

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Saturday, May 6

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Groton City-Wide Rummage Day, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Sunday, May 7

High School Baseball vs. W.I.N./Elkton at Elkton, noon.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

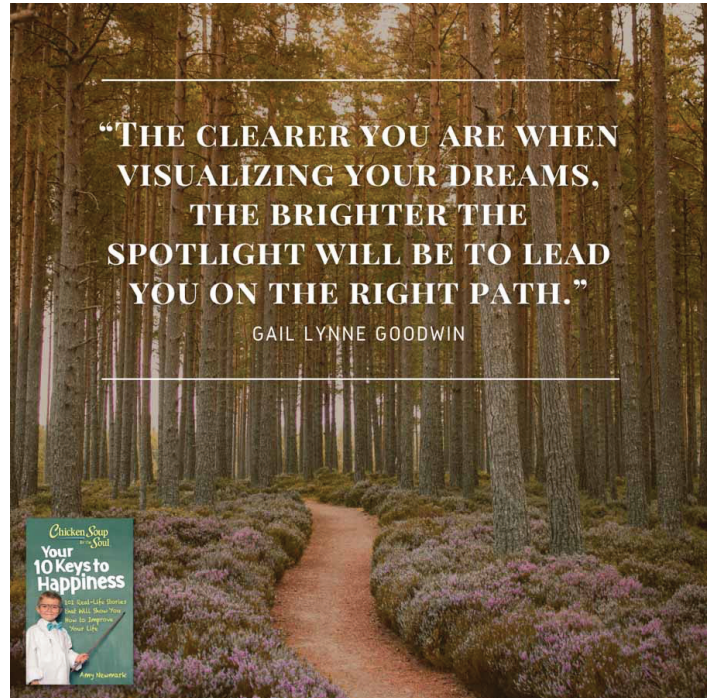
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

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

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



“THE CLEARER YOU ARE WHEN
VISUALIZING YOUR DREAMS,
THE BRIGHTER THE
SPOTLIGHT WILL BE TO LEAD
YOU ON THE RIGHT PATH.”

GAIL LYNNE GOODWIN

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m. (Graduation reception); worship with communion at Zion, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion (Senior Milestones & Faith Forever Scholarship Awards), 9 a.m.; Sunday school, 10:15 a.m.; Choir, 7 p.m.

Monday, May 8

School Breakfast: Cook's choice for rest of year.

School Lunch: Zita pasta, bake corn.

Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, garlic toast, Acini Depepi fruit salad.

The Pantry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Girls Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

Track Meet at Webster Relays. Varsity starts at 10 a.m.; junior high at 3 p.m.

FFA Banquet, 6:30 p.m.

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m..

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

available over the counter during a meeting next week. The medication, Opill, would be the first of its kind to become available without a prescription if the FDA moves forward with drugmaker Perrigo's request.

- The U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay of execution for Richard Glossip, a man on death row in Oklahoma who was convicted in 1997 in a murder-for-hire killing. Glossip, who says he is innocent, was scheduled to be executed on May 18.

- About 516,000 at-home COVID-19 tests have been recalled due to concerns about bacteria contamination in the testing solution, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced. The SD Biosensor Pilot COVID-19 At-Home Tests were distributed by Roche Diagnostics and made available to consumers through CVS Health and Amazon.

- Prosecutors investigating former President Donald Trump's handling of classified documents issued new subpoenas and have reportedly obtained confidential cooperation from a Mar-a-Lago insider who provided pictures of a storage room where documents may have been held.

- Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley has suggested he is uncertain whether the allegations he and fellow Republican Rep. James Comer of Kentucky made about a "criminal scheme" involving then-Vice President Joe Biden are true. Grassley and Comer called upon the FBI earlier this week to provide information related to their allegations.

- Ford is recalling nearly 232,000 of its 2004 to 2006 Ranger vehicles due to a potential issue with replacement airbags. The replacements, introduced under an earlier recall, can have problems inflating and present injury risks in a crash, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

- More than four million TurboTax customers will soon receive a check worth \$29 to \$85 as part of a settlement reached last year related to the company's marketing strategies. All recipients paid TurboTax during the 2016, 2017 or 2018 tax years despite qualifying for free tax services.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Chechen leader and Putin ally Ramzan Kadyrov said he would send troops to fight in Bakhmut if the Wagner Group pulls out of the Ukrainian city.

What to Watch in the Days Ahead

- King Charles III's coronation takes place on Saturday at Westminster Abbey in London, formalizing the monarch's new title after ascending to the throne last September. The King will be crowned alongside Queen Consort Camilla. The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m. GMT/6 a.m. ET. Prince Archie, the first child of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, celebrates his 4th birthday on the same day.

- The Eta Aquarid meteor shower peaks between midnight and dawn on Saturday. NASA expects a "significant outburst" this year, with 120-160 meteors expected per hour in the Southern Hemisphere.

- Pussy Riot, a Russian feminist protest and performance art group, will be honored with the 2023 Woody Guthrie Prize in Tulsa. Following the ceremony, the group will perform a multimedia show marking their U.S. debut.

- The 149th running of the Kentucky Derby will take place Saturday evening at Churchill Downs in Lexington. Excitement for this year's race has dimmed after four horses died while racing or training at Churchill Downs over the last week, a series of tragedies the track is investigating.

- Anti-monarchy protesters have been arrested in London ahead of King Charles' coronation, according to campaign group Republic. Harry Stratton, director of Republic, told Newsweek that "six of our main organizers have been arrested."

- Former Marine Daniel Penny released a statement over the death of Jordan Neely in Manhattan on Monday afternoon. Attorneys for Penny said he "never intended to harm Mr. Neely and could not have foreseen his untimely death."

- The FDA will decide whether to make a birth control pill

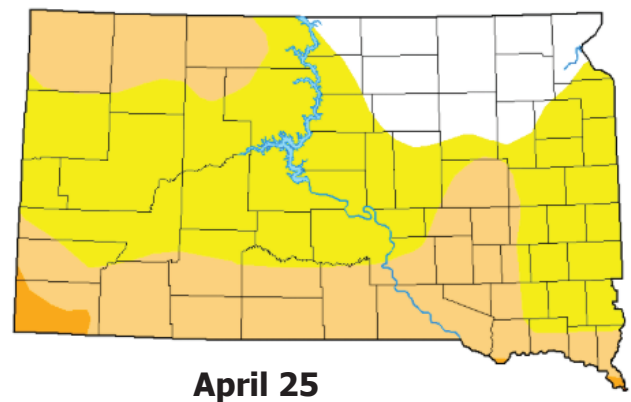
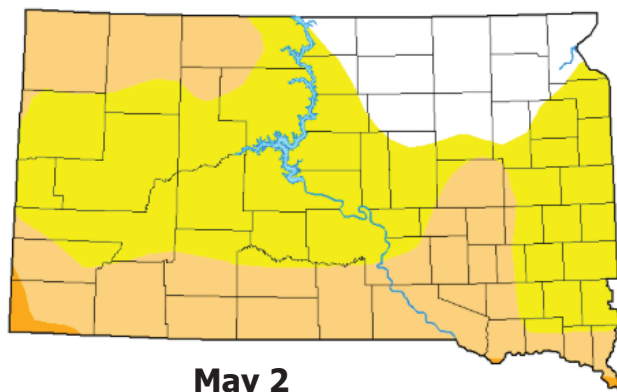
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Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Rainfall of 1.5 to 2 inches, or more, during the past week along with SPI at various time scales and soil moisture supported a 1 to 2-category improvement to southeastern Colorado. For similar reasons, a 1-category improvement was made to southwestern Kansas. However, 12-month SPI still supports D3-D4 across much of western and central KS. Wichita has only received 0.72 inches of precipitation from March 1 to April 30, which made it the 2nd driest March and April on record and the driest since 1936. Based on the NDMC's short and long-term objective blends and CPC's leaky bucket soil moisture, D1-D3 expansion was warranted for northern Kansas and south-central Nebraska. D3 was increased westward across west-central Nebraska following a very dry April. North Platte tied the driest April on record. Degradations were also made to southeastern Kansas based on 60 to 120-day SPEI. Abnormal dryness (D0) coverage increased in northeastern Wyoming based on recent dryness and declining soil moisture. A small improvement was made to the southwest corner of South Dakota, based on a local report that was consistent with VegDri and objective drought blends.

