS-related pneumonia in 1991.

Austin, who has kept most of it the way Mercury left it in his home in the upscale Kensington neighborhood of London, said she had reached the "difficult decision" that it was time to sell it all, Sotheby's said.

Artwork includes prints or works on paper by Picasso and Matisse. "Type of Beauty," a painting by 19th century French artist James Tissot of his Irish muse and lover Kathleen Newton, is estimated to sell for 400,000 to 600,000 pounds (\$500,000-750,000) — the highest of any item listed in press materials.

Lyrics for the band's show-closing anthemic number "We are the Champions" that Mercury wrote on nine pages, including stationery from British Midland Airways, are estimated to fetch 200,000 to 300,000 pounds (\$250,000-375,000).

Mercury donned the rhinestone-studded crown and cloaked his bare back in the red fake fur cloak after singing "Champions" at Knebworth House north of London during Queen's final concert together in 1986. He marched triumphantly back onto stage and raised the crown with his right hand as the crowd began singing along to "God Save the Queen" piped out through the sound system.

The crown is said to be based on St. Edward's Crown, which will be featured in King Charles III's coronation next month. Unlike the authentic centerpiece of Britain's Crown Jewels, the headpiece worn by Mercury is only estimated to sell for 60,000 to 80,000 pounds (\$75,000-100,000).

A Mercury fan with a smaller budget might consider his silver moustache comb from Tiffany & Co. It's expected to set you back 400 to 600 pounds (\$500—750).

Some of the roughly 1,500 items going up for sale will be exhibited in New York, Los Angeles and Hong Kong during a tour in June.

They will be auctioned over three days in September. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to charity.

Bud Light fumbles, but experts say inclusive ads will stay

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Bud Light may have fumbled its attempt to broaden its customer base by partnering with a transgender influencer. But experts say inclusive marketing is simply good business — and it's here to stay.

"A few years from now, we will look back on this 'controversy' with the same embarrassment that we feel when we look back at 'controversies' from the past surrounding things like interracial couples in advertising," said Sarah Reynolds, the chief marketing officer for the human resources platform HiBob, who identifies as queer.

On April 1, transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney posted a video of herself cracking open a Bud Light on her Instagram page. She showed off a can with her face on it that Bud Light sent her — one of many

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corporate freebies she gets and shares with her millions of followers.

But unlike the dress from Rent the Runway or the trip to Denmark from skincare brand Ole Henriksen, Bud Light's partnership with Mulvaney angered some customers and hurt sales, while the brand's lack of support for the influencer infuriated the very people it was trying to reach.

Three days after Mulvaney's post, Kid Rock posted a video of himself shooting cases of Bud Light. Shares of Bud Light's parent, AB InBev, temporarily plunged and the company issued a terse statement in response to the controversy.

This week, Anheuser-Busch — AB InBev's U.S. subsidiary — confirmed that Alissa Heinerscheid, its vice president of marketing, and her boss, Daniel Blake, are taking a leave of absence. The company won't say when they will return or whether they're being paid.

For some, the partnership went too far at a time when transgender issues — including gender-affirming health care and participation in sports — are a divisive topic in state legislatures.

"Whether the issue is trans people or anything else, the majority of consumers are pretty vocal about the fact they don't want brands lecturing them or stuffing politics or social issues down their throat," said John Frigo, the head of digital marketing for Best Price Nutrition. "If you sell beer, just make beer and leave it at that."

But others — including Heinerscheid herself — say reaching out to younger and more diverse consumers is crucial. According to a 2021 Gallup poll, 21% of people in Generation Z identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, compared to 3% of Baby Boomers. Gallup has also found that younger consumers are the most likely to want brands to promote diversity and take a stand on social issues.

"I had a really clear job to do when I took over Bud Light. And it was, this brand is in decline. It's been in decline for a very long time. And if we do not attract young drinkers to come and drink this brand, there will be no future for Bud Light," Heinerscheid said last month in an episode of Apple's "Make Yourself at Home" podcast.

Bud Light and Mulvaney declined requests to talk to The Associated Press for this story.

Bud Light has long been America's best-selling beer. But its U.S. sales are down 2% so far this year, part of a long-running decline as younger consumers flock to sparkling seltzers and other drinks, according to Bump Williams Consulting. Those sales declines accelerated rapidly in April. The week ending April 15, Bud Light's sales dropped 17% compared to the same week a year ago. Meanwhile, rivals Miller Lite and Coors Lite both saw their sales jump more than 17%.

Marketing experts say it's possible Bud Light's experience will cause other brands to rethink using transgender people in their advertising. Joanna Schwartz, a professor at Georgia College and State University who teaches a course on LGBTQ+ marketing, said companies will still want to reach transgender consumers and their supporters, but might shift to social media and more targeted ads.

"They're walking an extremely fine line. They want to appeal to everyone, but that includes people who don't like each other," Schwartz said of Bud Light.

Still, Schwartz said, there are plenty of brands that have successfully featured transgender or non-binary people in their marketing. In 2016, Secret deodorant ran an ad featuring a transgender woman in a bathroom stall, debating whether to walk out and face other women at the sink. Pantene shampoo has run ads and short films supporting transgender people in 2021 as part of its Hair Has No Gender project. And Coca-Cola's 2018 Super Bowl ad featured young people using different pronouns to describe themselves.

Thomas Murphy, an associate professor of branding at Clark University, said he tells brands that want to be inclusive to run ads with real people who can talk about the company's efforts.

"They can have employees who say, 'I love Bud Light. I have worked here for 20 years, there are inclusive programs and I came here because I wanted a company that would embrace me,'" he said. "Who couldn't see and hear that person and say, 'What a great company?'"

Instead, Bud Light wound up alienating even transgender customers because it didn't support Mulvaney after the boycott calls began, Schwartz said. Anheuser-Busch CEO Brendan Whitworth issued a statement on April 14 but it didn't specifically mention the controversy.

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"We never intended to be part of a discussion that divides people," Whitworth said.

By comparison, Nike — which also faced some boycott threats after sending workout clothes to Mulvaney — supported the transgender community in an Instagram post, encouraging followers to be kind and inclusive. Nike didn't respond to requests for comment.

Manveer Mann, an associate professor of marketing at the Feliciano School of Business at Montclair State University, said Bud Light should have anticipated the backlash and had a plan in place to handle it.

Nike learned that lesson in 2018, when it featured football player Colin Kaepernick — who had protested police brutality by kneeling during the national anthem — in its ads. Mann said Nike briefly faced boycott threats, but it stood by Kaepernick and its sales quickly recovered.

Mann thinks Bud Light's sales will ultimately recover, too. But in the meantime, it's alienating everyone, she said.

"The communication from Bud Light is not clear. Is this coming from your value set or are these things just trending?" Mann said. "You have to know what your values are and what are the values of the customers you are trying to reach."

From Sanders to Sauce, NFL draft fashion evolves over time

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Deion Sanders became the NFL draft's first fashion icon by accessorizing a black and white track suit with loads of sparkling gold jewelry and dark shades when he took the call from the Atlanta Falcons before they selected him fifth overall in 1989.

As memorable as Sanders' draft swag remains, wearing a track suit on draft night or the jean shorts Brett Favre wore would be scoffed at today with top players gathering for a televised event that has become as much runway show as sporting event.

While top prospects in this year's draft like quarterbacks Bryce Young, C.J. Stroud and Anthony Richardson and defensive lineman Will Anderson Jr. prepare their fits for the big night, we look back at some of the most memorable draft night ensembles since the splash by Sanders.

Ray Lewis chose a flashy Versace look when the Ravens took him in the first round in 1996. The linebacker rocked a silk shirt, belt and sunglasses by the designer with white slacks as he helped usher in the move from casual draft night clothes to more sophisticated looks.