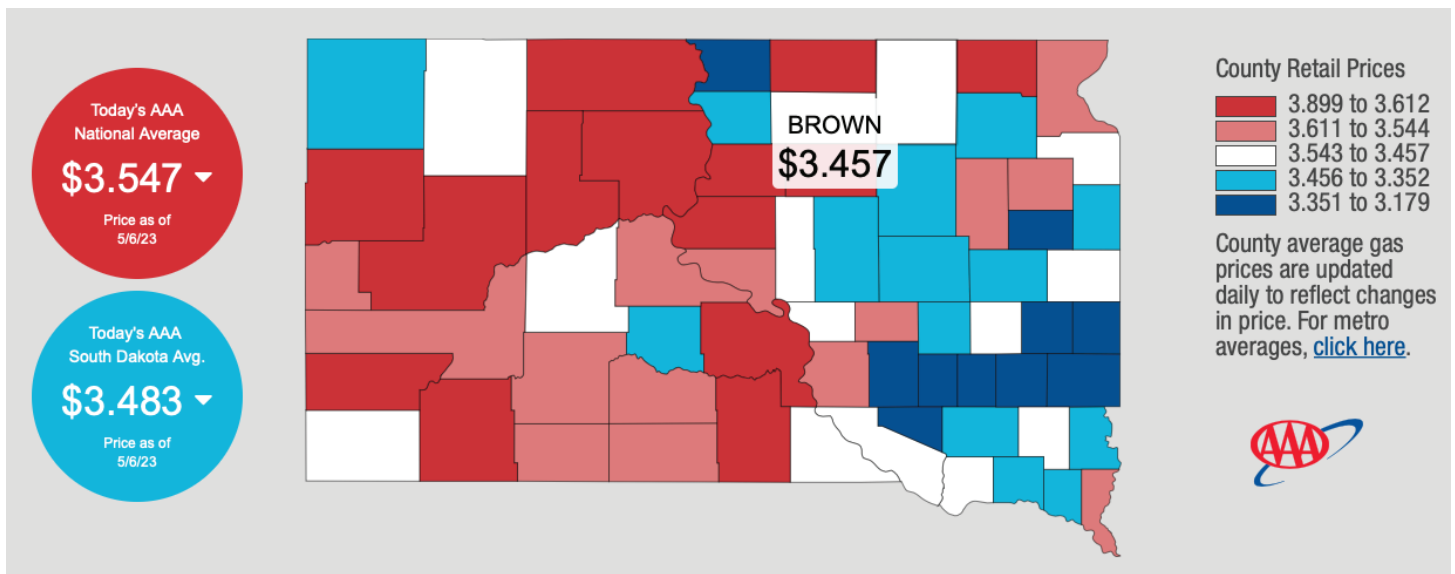
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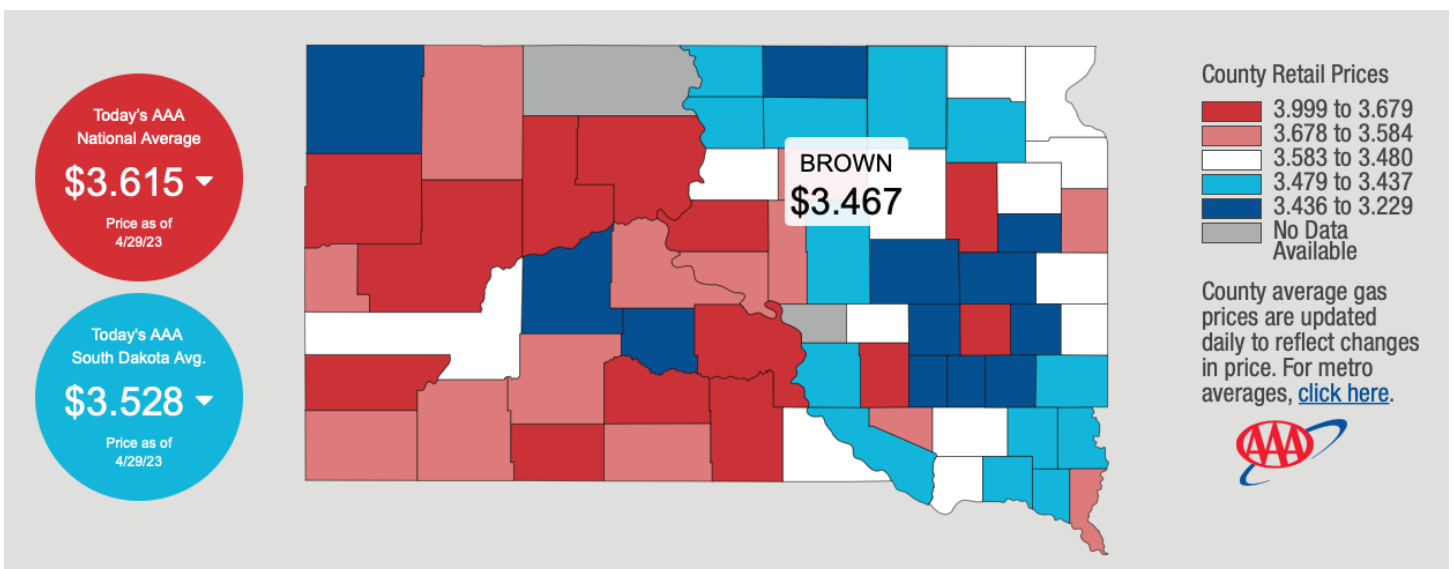
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.483	\$3.617	\$4.075	\$3.843
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.491	\$3.631	\$4.083	\$3.875
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.528	\$3.675	\$4.130	\$3.945
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.338	\$3.506	\$3.963	\$3.900
Year Ago Avg.	\$4.030	\$4.140	\$4.518	\$5.349

This Week



Two Weeks Ago



GFP Commission Holds May Meeting

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) Commission held their May meeting at Custer State Park.

WILDLIFE PROPOSALS

Furbearer Seasons

The Commission proposed the Beaver, Skunk, Opossum, Jackrabbit, Fox, Raccoon, Badger, Mink, Weasel, and Muskrat trapping and hunting seasons with no changes from 2022. By rule, these seasons are finalized.

WILDLIFE FINALIZATIONS

Youth Deer

The Commission opened the Ft. Meade Bureau of Land Management area in Unit WRD-49A to archery only for the Youth deer season.

Apprentice Deer

The Commission opened the Ft. Meade Bureau of Land Management area in Unit WRD-49A to archery only for the Apprentice deer season.

Custer State Park Deer

The Commission removed the Nov. 1-15 archery only restriction for the Custer State Park deer season.

Refuge Deer

The Commission voted to restrict hunters during the fourth season at Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge to muzzleloaders without telescopic sights.

West River Deer

The Commission completed an administrative cleanup for Unit WRD-27A (portions of Custer and Fall River counties) and to allow archery only hunting in Ft. Meade Bureau of Land Management Area in Unit WRD-49A.

Nonresident Waterfowl

The Commission increased 3-day temporary nonresident licenses from 2,000 to 2,100 and increased the two 5-day nonresident licenses from 3,750 to 3,950.

To hear the discussion on these proposals, audio from the meeting is available through South Dakota Public Broadcasting and will soon be available on the GFP website as part of the meeting archive.

To see these proposals in their entirety, visit gfp.sd.gov/commission/information.

To be included in the public record and to be considered by the Commission, comments must include a full name and city of residence and be submitted by 11:59 p.m. CDT on June 3.

The next GFP Commission meeting will be held in Sioux Falls June 8-9.

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Vincent J. "Jim" Troiola, National Commander of The American Legion attended a luncheon in Aberdeen this past week. Legion Groton Post 39 Commander Bruce Babcock and Vice-Commander Aaron Grant pose with the National Commander. (Courtesy Photo)



(R) Katie Kesterson congratulates (L) Krystina McCollum, both of Groton, at her Presentation College nursing pinning-on ceremony Friday evening. (Courtesy Photo)

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Groton Area boys dominate relays at Sisseton Twilight Meet

The Groton Area boys relay teams sprinted to first place in four of the five relay events they participated in at the Sisseton Track Meet held Friday. The wins propelled the boys to a second place finish in a field of 20 teams.

The girls placed fourth with the 3200m relay team and Aspen Johnson in the triple jump winning their events.

Boy's Division

Team Points: 1. Lisbon 87.5; 2. Groton Area 77; 3. Milbank 71; 4. Border West 70; 5. Aberdeen Roncalli 50; 6. Great Plains Lutheran 48; 7. Sargent County 46.5; 8. Sisseton 38; 9. Wyndmere-Lidgerwood 36.5; 10. Oakes 36; 11. Dakota Hills 33; 12. Britton-Hecla 32; 13. Webster Area 30.5; 14. Hankinson 21; 15. Warner 16; 16. Langford Area 12; 17. Frederick Area 10; 18. LaMoure/Litch-Marion 10; 19. Richland 8; 20. Tiospa Zina 2

100 Meters: 9. Teylor Diegel, 11.9; 13. Jacob Zak, 12.0; 55. Logan Warrington, 13.6

200 Meters: 5. Lane Tietz, 23.9; 8. Teylor Diegel, 24.2; 9. Korbin Kucker, 24.3; 33. Gage Sippel, 26.2

400 Meters: 5. Cole Simon, 54.7; 15. Gage Sippel, 58.7; 35. Logan Warrington, 1:04.0

800 Meters: 16. Jacob Lewandowski, 2:31.8
18. Jayden Schwan, 2:34.6

1600 Meters: 12. Jayden Schwan, 5:37.4; 20. Jacob Lewandowski, 5:47.5; 27. Nicolas Fernandez, 6:27.0; 28. Garrett Schultz, 6:28.2

110m Hurdles: 9. Caden McInerney, 19.7

4x100 Relay: 1. (Korbin Kucker, Ryder Johnson, Andrew Marzahn, Keegen Tracy), 45.5

4x200 Relay: 1. (Keegen Tracy, Ryder Johnson, Andrew Marzahn, Lane Tietz), 1:34.6

4x400 Relay: 1. (Keegen Tracy, Ryder Johnson, Andrew Marzahn, Cole Simon), 3:36.8

4x800 Relay: 3. (Blake Pauli, Jacob Lewandowski, Tristin McGannon, Colby Dunker), 9:24.0

SMR 1600m: 1. (Korbin Kucker, Teylor Diegel, Colby Dunker, Blake Pauli), 4:03.2

Shot Put: 5. Holden Sippel, 40' 2.5; 6. Logan Ringgenberg, 39' 8; 11. Caleb Hanten, 38' 5; 16. Karter Moody, 37' 0.25

Discus: 2. Logan Ringgenberg, 117' 4; 7. Holden Sippel, 107' 10; 13. Caleb Hanten, 98' 6

Long Jump: 31. Tristin McGannon, 15' 11.25; 41. Gage Sippel, 14' 9.25

Triple Jump: 4. Jacob Zak, 38' 2

Girl's Division

Team Points: 1. Lisbon 93, 2. Oakes 78.83, 3. Great Plains Lutheran 70.5, 4. Groton Area 55, 5. Sargent County 48, 6. Border West 47, 7. LaMoure/Litch-Marion 37, 8. Wyndmere-Lidgerwood 34, 9. Milbank 32.33, 10. Webster Area 31.5, 11. Aberdeen Roncalli 25.5, 12. Sisseton 25, 13. Britton-Hecla 23, 14. Dakota Hills 22, 15. Tri-State 18, 16. Langford Area 13.5, 17. Richland 3.33, 18. Warner 2, 19. Frederick Area 0.5

100 Meters: 38. Shaela McGannon, 15.8

200 Meters: 10. Rylee Dunker, 29.3

800 Meters: 6. Faith Traphagen, 2:44.4; 13. Elizabeth Fliehs, 2:59.1

100m Hurdles: 8. Talli Wright, 18.6; 17. Hannah Sandness, 21.4

300m Hurdles: 6. Talli Wright, 53.7; 7. Mckenna Tietz, 54.6; 13. Hannah Sandness, 1:01.5

4x100 Relay: 4. (Laila Roberts, Kennedy Hansen, Mckenna Tietz, Jerica Locke), 56.3

4x200 Relay: 4. (Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Rylee Dunker, Laila Roberts), 1:54.5

4x400 Relay: 2. (Jerica Locke, Kennedy Hansen, Rylee Dunker, Laila Roberts), 4:22.3

4x800 Relay: 1. (Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Rylee Dunker), 10:52.8

SMR 1600m: 2. (Laila Roberts, Kennedy Hansen, Jerica Locke, Taryn Traphagen), 4:46.3

Shot Put: 10. Emma Kutter, 31' 1; 19. Faith Fliehs, 28' 4.5; 56. Ashley Johnson, 22' 4; 62. Kayleigh McGannon, 20' 0.5

Discus: 30. Emma Kutter, 71' 2; 60. Ashley Johnson, 47' 0

High Jump: 18. Anna Fjeldheim, 4' 2

Triple Jump: 1. Aspen Johnson, 31' 11.25
20. Emerlee Jones, 27' 9



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

'It's about property rights': Some farmers resent ethanol industry's push for carbon pipelines

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 5, 2023 5:05 PM



Craig Schaunaman, who farms thousands of acres near Aberdeen, looks out over his family farm. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

ABERDEEN — Craig Schaunaman, who farms thousands of acres, has been invested in the ethanol industry since its early days and even served on the board of an ethanol plant.

But a carbon-capture pipeline supported by dozens of ethanol plants would cross his land, and he's against it, even though ethanol officials say the pipeline is crucial to the future viability of the industry.

"Eminent domain should not be used for a private company's gain," Schaunaman said.

Schaunaman received a letter in mid-2021 from Summit Carbon Solutions, one of the companies planning to build a carbon-capture pipeline across the Midwest, requesting permission to conduct surveys on his land that would involve digging.

"I told them they were not allowed to do surveying without compensation," he said.

By the fall of 2021, Summit approached him with an initial offer that he considered "under

market value" to place a permanent easement on his land. By May 2022, the company had offered him "three times as much," but Schaunaman remained adamant about not allowing the construction of a pipeline carrying potentially hazardous liquified carbon dioxide on his property, saying, "It's about property rights for me." He declined to disclose the amounts of the offers. But he, like some other farmers, has an active lawsuit against Summit Carbon Solutions claiming the company doesn't have a right to enter their land.

In South Dakota, where two of every three ears of corn are turned into ethanol, Schaunaman isn't the only corn farmer on a proposed carbon-capture pipeline route who says the ethanol industry is putting profits over property rights.

Ed Fischbach, a corn farmer near Mellette, never received an initial offer from Summit Carbon Solutions, because he signed on with a lawyer representing opponents of the project as soon as he could.

"I made it very clear in the very beginning that I was against it," Fischbach said. "The ethanol companies are already making massive profits. They don't need this to maintain viability."

However, according to Sioux Falls-based POET, the nation's largest ethanol producer, pursuing additional profits and higher demand for corn through a carbon-capture pipeline is worth it.

"Bioethanol companies like POET are moving forward with carbon-capture projects because they represent an unparalleled opportunity to create value for family farmers and drive investment in our rural communities," said Erin Smith, a spokesperson with POET.

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Fischbach said it all depends on what people value.

"Ethanol has had its drawbacks, too," he said. "Land values have gone up, which isn't good if you're a young family farmer who has to pay more in taxes. There's a lot of native grass that got torn up when the ethanol industry became strong, and people started planting corn on more marginal ground."

Corn and carbon capture

Ethanol, which is typically made from corn, is an additive to gasoline that partially reduces the nation's reliance on foreign oil. However, while ethanol is a renewable resource, its production still emits greenhouse gases, which trap heat and contribute to climate change. During the fermentation process, organic materials are broken down, releasing carbon dioxide. In addition, the production of ethanol requires fossil fuels for growing, transporting and processing corn.

To address some of that environmental impact, pipelines would capture carbon dioxide emitted from ethanol plants and transport it in liquefied form to be stored deep underground at a carbon sequestration site. The sites are in underground geologic formations where the carbon can be permanently injected.

The Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline would run about 2,000 miles in total, connecting to 34 ethanol plants across South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota and North Dakota (and sequestering the carbon at an underground site in North Dakota). It would transport up to 12 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.

Another project, the Heartland Greenway pipeline, would run about 1,300 miles in total, connecting to 31 ethanol plants across South Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and Illinois (and sequestering the carbon at an underground site in Illinois). It would transport up to 15 million tons of carbon dioxide per year.

The goal of carbon sequestration is to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, to mitigate climate change. It would also enable ethanol plants to sell more of their fuel in states and countries with higher emission standards — like California and Canada.

Some corn farmers acknowledge the need to address climate change but oppose building a pipeline that carries a hazardous product on or near their property.

Liquid carbon dioxide pipelines operate at high pressures, typically around 300 pounds per square inch. That high pressure means any leak or rupture in the pipeline can burst with explosive force and release large amounts of carbon dioxide that displace oxygen quickly, posing a risk to nearby people and animals.

The federal government is currently reviewing safety standards for carbon pipelines, and California lawmakers passed a law barring the construction of new underground carbon dioxide pipelines until those standards are finalized.

"Most of the landowners that are against this thing are investors in the ethanol plants," Fischbach said. "I don't think I should have to sacrifice my land or my safety so they can make a few more dollars. That's wrong. The only way that I will negotiate or talk to them is if I'm forced to."



Craig Schaunaman sifts through his well-organized file of paperwork. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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An ethanol plant near Aberdeen. (Joshua Haiar/South

Dakota Searchlight)

Eminent domain

Lawmakers rejected legislation introduced during the 2023 session in Pierre that would have prevented the pipeline projects from using eminent domain — a legal process for obtaining access to land from landowners who aren't willing to grant it.

Last month, Summit initiated dozens of eminent domain proceedings in state court — including against Fischbach and Schaunaman. Those are among more than 100 cases of pending state and federal litigation concerning proposed carbon pipelines in South Dakota.

"I'm being forced to negotiate with a private company, against my will," Schaunaman said.

Charlie Johnson, who farms land near Madison, is upset about Summit Carbon Solutions suing his landlord.

"I don't think it's right for one group of farmers to pirate onto the land of other farmers," Johnson said. "Maybe we don't need to be growing so much corn in South Dakota anymore, you know? Maybe we need to start considering more diversity in our crop rotations."

John Satterfield, regulatory affairs director with Summit Carbon Solutions, said eminent domain has to be on the table; otherwise, no pipeline of any kind would ever get built.

"The expectation that people want to invest in a project like ours, without that tool available, is a misunderstanding of the business," he said.

Elizabeth Burns Thompson, vice president of government and public affairs with the Heartland Greenway pipeline, said eminent domain is a last resort. Heartland Greenway has yet to leverage eminent domain.

"It does not save us as a company time or money," she said, "and it does not make us any friends. It's only for sheer business purposes at its core."

Schaunaman said a carbon-capture pipeline differs from other projects that have used eminent domain, like electrical power lines and water and oil pipelines.

"First of all, let's get back to what eminent domain should be used for: infrastructure that benefits the public," Schaunaman said. "Sure, a pipeline 'of this nature' would never get built, because it's not for public use."

The pipeline companies and POET said many farmers support the pipelines.

Summit Carbon Solutions said it has signed easements with 2,700 landowners across the Midwest, including with over 60% of landowners along the pipeline route in South Dakota. The Heartland Greenway pipeline is on a similar track.

Craig Schaunaman said the federal government's payment of \$85 per ton of liquid carbon dioxide stored underground, along with additional tax incentives based on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions captured during production, are the primary incentives driving pipeline projects. He claims that without those incentives, the projects would not be proposed.

"That's the only thing driving this," Schaunaman said.

Erin Smith of POET said federal incentives are not the only motivating factors.

"In addition to federal incentives, there is increasing domestic and international demand for climate solutions and lower carbon fuels that will build new local markets and drive economic growth across the Midwest for decades to come," she said.

Furthermore, the \$85 tax credit "doesn't go on forever," said Satterfield, of Summit. The credit is valid for 12 years from the start of sequestration.



A map of Summit Carbon Solution's proposed carbon-capture pipeline. (Courtesy of Summit Carbon Solutions)

Other ways to store carbon

There are other ways to sequester carbon within the ethanol production process that do not involve pipelines and sequestration sites.

During photosynthesis, plants take in carbon dioxide and convert it into sugars and starches. Those compounds are then transported down into the roots and released into the soil, becoming food for microorganisms, in a process that keeps carbon trapped underground for centuries.

Some farmers suggest using the tax credits and federal subsidies to bolster already existing incentives for natural carbon sequestration practices like no-till farming and planting cover crops, which also result in healthier soils, more wildlife and cleaner water. Schaunaman said that would be better than "just pumping it in the ground and giving large corporations tax credits."