Over the next decade, most players made the transition to suits, but they were more going to church with your grandma looks than high fashion statement pieces.

Then came 2016 and running back Ezekiel Elliott's bold choice of a crop top tuxedo shirt when the Dallas Cowboys took him fourth overall. He stunned on the red carpet when he unbuttoned his suit jacket to reveal his bare, toned abs, raising the bar for draft night fashion surprises.

The following season, safety Jamal Adams shined in a white windowpane patterned, double-breasted suit when he was taken at No. 6 by the Jets.

Quarterback Lamar Jackson took a page out of Lewis's book by going designer head to toe when he was taken by the Ravens in 2018. He complemented the rich green Gucci suit with a white UFO printed shirt by the designer, a signature Gucci belt and went Gucci down to the shoes with a brown pair adorned with the brand's bee logo and signature red and green details.

When defensive end Nick Bosa was selected second overall by San Francisco in 2019, he delighted Ohio State fans everywhere by opening his gray suit jacket to reveal a lining covered with images of mascot Brutus Buckeye.

After a virtual 2020 draft because of the pandemic, players raised the bar again with some stunning looks when the event returned in person in 2021.

The star of that draft and arguably the best dressed player in the event's history was Heisman Trophy winner Devonta Smith, who was taken 10th by the Eagles. The slim receiver wowed in a impeccably fitted bespoke suit by Brian Alexander.

The blue shawl collar jacket with a tied waist was adorned with gold pins of his initials on one lapel. He

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also added his initials on blue velvet loafers that pulled the look together.

Last year's draft was a banner year for fashion.

Perhaps the biggest style star of the night was Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner, taken at No. 4 by the Jets. He brought the best jewelry since Sanders to stun — and blind — anyone in his path. He accessorized his sky-blue suit with two thick Cuban link chains adorned with two huge diamond-soaked pendants celebrating his Sauce nickname.

One was a hot sauce bottle and the second was the word "Sauce" in all caps that had diamonds set to look like they were dripping from the letters.

Offensive lineman Ikem Ekwonu had the most creative look when he was taken sixth by the Panthers last season. He rocked a white suit with green accents made to look like the Nigerian flag as a nod to his heritage.

The last stunner of the 2022 draft was receiver Garrett Wilson, who took draft style to the next level with his eye-catching ensemble when the Jets took him with the 10th pick. Wilson wore a gray and white double-breasted, color block suit that he set off with \$1,690 Prada lug sole combat boots and three strands of chunky pearls.

From Sanders to Sauce, the NFL draft has been a style showcase for more than three decades. Thursday we'll find out which of these upcoming NFL stars has top-tier fashion sense to match their special talent.

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

2024 race won't be like 2020. That's good and bad for Biden

By WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No honking geese are likely to interrupt his speeches this time.

As President Joe Biden seeks a second term, he won't have to depend on glitchy Zoom connections, or deliver remarks in largely vacant theaters with attendees in chairs ringed by circle markings on the floor to ensure enough social distancing. His advisers won't scrutinize the 1918 flu outbreak for clues on pandemic-era voting.

With the country increasingly back to normal, Biden can fly to crowded campaign events on Air Force One, make policy announcements from the Rose Garden and shape not only the presidential race but global affairs with his actions.

Just as the 2024 campaign will be vastly different from the coronavirus-marred 2020 edition, Biden won't be able to hold on to the White House by running in the same way he won it three years ago. Virtual events offered from a basement rec room he converted into a studio in his Delaware home and avoiding travel for months at a stretch won't cut it this time.

A return to more typical campaign rhythms presents both opportunities and potential challenges for Biden.

Lockdowns made the 2020 campaign far less grueling, so much so that Donald Trump frequently accused Biden, now 80, of ignoring voters. But avoiding crowds also often made it harder for Biden to ignite supporter enthusiasm. He also averted the kind of spontaneous interactions with the public and the press that led to memorable gaffes in the past, but sometimes created endearing moments.