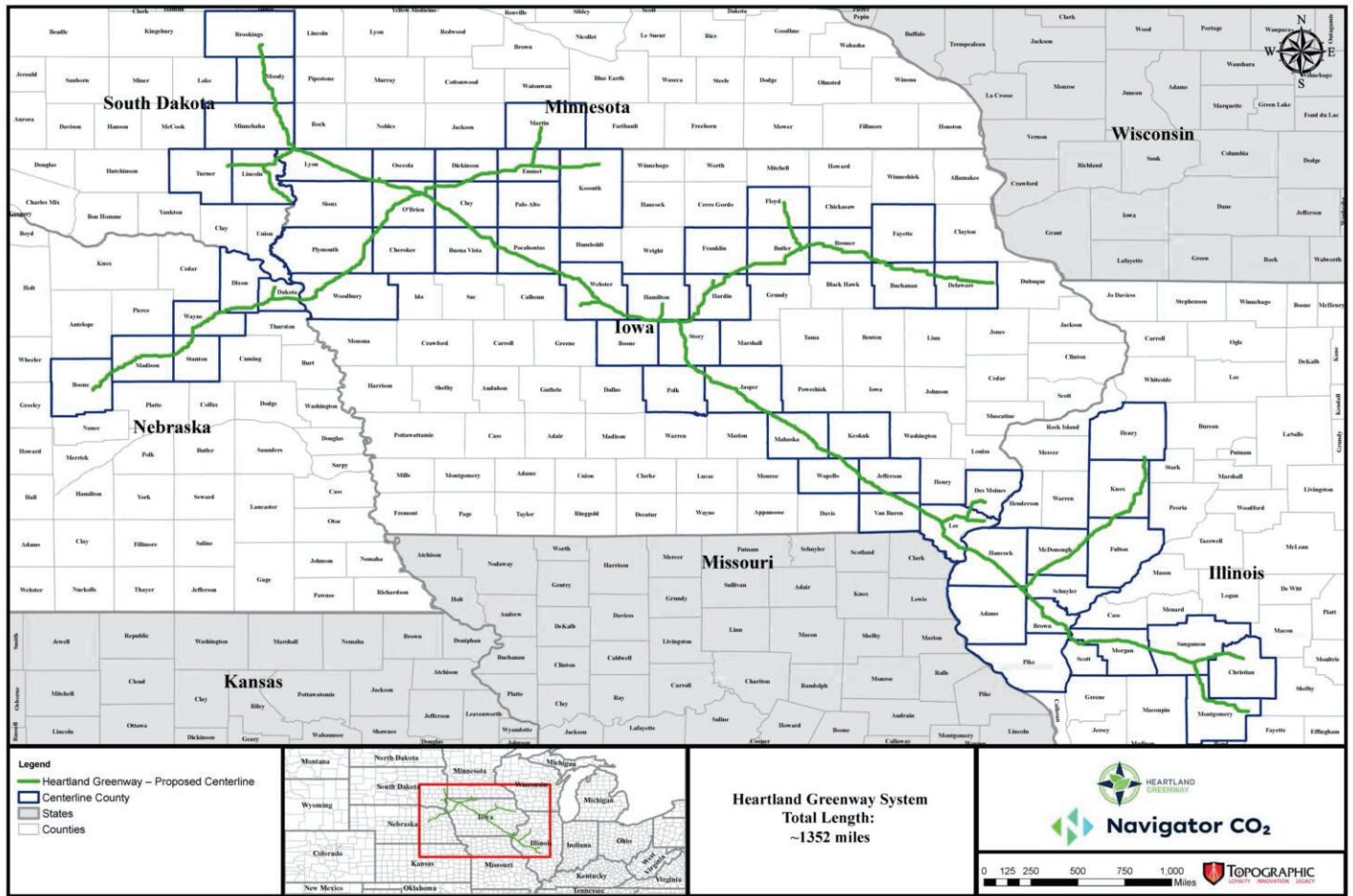
All native grasslands in the country together sequester up to 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide each year, according to an estimate by Jim Blackburn, an environmental lawyer and professor who spoke to the Washington Post. The nation's annual carbon dioxide output was nearly 6.4 billion metric tons in 2021, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

POET, Summit and Navigator Co2, the company proposing the Heartland Greenway pipeline, all express support for both natural and pipeline-based sequestration methods.

POET said the company already has a program to incentivize cover crops and less invasive tillage practices.

And Burns Thompson with Navigator said by doing "all of the above," ethanol will become even more valuable, given the lower carbon intensity score as a result.

"It's just not enough to produce green fuels," she said. "We need to be producing green fuels in an increasingly greener fashion."



The route of the proposed Heartland Greenway pipeline. (Courtesy of Navigator CO2)

The influence of EVs

Former South Dakota U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle played a lead role in passing the 2005 Renewable Fuel Standard. The law set a minimum requirement for the use of ethanol in fuel and made it more attractive for investors and farmers to get involved in making ethanol. Today, the United States is the world's largest producer of ethanol, having produced over 15 billion gallons in 2021.

While industry officials say the future can be even brighter, some pipeline opponents are skeptical that sequestering carbon via pipelines will create a long-term market for ethanol. They point to the worldwide movement toward electric vehicles.

"By the year 2030, they are going to outlaw the sale of any new vehicle that is not electric," Fischbach predicted. "They don't want ethanol. They are not going to get into those markets long-term. It's just another faulty argument to convince people to support this pipeline."

Schaunaman argues the state should be positioning young farmers for the economy of the future. "You're not going to stop the electric vehicle trend," Schaunaman said. "That's competition. Our job is to protect farming for future generations."

That's what proponents of the carbon pipelines say they're doing.

Satterfield, of Summit Carbon Solutions, said while hybrids and electric vehicles will eat into ethanol's market share, demand for green fuels "is not going anywhere anytime soon."

And Burns Thompson with the Heartland Greenway pipeline said the ethanol industry and pipeline companies are researching what can be done with carbon, beyond sequestration.

"They are looking at how do you take that molecule and process it into a bio-based plastic, fertilizers or potentially new waves of biofuels," she said. "But CO2 is going to need growth and efficient transportation to be able to do that."

Whatever happens in the future, Fischbach said one thing has already been made clear to South Dakota farmers and ranchers.

"Our politicians don't seem to get the message that using eminent domain for private gain is nothing more than theft," he said.

Both of the pipeline projects need a permit from South Dakota's Public Utilities Commission. Public hearings on the permit applications are July 25-Aug. 3 for the Heartland Greenway pipeline and Sept. 11-22 for Summit Carbon Solutions.



A wind turbine on a farmer's land near Aberdeen. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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

Most out-of-state worker recruitment cash goes unspent **State spends a fraction of incentive cash meant to draw new residents and train current ones**

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 5, 2023 5:04 PM

A few years ago, an economic development office in Yankton asked for and received access to \$100,000 from the state to train local employees and recruit out-of-state workers.

The funding helped pull in a manufacturing quality manager, two professors, a vice president of enrollment, an accountant and a fire chief from states including Illinois, Nebraska, North Carolina, Washington and Nevada.

But the city only spent \$40,000. The rest went unspent, in part due to restrictions placed on how and where the money could go.

Yankton's story is unique to Yankton, but it's similar to other cities who signed on for the program in one key way: Local officials asked for more money than they were able to use.

This week, lawmakers learned that just a fraction of the \$1 million they sent to the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) two years ago to draw skilled workers to the state was spent before the hiring bonus program was shuttered.

The idea was for local economic development leaders to partner with GOED to identify the needs of individual employers and help connect recruits to a subsidized hiring bonus. Out-of-state residents who moved to South Dakota would be paid for doing so, and the employer or community foundation would match the state funding and double the payout.

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The money was also meant to help “upskill” South Dakota workers into higher-paid positions — again with locals matching the state’s contributions — and to fund a cooperative marketing campaign designed to pique the interest of out-of-state talent.

In the end, GOED spent about a third of the \$1 million it received — \$318,412. Of that amount, about \$161,000 — 16% of the total — was spent on skills training for South Dakotans and hiring incentives for out-of-staters. The rest of the \$318,412 went to the marketing campaign.

The leftover money, lawmakers learned on Wednesday, will be folded back into ongoing marketing efforts.

Joe Fiala, GOED’s director of partner relations, told the Legislature’s Interim Appropriations Committee that the program did return results. As an example, a nurse from California was paid \$2,500 by the state and another \$2,500 from her South Dakota employer to relocate, he said. All told, 66 people from 25 states and two foreign countries moved to the state to take advantage of the recruitment cash.

On the upskilling side, Fiala pointed to a worker who earned a commercial driver’s license with the help of \$633 in state funding, which bumped his hourly pay as a driver by \$2.50 an hour. Thirty-five people got a hand from the state through the upskilling portion of the program.

On the marketing side, social and traditional media ads were sent to residents of Wyoming, North Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, Minnesota, Iowa, Colorado, and California.

“Going forward, we will continue to market out-of-state for our workforce and try to let people know that yes, we do have jobs here, it’s a great state and we want people to come,” Fiala told the Interim Appropriations Committee.

Return on investment, marketing questioned

Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, is a member of the committee. Duba asked Fiala about the return on investment.

“What was the spend to get those 66 people here?” she asked.

The incentives piece of the program cost around \$161,000, Fiala said, spread across the 101 people it helped. New resident recruitment cost an average of \$1,989 per person; the upskilling portion spent an average of \$872 per person.

The remaining money — around \$700,000 — will be used to continue marketing the state as a solid choice for skilled workers.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, questioned why the money wasn’t returned, or at least used to reduce the agency’s overall marketing budget for this fiscal year. It appears that GOED is building “a slushy fund,” he said.

The money was meant to carry over, according to GOED Chief Fiscal Officer Travis Dovre, and the leftover funds will allow the agency to “really drive the needle home” and “make a big splash” with its marketing push.

The community partnerships ended last September, Fiala added, but the marketing campaign — spearheaded by the South Dakota firm Lawrence and Schiller and Tennessee’s Designsensory — never slowed down.



Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, on the House floor during the 2023 legislative session at the Capitol in Pierre. (Makenzie Huber, South Dakota Searchlight)

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Field	Industrial	Technical / Professional	Health / Medical	City / County Government	Education	Total
Relocations	27	10	15	11	3	66
Amount	\$47,106.95	22,406.55	31,696.26	25,833.33	3,947.36	131,290.45
Average	\$1,755.81	\$2,240.66	\$2,113.08	\$2,348.48	\$1,315.79	\$1,989.25
Upskilled	24	10	0	0	1	35
Amount	\$26,688.86	\$5,116.33	\$0	\$0	\$1,735.00	\$30,540.19
Average	\$987.04	\$511.63	\$0	\$0	\$1,735.00	\$872.58

📌 A table showing dollars spent by the Governor's Office of Economic Development to recruit out-of-state employees and train in-state employees. (Courtesy of South Dakota Legislative Research Council)

"The marketing effort has continued on throughout this entire time frame," Fiala said.