"If any presidential candidate benefited from the virtual mold of 2020, it was Joe," said Democratic strategist Nicole Brener-Schmitz. "But he's shown over the course of his presidency that he's perfectly capable of the travel and the rallies and the events and the town halls. There shouldn't be any concern about there being a 'normal' campaign and the American public going, 'Oh no.'"

Biden advisers say that among the many societal changes wrought by the pandemic, campaigning changed too. Voters adapted to using different platforms to engage with politics and candidates. Biden's team also notes that the president is the only successful national candidate so far in that new environment, and his advisers aim to build on the lessons of 2020, finding novel ways to deliver the most effective message to individual voters.

Biden himself likely won't miss campaigning online. When giving one of his first virtual addresses in

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March 2020, he lost his place in his prepared remarks and gestured awkwardly to staff standing out of frame. Two months later, as Biden virtually addressed members of the Asian American and Pacific Islanders Victory Fund, a more jarring off-camera distraction came from the Canada geese clustered around a pond in his back yard.

"If you hear them honking away, they're cheering," Biden joked.

Though the production quality improved over time, Biden's online presentations were often overshadowed by what Trump was doing — so much so that Biden's campaign resorted to creating a short-lived podcast. They also studied balloting during the 1918 midterm elections, when turnout dropped amid the flu pandemic.

Even after he resumed in-person campaigning with social distance circles, drive-in rallies and other small events in battleground states, Biden almost always returned each night to sleep at home in Delaware. This time, it would be Air Force One carrying him back to the White House or Delaware.

One downside of 2020, aides say, was Biden's inability to meet people on the campaign trail. Even with Secret Service protection, brief one-on-one time will now be possible — but that also increases the likelihood that Biden will say something he regrets.

In December 2019 a man in Iowa suggested Biden was too old and also raised questions about the then-candidate's son's overseas business ties. Biden called him a "damned liar" and suggesting a pushup contest — reminiscent of times his verbal blunders as vice president made some in the Obama White House blanch.

Biden was also at his weakest during in-person campaigning early in 2020. Despite joining the race as the perceived frontrunner, he lost the first three Democratic primary contests and only clinched his party's nomination after the pandemic took hold.

He offered a mainstream agenda that appealed to Democratic moderates early, but moved to the left as the general election approached — promising sharp federal spending increases on health care, social programs and the environment while boosting domestic manufacturing and the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

With Democrats controlling Congress through last year, Biden fulfilled many such promises. But he's shifted to the center more recently, which some progressives say will alienate the Democratic base.

"Unless he's hermetically sealed and doesn't want to talk to anybody under 30, he's going to be asked, 'Gee, you said the last time you ran for president dot, dot, dot. What's up with that?'" said Norman Solomon, national director of RootsAction.org, a progressive group that championed the "Don't Run Joe" campaign attempting to convince Biden to forgo seeking a second term.

Pandemic aside, the 2020 campaign was unique in unfolding as a summer of protests decrying police brutality and racial injustice erupted after George Floyd's killing. Biden was unable to get Congress to approve major criminal justice reform, leaving some Black activists disillusioned that more wasn't done on that issue or to protect voting rights nationwide.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll last week found the president's 58% approval rating among Black adults was down sharply from the roughly 9 in 10 who approved of Biden over his first months in office.

Only about half of Democrats polled said they wanted Biden to run again, but 81% said they'd at least probably support him in next year's general election. Among Black adults, though, the enthusiasm lagged: Only 41% said they want him to run and 55% said they were likely to support him in the general election.

Questions about the 80-year-old Biden's physical stamina, meanwhile, will be more pronounced this time, as Biden would be 86 at the conclusion of a second term.

Aides concede that the travel and rigors of a normal presidential campaign are brutal, but not compared to the demands of the presidency, with its jam-packed intercontinental trips and middle-of-the-night wake-up calls to respond to global crises. And for much of the next year, Biden will be most intently focused on his day job, with his advisers arguing that being an effective president makes the case better than anything else for another four years in the White House.