Karr wasn't satisfied with that answer. He asked GOED to come back to the committee to explain why the dollars weren't returned.

Appropriations Committee Chair Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, said that GOED's answers did not fully explain why the dollars were folded into the following year's budget.

"I guess that's an internal decision within the agency," Hunhoff said.

It's unclear whether the incentives program that ended last September could have been restarted with new rules or extended. Fiala and Dovre had not responded to questions on those topics from South Dakota Searchlight as of Friday afternoon.

More asks than offers

The state's local partners asked for more incentive money than they were able to spend.

Yankton Thrive had \$100,000 worth of commitments from local businesses for upskilling and recruitment, and the state was prepared to match those dollars.

The city was only able to use \$40,000 of it, according to Nancy Wenande, Thrive's executive director. That was in part because of program rules written by GOED. New recruits needed to be paid at least \$20 an hour — more than some manufacturing firms might offer. On the upskilling side, a raise had to follow for any employee who received training or skills-building through the program.

Some employers wanted to use the funds for leadership training, Wenande said, which tends to function more as a proving ground to vet future managers than a path to an immediate pay bump.

Wenande said Yankton was grateful for the partnership and did benefit, just not quite as much as it could have.

"It was just difficult to execute, based upon some of the guidelines," Wenande said. "It was a win. We didn't get to use all \$100,000 of that funding, but the \$40,000 was helpful."

Yankton was not alone in asking for more money than it used. Requests from 17 communities or community organizations totaled more than \$1 million, including economic development groups in Watertown, Brookings, Sioux Falls, Pierre, Sturgis and Huron.

Sturgis was approved for \$40,000 in workforce incentives, but spent just \$2,500 of that GOED funding. That money was matched by a local employer to pay a former Arizona resident \$5,000 for a South Dakota relocation, according to Sturgis Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Amanda Anglin.

The remaining \$37,500 went unspent.

"From my perspective, we just didn't have the inquiries we were anticipating from the marketing campaign," said Anglin, who nonetheless said the community was grateful for the recruitment efforts.

In Brookings, all \$90,000 went unspent. That's in part because Tim Reed, a GOP senator from Brookings, took over the city's economic development office shortly after the funding was approved. Other reorganization efforts took precedence, Reed said.

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The marketing side led to a few inquiries from potential residents, he said, but little else came of the program for Brookings.

"We got calls on that, but we didn't know of anybody who specifically moved to Brookings because of it," Reed said. "The rest of the money we left because we just didn't have the organizational capacity to administer the program."

The city of Huron had more success pushing its \$25,000 allocation for incentives out the door, according to Ted Haeder of the Greater Huron Economic Development Corporation. A half dozen out-of-state recruits landed in the Fair City with the help of the funding, Haeder said, filling automotive, health care, banking and other positions.

The city left around \$5,000 unspent, said Haeder, who said his organization would be happy to partner on a similar program again.

"It wasn't a whole lot of extra work for us," he said.

Pierre had success, as well, though it spent less than it could have. It used \$28,000 of its \$80,000 allotment and drew 10 workers from out of state to fill jobs in health care and corrections, according to Pierre Economic Development Corporation CEO Jim Protexter.

"The sheriff told us it was a blessing," Protexter said.

Money as a springboard in Sioux Falls

Sioux Falls didn't spend all \$50,000 of its incentive money, but it did build a longer-term training program at Southeast Technical College.

The funding focus in the state's largest city was for commercial driver's license training, according to Bob Mundt of the Greater Sioux Falls Development Foundation. The city used GOED dollars to help fund CDL training at the technical college for 15 people in hopes of filling open trucking positions. The expanded CDL coursework has since helped more than 100 others, Mundt said.

The outreach, targeted marketing, recruitment and training opportunity connections will carry on, Mundt said, with or without state aid.

"We're going to continue that program here at the local level," Mundt said. "We leveraged some of the state dollars to make that happen last year."

The city's ongoing project aims to connect potential recruits in Omaha and Council Bluffs, the Twin Cities and Sioux City areas to Sioux Falls job opportunities, as well as help connect current residents to training programs at universities and technical colleges.

"Anything we can do to spread the good word about Sioux Falls, that's what we're trying to do," Mundt said.

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



The exterior of the Sioux Falls Commerce Center in downtown Sioux Falls. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

Rural lenders, crop insurance agents push for bolstered safety net at farm bill hearing

BY: ADAM GOLDSTEIN - MAY 4, 2023 5:50 PM



William Cole, of the Cole Agency in Mississippi, testifies about crop insurance to a Senate agriculture subcommittee May 4, 2023, in Washington, D.C. (Committee livestream screenshot)

WASHINGTON — Rural bank executives and crop insurance agents testified at a Thursday Senate hearing in support of a modernized crop insurance market that helps upstart producers manage growing risks, and supports food security.

The witnesses told the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry that crop insurance represents one of the most important financial tools in the agricultural producer's toolbox. They added that efforts to weaken it or tie it to climate provisions in the farm bill would undercut the economies of rural America that depend on it.

"I would submit that it's the only viable risk management tool that our farmers have today," said William Cole, chairman of the Crop Insurance Professionals Association. "It's the underpinning of all of our rural communities, to a certain extent."

The federal crop insurance program, contained in Title XI of the farm bill, helps make insurance

coverage available to farmers from private sector insurers to mitigate potential financial consequences of adverse growing and market conditions.

The finance leaders argued that crop insurance premiums should be lowered to encourage greater participation, which would consequently decrease risk for all producers. They said that given farmers and ranchers are financially invested in the safety net, a strong crop insurance program is more economically efficient to American taxpayers than ad-hoc disaster relief.

The witnesses also testified in favor of increasing the payment limits and efficiency of the Department of Agriculture's guaranteed loan programs to keep up with rising farm operating expenses. They said that with rising interest rates, tax exemptions and loan flexibility will be key for farmers to meet their financial obligations.

The program offers insurance coverage for most field crops, many specialty crops, certain livestock and animals, and grazing lands. Outlays are estimated to be close to \$53.5 billion between 2018 and 2023 by the USDA Office of the Inspector General. This number does not account for the more than \$90 billion in ad-hoc emergency aid the USDA delivered to farmers in that same five-year period, mostly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agency's farm credit and guaranteed loan programs are located in Title V of the farm bill, and are designed to help farmers access the financial credit they need to grow and sustain their farming operations, via direct loans and loan guarantees.

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 projected at \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 fiscal years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Ag business leaders defend crop insurance

The agriculture business leaders on the panel unanimously agreed on the need to maintain a robust crop insurance program, so producers can obtain lines of credit to expand operations, and maintain a functional safety net amid outdated reference prices for Title I commodity programs.

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"I think it's extremely important to note that the coverage does not just help farmers recover after a natural disaster," Cole said. "It means so much more than that."

Gus Barker, a witness and the president and CEO of First Community Bank in Newell, Iowa, said that bank regulators insist borrowers have crop insurance to repay their loans, and it allows producers to qualify for operating loans with extremely tight margins and high risk.

James Korin, the president of NAU Country Insurance in Ramsey, Minnesota, said that it is more efficient for taxpayers to put money into the crop insurance program, where the farmer is shouldering some of the cost, than in ad-hoc aid.

Jason Meador, head of Rural Community Insurance Services, said that crop insurance is currently farmers' "first line of defense" against climate change, and has a track record of delivering assistance in a predictable and timely fashion compared to ad-hoc aid.

Korin and Meador both said integration of climate-related practices in the program must be incentive-based, "actuarially sound," and funded separately from the broader crop insurance program.

"It is important that the formula provides enough return to cover our costs, and a reasonable long-term rate of return on the billions of dollars of capital we invest," Korin said.

Republican Sen. John Hoeven of North Dakota asked what would happen if Congress attempted to weaken crop insurance through cuts.

"Without the safety net for our farmers and ranchers, grocery shelves could quickly empty after a bad growing season across America's heartland," Korin said.

"It's so important to our small rural communities, not just the farmers relying on it," Cole said. "These vendors here rely on it heavily — the tractor dealerships, the seed and chemical dealerships."

Republican Sen. John Boozman of Arkansas asked the panelists about the importance of crop insurance for producers in the face of high interest rates and inflation.

Phillip D. Morgan, a witness and the CEO of Southern AgCredit, said that as producers see their balance sheets decline with high input costs, the safety net crop insurance provides is a guarantee that they will be able to keep farming into the future.

Democrats worry about ag economy

Democrats on the committee asked panelists for their perspectives on the state of the agricultural economy and its structures, amid recent external shocks like bank failures and the risk of a national default if the debt ceiling is not raised.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York asked if recent banking disruptions — fueled by three of the largest bank collapses in U.S. history — pose a risk to rural lenders and creditors.

Korin said that the change in the banking industry has "no doubt" affected the cost of capital for NAU Country Insurance, which has seen reinsurance costs go up 40%.

Jase Wagner, the president and CEO of Compeer Financial in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, said that financial risk to farmers from these bank failures is "not real acute right now." Still, he said the aftershocks are something his company is monitoring with its district bank, AgriBank, to minimize risk for newer producers.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, the chair of the committee, asked how the availability of credit and interest rates on farm loans would be affected if the country were to default on its debts.

Morgan said that the rapid hikes in interest rates from the Federal Reserve have farm operators looking at operating loan interest rates twice that of the previous year, and could worsen. He said that while producers will feel the impacts of those cost increases, NAU Country Insurance is "well-equipped" to weather potential adversity.

Wagner added that the risk-free rate, linked to the cost for a bank to borrow money, would be adversely impacted by a default. He said the impacts would compound across loans for inputs like fertilizer and seed, and make it harder for producers to pay them off.

Barker said that his organization is pushing a bill in Congress that would exempt taxes on the interest of all rural agricultural loans and real estate in towns of 2,500 people or fewer, which would lower already-high rates by a measure of 1.5 to 2.5 percentage points.