Democrats also note that, unlike 2020, when lockdowns saw the party and its top outside supporters

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abandon knocking on doors and other in-person activities to mobilize their base voters, such efforts will be back this time.

Lee Saunders, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which has 1.4 million members nationwide, said voter mobilization efforts have run continuously since the pandemic eased. Those helped Democrats to a surprisingly strong midterm election showing, are already under way for 2024, he said, and are focusing on the legislative achievements of Biden and his party.

"We just have to talk about those victories. All of us collectively: labor and allies, and the White House, and our friends on the Hill and our governors and our state reps and our mayors," Saunders said.

Biden's team has concentrated most on running again against Trump. Even a rematch wouldn't feel like 2020, though, since Biden will be the incumbent. That worries Solomon, who said the Biden White House has been "exuding complacency" by insisting that Biden can top Trump again in 2024.

"These refrains coming out of the White House, 'Oh, he beat Trump before, he can beat him again,'" Solomon said. "This time, Biden is gonna represent the status quo as an incumbent. That's a fundamental problem."

But Brener-Schmitz noted that the incumbent always has an advantage, being able to tap into Democrats' nationwide supporter base and infrastructure, allowing the president to concentrate on connecting personally with voters.

She added: "This is where Joe Biden thrives."

Associated Press Writer Hannah Fingerhut contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to show that Biden's exchange with 2020 heckler came in Iowa, not New Hampshire.

Bale to Wrexham? Hollywood owners make pitch to retired star

WREXHAM, Wales (AP) — Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney are making an audacious — and very public — bid to entice Gareth Bale out of retirement to play a season at Wrexham.

Bale, a Wales great who retired after the World Cup at age 33, offered his congratulations to Wrexham's celebrity owners following the team's promotion to the fourth tier of English soccer at the weekend.

In a response to Bale's video message, McElhenney wrote on Twitter: "Hey Gareth Bale let's play golf, where I totally won't spend 4 hours trying to convince you to un-retire for one last magical season."

Bale, a passionate golfer in his spare time, replied "Depends what course..." He also tagged in the R&A, which organizes the British Open from its base at the home of golf in St. Andrews, Scotland.

Reynolds weighed in on Wednesday, tweeting: "I will shave a professional-grade golf course into Rob's back if you'll give Wrexham a season."

The pursuit of Bale looks a long shot, given he is three months into retirement, has never played at such a low level in soccer and would likely command a massive salary. He also was born in Cardiff in south Wales, whereas Wrexham is based in the north of the principality.

McElhenney and Reynolds are dreamers, though. Just look at what they are doing at Wrexham, a club on its knees before the 2021 takeover of the A-listers.

The owners were in tears after Wrexham beat Boreham Wood 3-1 on Saturday to clinch automatic promotion from the National League.

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

Singapore executes man for helping buy 2 pounds of cannabis

By ZEN SOO Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — Singapore on Wednesday executed a man accused of coordinating a cannabis delivery, despite pleas for clemency from his family and protests from activists that he was convicted on weak evidence.

Tangaraju Suppiah, 46, was sentenced to death in 2018 for abetting the trafficking of 1 kilogram (2.2 pounds) of cannabis. Under Singapore laws, trafficking more than 500 grams of cannabis may result in the death penalty.

Tangaraju was hanged Wednesday morning and his family was given the death certificate, according to a tweet from activist Kirsten Han of the Transformative Justice Collective, which advocates for abolishing the death penalty in Singapore.

Although Tangaraju was not caught with the cannabis, prosecutors said phone numbers traced him as the person responsible for coordinating the delivery of the drugs. Tangaraju had maintained that he was not the one communicating with the others connected to the case.

At a United Nations Human Rights briefing Tuesday, spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani called on the Singapore government to adopt a "formal moratorium" on executions for drug-related offenses.

"Imposing the death penalty for drug offences is incompatible with international norms and standards," said Shamdasani, who added that increasing evidence shows the death penalty is ineffective as a deterrent.