"So it's safe to say that no one thinks that the U.S. defaulting is a good idea for farmers and ranchers," Stabenow asked, eliciting nods and chuckles from the panelists.

Increasing loan limits

The panelists also angled to increase loan payment limits on Farm Service Agency loans in Title V, noting that they have not kept pace with current prices.

Morgan cited that the cost of building a modern poultry house in Louisiana or Mississippi is up 37% from three years ago. He said that the Farm Credit Council supports an increase to a \$3.5 million limit for a building loan, which is currently at just over \$2 million, and a \$3 million limit for an operating loan.

Wagner said that in some cases, younger producers may get help from outside parties on the land loan, but not the operating loan, and with the rising costs of input and land, "you hit that limit real quickly."

Barker said that while his organization "could live with those numbers," they would like to keep it indexed with inflation to keep up in the future.

Adam Goldstein was the D.C. Bureau intern for States Newsroom. Goldstein was 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.

U.S. default could begin June 8 without agreement, top economist tells Congress

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 4, 2023 4:00 PM

WASHINGTON — Unless Congress can strike a deal, the U.S. Treasury will likely default on the nation's bills starting June 8, triggering major consequences for the economy, according to Mark Zandi of Moody's Analytics.

The risk assessment organization's chief economist testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget Thursday and urged lawmakers to suspend the debt ceiling as soon as possible, and to ensure it is addressed long enough to make it to the other side of the 2024 presidential election.

Congress has eight working days with both chambers in session before Memorial Day, and negotiations appear non-existent. On Monday, President Joe Biden called Senate and House leaders and scheduled a White House meeting for May 9. Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy last met about the debt ceiling in early February.

"This is an especially inopportune time to have a political debate over the debt limit. Recession risks are uncomfortably high," Zandi warned lawmakers.

"I'd say a majority of economists, many CEOs and investors firmly believe that a recession is likely over the next 12 to 18 months. The economy is struggling with the increase in interest rates. The (Federal) Reserve raised rates again yesterday, they've raised rates over 5 percentage points, all (in) over a year. That's created tremendous pressure on the economy and of course on the banking system."



Mark Zandi of Moody's Analytics testifies to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget on May 4, 2023, in Washington, D.C. (Committee livestream screenshot)

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Zandi, and other witnesses, did not dispute that the U.S. is on an “unsustainable” spending path, but they pressed lawmakers to disentangle long-term work on reducing the nation’s deficit from the immediate need to raise the debt limit.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, which is tasked with calculating costs and savings of federal legislation, projects a deficit of \$1.4 trillion in 2023 and \$2 trillion each year thereafter until 2033.

“We need both additional tax revenue and we need spending restraint. Both of those things need to happen, but we can’t do that in the current environment. So this is not the time to do it,” Zandi said. “We need to end this drama as quickly as possible. If we don’t, we’re going to go into recession and our fiscal challenges will be made even worse.”

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned in a letter to lawmakers Monday that the country could meet its X-date, or default, as soon as June 1.

House vote

McCarthy, a California Republican, has vowed that his party will not raise the nation’s borrowing cap without simultaneous budget reductions.

Republicans pushed through a debt ceiling bill April 26 by a slim margin, 217-215, to temporarily raise the limit by \$1.5 trillion or until March 31, 2024, whichever comes first.

They tied the measure to massive discretionary spending cuts and changes in federal programs, including dismantling new climate provisions passed in last year’s Inflation Reduction Act and increasing work requirements for recipients of government food and medical benefits.

The bill largely received support from the bipartisan fiscal watchdog the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget — except for a provision to slash new Internal Revenue Service funding meant to increase tax revenue collection.

The CBO projected that the GOP’s bill — titled the Limit, Save, Grow Act — would reduce the federal deficit by a projected \$4.8 trillion over the next decade.

Stalemate

Biden and Democrats have panned the bill, nicknaming it the Default on America Act, or DOA Act. They have pledged to refuse to negotiate on the legislation and liken it to taking the U.S. economy “hostage,” as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer repeated on the Senate floor Thursday.

Senate Democrats subtitled their Thursday panel as a hearing about “Blackmail, Brinkmanship and Billionaire Backroom Deals.”

“MAGA Republicans’ dangerous bill proposes a terrible choice: Default on our financial obligations, cause widespread pain and wreck our economy. Or gut basic federal programs essential to our economic strength, cause widespread pain and wreck our economy,” said Budget Committee Chair Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island.

Democrats highlighted a recent Moody’s analysis that projects the GOP bill — when compared to a standalone bill to raise the debt ceiling — would slow the nation’s Gross Domestic Product and cost the economy 780,000 jobs by the end of next year.

“(The Limit, Save, Grow Act) entails significant cuts to government spending beginning in fiscal year 2024, which begins at the end of this year, right at the point in time when the economy is going to be most vulnerable to going into recession. By my calculation, the act will shave spending equal to about a half a percent of GDP in 2024. And that’s a half a percent that the economy does not have,” Zandi told the panel.

Ranking member Chuck Grassley of Iowa maintained that House Republicans “have acted responsibly” in passing their bill to address the debt limit and spending together.

“In contrast, President Biden and Biden Senate Democrats have sat idly by watching the clock get down to default by not thoughtfully engaging. They hope to avoid a substantive debate on a very serious fiscal issue,” Grassley said Thursday.

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has so far stayed on the sidelines of the debate, reiterating this week that there is “no solution in the Senate.”

“The only solution is for presidential leadership. President Biden has been sleepwalking towards this

crisis," the Kentucky Republican said on the floor Wednesday.

The White House meanwhile has been hammering the talking points this week that McCarthy's deal will threaten health care for 21 million Americans, potentially cut veterans' benefits and pull 2,000 Customs and Border Patrol agents off the job.

"This President has not backed away. The problem is who you value in this country. Is it a special interest, or do you want to save (money) on the backs of people who can least afford it?" said Shalanda Young, director of the Office of Management and Budget, at the White House press briefing Thursday.

Finding a new path

Witnesses testifying before Thursday's Senate panel also called for Congress to find an altogether new path for fiscal negotiations rather than repeating down-to-the-wire politically fraught fights each time the U.S. edges toward a fiscal cliff.

"It is critically important for the U.S. to avoid future debt ceiling brinkmanship," said Jason Fichtner, the Bipartisan Policy Center's vice president and chief economist.

The organization suggests a framework going forward to align the debt limit with the annual budget process along with an off-ramp to trigger a debt ceiling suspension if the U.S. comes within 60 days of reaching its statutory borrowing limit.

Congress has approved 102 separate adjustments to the debt ceiling since the end of World War II.

The body raised the debt ceiling three times under the Trump administration. Under Biden in December 2021, Congress increased the debt limit by \$2.5 trillion to \$31.38 trillion.

The U.S. hit its borrowing limit on Jan. 19, triggering the Treasury Department to invoke "extraordinary measures," or special accounting maneuvers, to continue paying the nation's bills.

Adding to its budgeting maneuvers, the Treasury has begun suspending the issuance of State and Local Government Series securities — special securities offered to state and local governments that count against the debt ceiling. The maneuver was also used in the 2014 and 2015 debt ceiling debates as a way to delay the U.S. from reaching its borrowing limit.

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

Bernie Sanders unveils push for \$17-an-hour federal minimum wage, citing state increases

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 4, 2023 1:46 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders on Thursday announced Democrats' plans to mark up legislation to increase the federal minimum wage to \$17 an hour, pointing to an increase in the cost of living.

Outside the U.S. Capitol, Sanders, a Vermont independent and chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said the panel will vote June 14 on a bill that would increase the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour to \$17 an hour over a five-year period.

That goal is a \$2-an-hour increase from labor organizers' past campaign of "Fight for \$15."

"Frankly, it is embarrassing for us to be here today and have to talk about a reality where people need to work two or three jobs to put food on the table for the kids," Sanders said, surrounded by advocates for a higher minimum wage. "You have billionaires who don't know what to do with their money, buying yachts and going off into outer space, so the time is long overdue."

Sanders argued that the idea is popular regardless of party affiliation and cited Nebraska, a deep red state that approved an increase in the state minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and Florida, which leans red but has also passed an increase in its minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2026.

He said the U.S. Senate "is going to push it as quickly and hard as we can," but did not specify if it would be brought to the Senate floor for a vote. There is also the hurdle of the 60-vote threshold when Democrats have a slim 50-seat majority.

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And with a Republican-controlled House, it's unlikely to be brought up by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican.

Heidi Shierholz, the president of the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute, said at the press conference that the economic impact of an increase to the federal minimum wage is one of the most-studied subjects in economics.

"The weight of that evidence shows that (when the) minimum wage increases, they raise the wages of our lowest wage-workers, they reduce inequality, they reduce poverty, they reduce child poverty, they reduce gender wage gaps, they reduce racial wage gaps because Black and brown workers, due to the broad impacts of structural racism on our labor markets, are disproportionately concentrated in the lowest-wage jobs," Shierholz said.

Workers in the South

Economic researchers have found that an increase to the federal minimum wage would particularly benefit low-income workers in the South.

A report from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office found that a boost to a \$15-an-hour wage by 2025 would nearly lift a million people out of poverty and more than 17 million workers would experience a wage increase by 2025.

Shierholz said because of inflation, a \$15 minimum wage isn't sufficient.

"So just to give you an idea, \$17 today has roughly the same purchasing power as \$15 did just two years ago," she said.

A 40-hour work week with a minimum wage of \$15 an hour comes out to an annual salary of about \$31,000, before taxes. That is just above the poverty line for a family of four, which is \$30,000. A 40-hour work week of \$17 an hour would come out to an annual salary of about \$35,000 before taxes.

"Mama Cookie" Bradley, a longtime labor organizer from Durham, North Carolina, who attended the press conference, said that a \$17-an-hour wage in her city would mean residents would be able to afford rent, food and child care costs.

"It would make life a lot more easier," she said.

Bradley said she's fighting for an increase in the federal minimum wage not only for herself, but for the next generation.