Singapore authorities say there is a deterrent effect, citing studies that traffickers carry amounts below the threshold that would bring a death penalty.

The island-state's imposition of the death penalty for drugs is in contrast with its neighbors. In Thailand, cannabis has essentially been legalized, and Malaysia has ended the mandatory death penalty for serious crimes.

Singapore executed 11 people last year for drug offenses. One case that spurred international concern involved a Malaysian man whose lawyers said he was mentally disabled.

The Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network condemned Tangaraju's execution as "reprehensible."

"The continued use of the death penalty by the Singaporean government is an act of flagrant disregard for international human rights norms and casts aspersion on the legitimacy of Singapore's criminal justice system," the statement said.

Relatives and activists had sent letters to Singapore's President Halimah Yacob to plead for clemency. In a video posted by the Transformative Justice Collective, Tangaraju's niece and nephew appealed to the public to raise concerns to the government over Tangaraju's impending execution.

An application filed by Tangaraju on Monday for a stay of execution was dismissed without a hearing Tuesday.

"Singapore claims it affords people on death row 'due process', but in reality fair trial violations in capital punishment cases are the norm: Defendants are being left without legal representation when faced with imminent execution, as lawyers who take such cases are intimidated and harassed," said Maya Foa, director of non-profit human rights organization Reprieve.

Critics say Singapore's death penalty has mostly snared low-level mules and done little to stop drug traffickers and organized syndicates. But Singapore's government says that all those executed have been accorded full due process under the law and that the death penalty is necessary to protect its citizens.

British billionaire Richard Branson, who is outspoken against the death penalty, had also called for a halt of the execution in a blog post, saying that "Singapore may be about to kill an innocent man."

Singapore authorities criticized Branson's allegations, stating that he had shown disrespect for the Singaporean judicial system as evidence had shown that Tangaraju was guilty.

Taliban kill mastermind of suicide bombing at Kabul airport

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, MATTHEW LEE, AAMER MADHANI and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — A ground assault by the Taliban killed the Islamic State militant who spearheaded the August 2021 suicide bombing at the Kabul airport that left 13 U.S. troops and about 170 Afghans dead during the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, U.S. officials said.

Initially, neither the U.S. nor apparently the Taliban were aware that the mastermind was dead. He was killed during a series of battles early this month in southern Afghanistan between the Taliban and the Islamic State group's affiliate, according to several officials.

But in the past few days, U.S. intelligence confirmed "with high confidence" that the Islamic State leader had been killed, a senior administration official said Tuesday. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

Late Tuesday night, Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder issued a statement confirming that the plotter had been killed by the Taliban. "The United States was not involved in this operation," Ryder said.

Over the weekend, the U.S. military began to inform the parents of the 11 Marines, the sailor and the soldier who were killed in the blast at Abbey Gate, and they shared the information in a private group messaging chat. The father of one of the Marines said the death of his son's killer brings little comfort.

"Whatever happens, it's not going to bring Taylor back and I understand that," Darin Hoover, the father of Staff Sgt. Darin Taylor Hoover, said in a phone call with The Associated Press. "About the only thing his mom and I can do now is be an advocate for him. All we want is the truth. And we're not getting it. That's the frustrating part."

Hoover said he and his son's mother, Kelly Henson, have spent the past year and a half grieving his death and praying for accountability from the Biden administration for the handling of the withdrawal.

He added that the Marines provided only limited information to him and did not identify the Islamic State leader or give the circumstances of his death. U.S. officials declined to provide many details because of sensitivities in the intelligence gathering.

The administration official said it was their "moral responsibility" to let the victims' families know that the "mastermind" and "person most responsible for the airport attack" had been taken off the battlefield. The official added that intelligence officials determined that the leader had "remained a key plotter and overseer" for the group.

Several officials said the U.S. played no role in the killing and did not coordinate at all with the Taliban. The administration official called the Taliban action "significant" and said the U.S. only learned of the operation through its "over the horizon" intelligence capabilities.

Hoover is among a group of 12 Gold Star families that have kept in touch since the bombing, supporting one another and sharing information through the messaging chat. The chat was created by Cheryl Rex, the mother of Marine Lance Cpl. Dylan Merola, who died in the blast.

Rex, who has been a vocal critic of the Biden administration's handling of the withdrawal, told the AP it was through the chat group that they were informed late Monday about the killing as they awaited official confirmation from U.S. military officials.

The fallen service members were among those screening the thousands of Afghans frantically trying on Aug. 26, 2021, to get onto one of the crowded flights out of the country after the brutal Taliban takeover. The scene of desperation quickly turned into one of horror when a suicide bomber attacked. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility.

The blast at Abbey Gate came hours after Western officials warned of a major attack, urging people to leave the airport. But that advice went largely unheeded by Afghans desperate to escape the country in the last few days of an American-led evacuation before the U.S. officially ended its 20-year presence.

The Afghanistan-based offshoot of the Islamic State — called Islamic State-Khorasan — has up to 4,000 members and is the Taliban's most bitter enemy and top military threat. The group has continued to carry out attacks in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover, especially against the country's minority groups.

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After the Trump administration reached a 2020 deal with the Taliban to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan and the Biden administration followed through on that agreement in 2021, there had been hope in Washington that the Taliban's desire for international recognition and assistance for the country's impoverished population might moderate their behavior.

But relations between the U.S. and the Taliban have deteriorated further since they imposed draconian new measures banning girls from school and excluding women from working for international aid and health agencies.

However, a line of communication still exists between the two sides, led by the U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan, Tom West. West's contacts are primarily with Taliban officials in Kabul and not with the group's more ideological wing based in Kandahar.

The U.S. decision to withdraw all troops fueled the swift collapse of the Afghan government and military, which the U.S. had supported for nearly two decades, and the return to power of the Taliban. In the aftermath, President Joe Biden directed that a broad review examine "every aspect of this from top to bottom" and it was released earlier this month.

The Biden administration in the publicly released version of the review largely laid blame on President Donald Trump for the deadly and chaotic 2021 withdrawal, which was punctuated by the suicide bombing at Abbey Gate.

News of the killing came on the same day that Biden formally announced he will seek a second term as president, offering a reminder of one of the most difficult chapters of his presidency. The disastrous drawdown was, at the time, the biggest crisis that the relatively new administration had faced. It left sharp questions about Biden and his team's competence and experience — the twin pillars central to his campaign for the White House.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday the U.S. has "made clear to the Taliban that it is their responsibility to ensure that they give no safe haven to terrorists," whether from al-Qaida or the Islamic State.

"We have made good on the President's pledge to establish an over-the-horizon capacity to monitor potential terrorist threats, not only from in Afghanistan but elsewhere around the world where that threat has metastasized as we have done in Somalia and Syria," Kirby said in a statement.

Yet Rex said the administration has not done enough to take responsibility for what happened at Abbey Gate.

"I feel like this is the administration trying to get the pressure off of them for accountability by saying that we're holding ISIS accountable for our kids' death," Rex said.

Associated Press writers Tara Copp and Ellen Knickmeyer contributed to this report.

Today in History: April 27, deadly Alabama tornadoes

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, April 27, the 117th day of 2023. There are 248 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 27, 1994, former President Richard M. Nixon was remembered at an outdoor funeral service attended by all five of his successors at the Nixon presidential library in Yorba Linda, California.

On this date:

In 1521, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan was killed by natives in the Philippines.

In 1810, Ludwig van Beethoven wrote one of his most famous piano compositions, the Bagatelle in A-minor.

In 1813, the Battle of York took place in Upper Canada during the War of 1812 as a U.S. force defeated the British garrison in present-day Toronto before withdrawing.

In 1865, the steamer Sultana, carrying freed Union prisoners of war, exploded on the Mississippi River

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near Memphis, Tennessee; death toll estimates vary from 1,500 to 2,000.