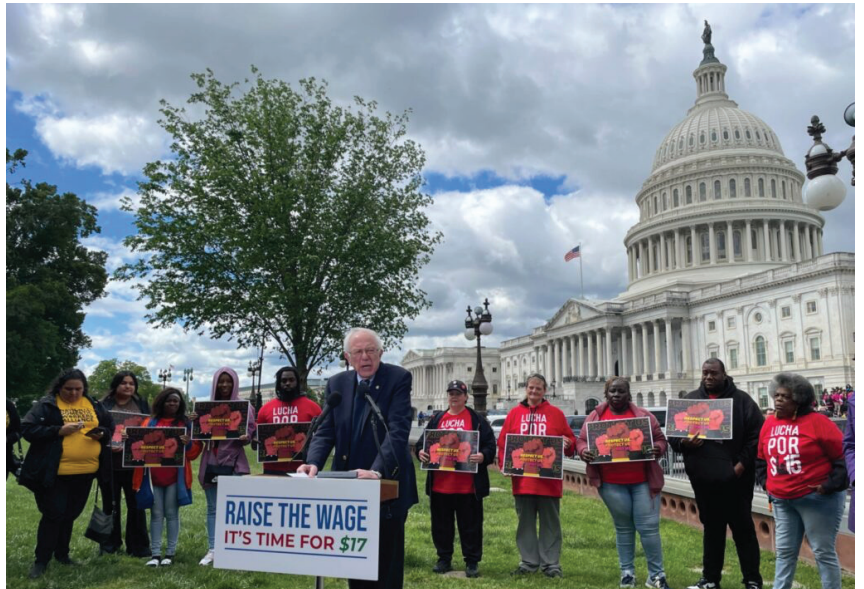
"They need it," she said, adding that her advice for the younger generation is to "keep fighting, keep unionizing and keep organizing."

The last time the federal minimum wage was raised was in 2009, to \$7.25 an hour. Efforts to increase the federal minimum wage have stalled several times in Congress.

When Democrats held control in both chambers in 2021 they tried to include a gradual increase of the federal minimum wage in the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package through a process known as reconciliation that requires only a simple majority, but not all Senate Democrats were on board.

The Biden administration issued an executive order in April 2021 to raise the minimum wage for federal contract workers to \$15 an hour, which includes nursing assistants at Veterans Administration hospitals, maintenance workers, cleaning staff and food service workers.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

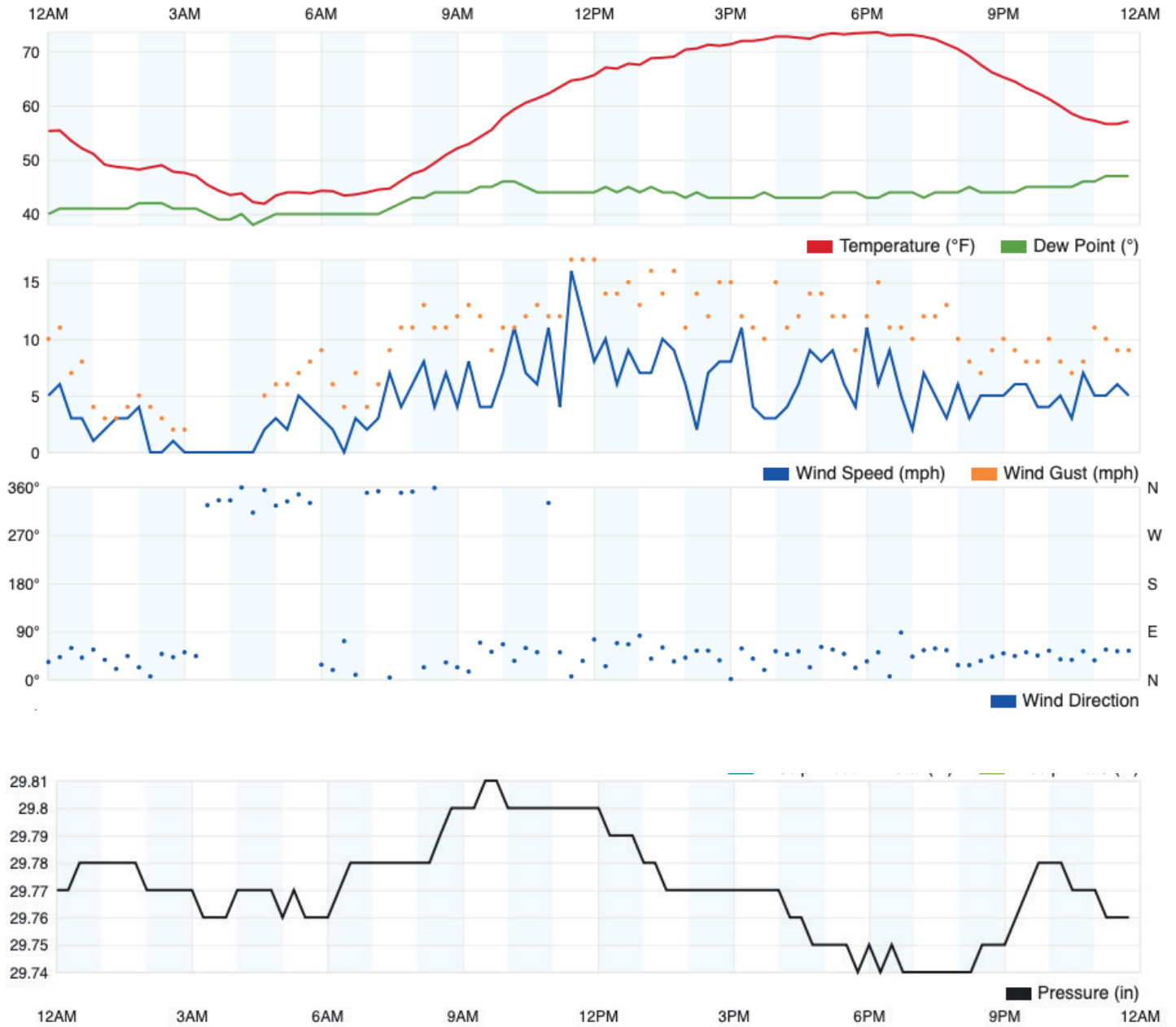


Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, an independent, with advocates at a press conference outside the U.S. Capitol on raising the minimum wage, on May 4, 2023. (Ariana Figueroa/States Newsroom)

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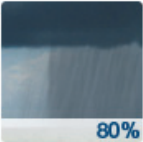




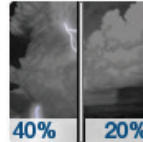

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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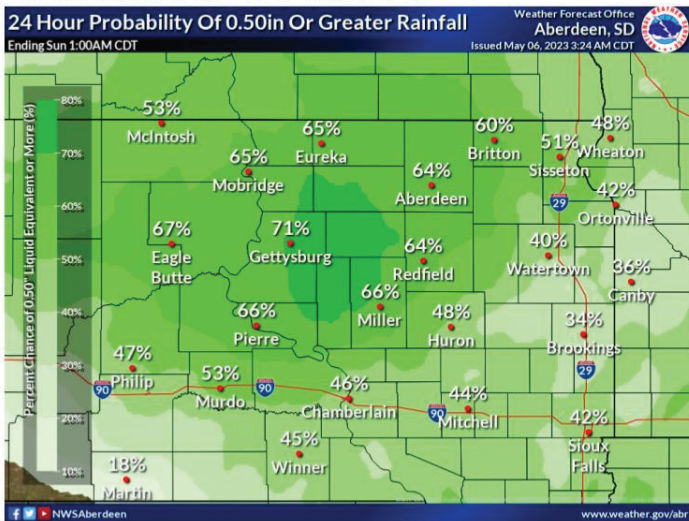
Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
 80%	 30%		 30%	 30% 40%	 40% 20%	
Showers	Chance T-storms	Partly Sunny	Chance Showers	Chance Showers then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms then Slight Chance Showers	Mostly Sunny
High: 62 °F	Low: 46 °F	High: 67 °F	Low: 43 °F	High: 67 °F	Low: 44 °F	High: 72 °F



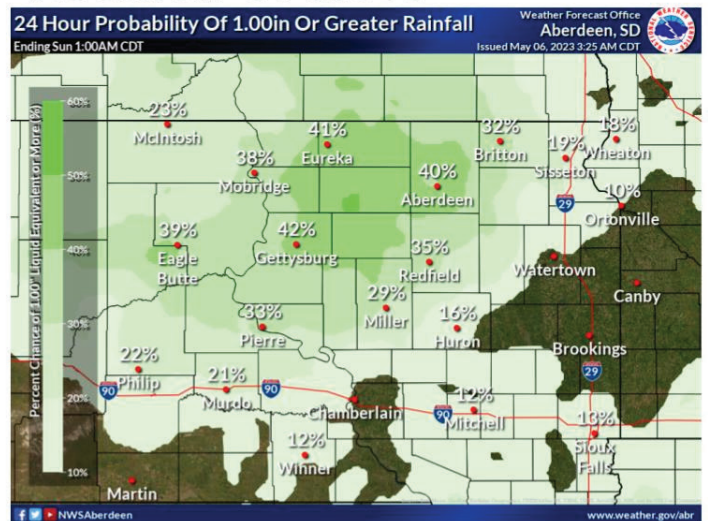
Probabilistic Precipitation Amounts Forecast Through Tonight