In 1941, German forces occupied Athens during World War II.

In 1973, acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray resigned after it was revealed that he'd destroyed files removed from the safe of Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt.

In 1978, 51 construction workers plunged to their deaths when a scaffold inside a cooling tower at the Pleasants Power Station site in West Virginia fell 168 feet to the ground.

In 1992, Russia and 12 other former Soviet republics won entry into the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

In 2010, former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega was extradited from the United States to France, where he was later convicted of laundering drug money and received a seven-year sentence.

In 2011, powerful and deadly tornadoes raked the South and Midwest; more than 60 tornadoes crossed parts of Alabama, leaving about 250 people dead and thousands of others injured in the state.

In 2015, rioters plunged part of Baltimore into chaos, torching a pharmacy, setting police cars ablaze and throwing bricks at officers hours after thousands attended a funeral for Freddie Gray, a Black man who died from a severe spinal injury he'd suffered in police custody; the Baltimore Orioles' home game against the Chicago White Sox was postponed because of safety concerns.

In 2019, a gunman opened fire inside a synagogue near San Diego as worshippers celebrated the last day of Passover, killing a woman and wounding the rabbi and two others. (John Earnest, a white supremacist, has been sentenced to both federal and state life prison terms.)

Ten years ago: North Korea announced that Kenneth Bae, an American missionary detained for nearly six months, was being tried in the Supreme Court on charges of plotting to overthrow the government (Bae was later sentenced to 15 years of hard labor; he was released in November 2014 along with another American, Matthew Miller). Center-left leader Enrico Letta forged a new Italian government in a coalition with former Premier Silvio Berlusconi's conservatives.

Five years ago: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made history by crossing over to South Korea to meet with President Moon Jae-in; it was the first time a member of the Kim dynasty had set foot on southern soil since the end of the Korean War in 1953. The Republican-led House Intelligence Committee released a lengthy report concluding that it found no evidence that Donald Trump's campaign colluded with Russia in the 2016 presidential campaign. The members of the Swedish pop supergroup ABBA announced that they had recorded new material for the first time in 35 years, with two new songs.

One year ago: Russia cut off natural gas to NATO members Poland and Bulgaria and threatened to do the same to other countries, using its most essential export as an attempt to punish and divide the West for its united support of Ukraine. The United States and Russia carried out an unexpected prisoner exchange in a time of high tensions over the war in Ukraine, trading a Marine veteran jailed by Moscow for a convicted Russian drug trafficker serving a long prison sentence in America. World leaders and the U.S. political and foreign policy elite gathered at Washington's National Cathedral to pay their respects to the late Madeleine Albright, America's first female secretary of state.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Anouk Aimee (ah-NOOK' EM'-ee) is 91. Rock musician Jim Keltner is 81. Rock singer Kate Pierson (The B-52's) is 75. R&B singer Herb Murrell (The Stylistics) is 74. Actor Douglas Sheehan is 74. Rock musician Ace Frehley is 72. West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice is 72. Pop singer Sheena Easton is 64. Actor James Le Gros (groh) is 61. Rock musician Rob Squires (Big Head Todd and the Monsters) is 58. Singer Mica (MEE'-shah) Paris is 54. Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., is 54. Actor David Lascher is 51. Actor Maura West is 51. Actor Sally Hawkins is 47. Rock singer Jim James (My Morning Jacket) is 45. Rock musician Patrick Hallahan (My Morning Jacket) is 45. Rock singer-musician Travis Meeks (Days of the New) is 44. Country musician John Osborne (Brothers Osborne) is 41. Actor Francis Capra is 40. Actor Ari Graynor is 40. Rock singer-musician Patrick Stump (Fall Out Boy) is 39. Actor Sheila Vand is 38. Actor Jenna Coleman is 37. Actor William Moseley is 36. Singer Lizzo is 35. Actor Emily Rios is 34. Singer Allison Iraheta is 31.