May 6, 2023
4:10 AM

0.50inch Or More



1.00inch Or More



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

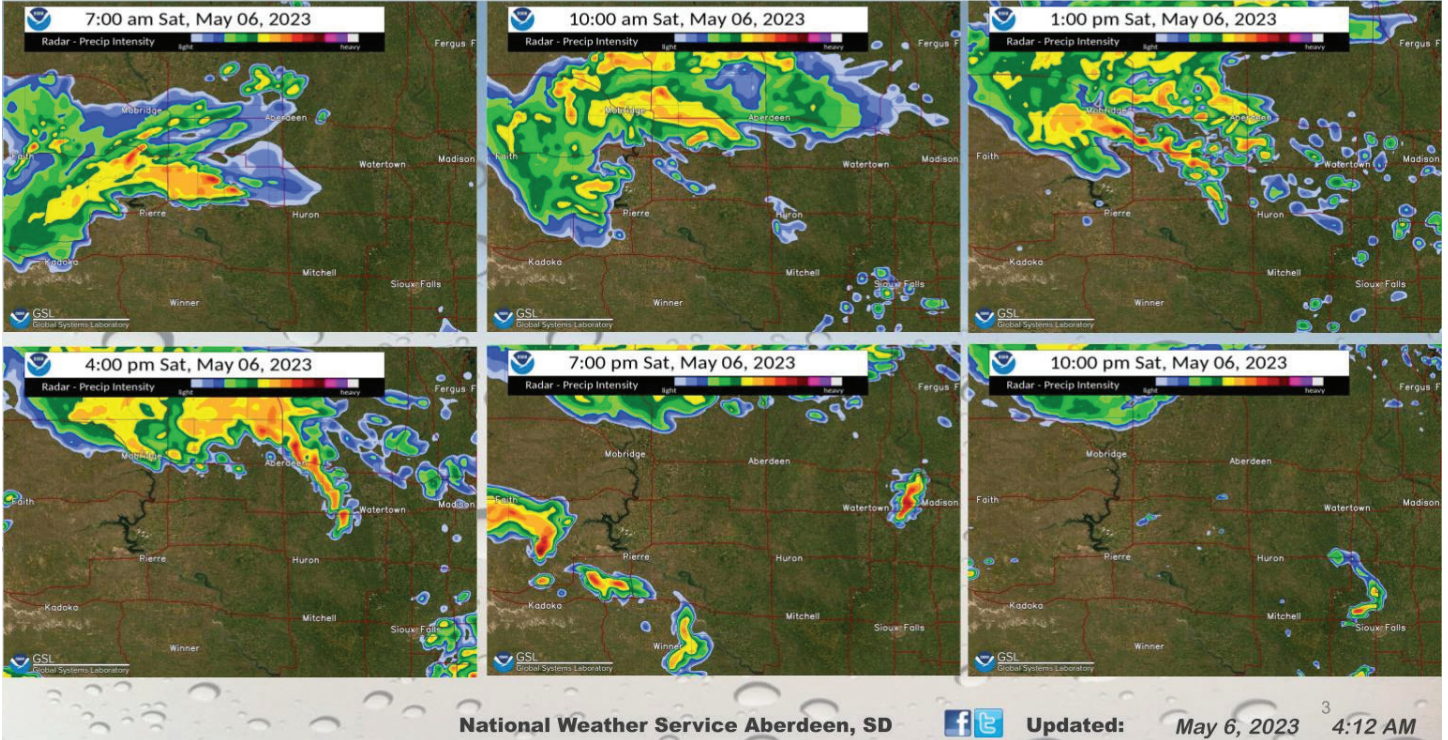
National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The likelihood is increasing that some areas will receive more than a half inch of rainfall from the showers and storms that move through the region today into tonight. In fact, it is not out of the realm of possibility for a few folks to pick up more than an inch of rainfall.

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This Morning Through This Evening



Always subject to change, but here is a general idea of what the radar might look like in areal coverage and timing today into tonight.

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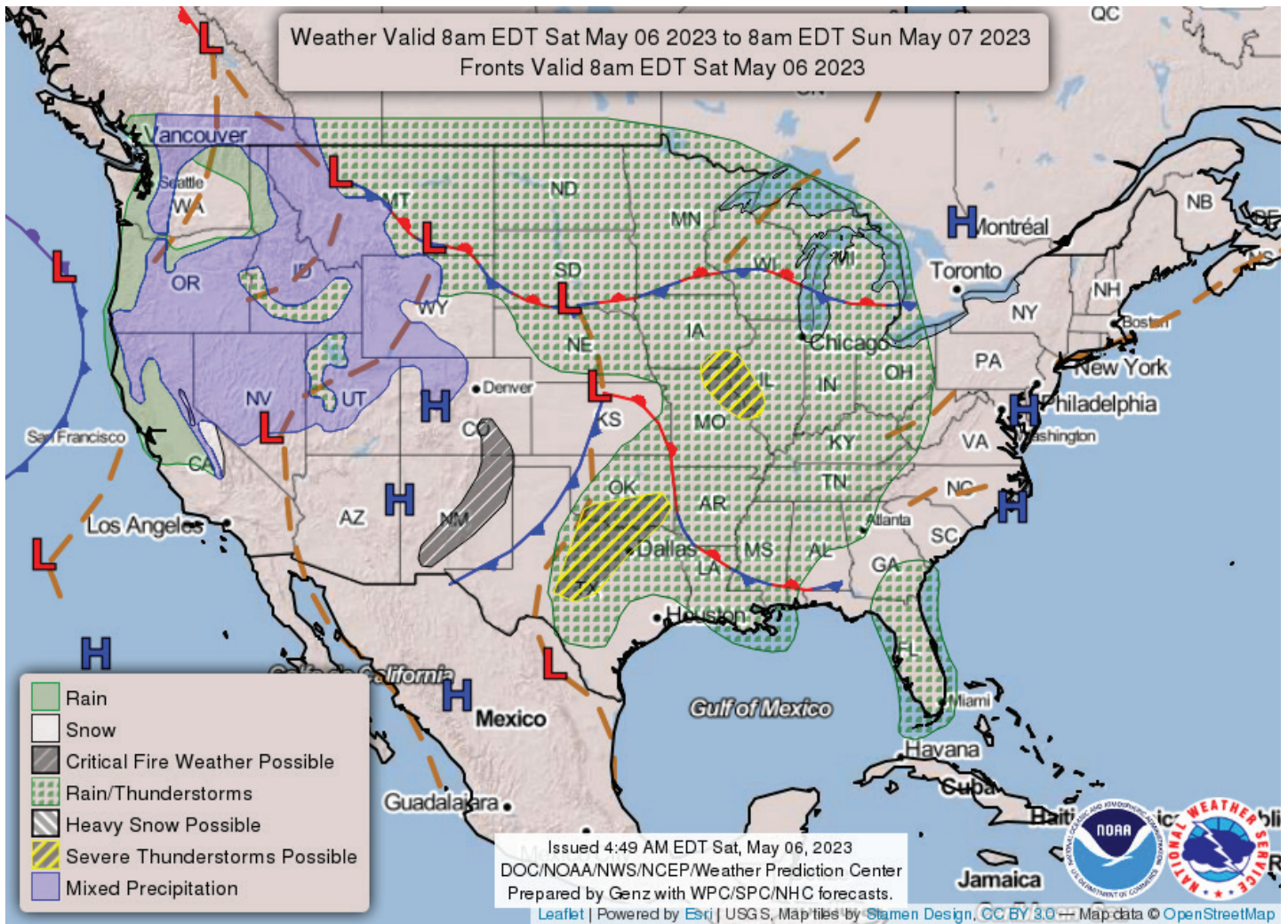
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 74 °F at 6:10 PM
Low Temp: 41 °F at 4:38 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 11:34 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 34 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 93 in 2016
Record Low: 23 in 1931
Average High: 67
Average Low: 40
Average Precip in May.: 0.65
Precip to date in May.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 4.62
Precip Year to Date: 5.72
Sunset Tonight: 8:46:30 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:10:09 AM



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Today in Weather History

May 6, 1988: High winds produced blowing dust which reduced visibilities to less than one-half mile in northeastern South Dakota. Wind gusts of 62 mph were reported at Aberdeen. A small building was destroyed in Gettysburg, and a building was damaged near Timber Lake. Winds also blew over a tractor-trailer injuring a man in Okaton.

May 6, 1999: High winds of 35 to 50 mph, gusting to over 60 mph blew across central and north central South Dakota from the early morning to the late evening hours causing some damage. In Pierre, the high winds blew a large tree down and tore loose a piece of the sheet metal cornice atop a downtown building. At the Legion Memorial Park in Mobridge, the high winds knocked the centerfield lights to the ground. In Jones County, a semi-tractor trailer was blown over and damaged. A fishing tournament at Lake Oahe had to be postponed as a result of the high winds.

1876: A tornado, estimated at F3 intensity, tracked four miles across Chicago, Illinois. The damaged buildings included a candy factory, a hospital, a freight depot, and a church. The tornado moved out over Lake Michigan and was observed to have multiple vortices by a reporter. Further south in Illinois, a tornado blew a moving passenger train off the tracks near Neoga, injuring all 19 people aboard.

1933 - Charleston, SC, was deluged with 10.57 inches of rain, an all-time 24 hour record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1937: The German passenger airship LZ 129 Hindenburg caught fire and was destroyed during its attempt to dock with its mooring mast at Naval Air Station Lakehurst in Manchester Township, New Jersey, United States. Of the 97 people on board (36 passengers and 61 crewmen), there were 35 fatalities (13 passengers and 22 crewmen). One worker on the ground was also killed, making a total of 36 deaths. The Hindenburg was delayed two hours from docking due to thunderstorms in the area.

1975: A massive tornado hit Omaha, Nebraska killing three persons, injuring 133 others, and causing over 250 million dollars damage. The tornado struck during the late afternoon moving northeastward through the industrial and residential areas of west-central Omaha and lifting over the northern section of the city. The twister, which cut a swath ten miles long and as much as a quarter of a mile wide. It was the most costly in U.S. history up till that time.

1987 - Eighteen cities in California and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 91 degrees at Portland OR, 101 degrees at Medford OR, and 104 degrees at Sacramento CA, were the warmest of record for so early in the season. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A major storm brought high winds to the western half of the country. A wind gust of 74 mph at Pueblo CO broke their May record established just four days earlier, and winds in the Arapahoe Ski Basin area of Colorado reached 85 mph. In North Dakota, the high winds reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust closing many roads. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Sixteen cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Morning lows of 17 at Bismarck ND and 26 at Minneapolis MN were the coldest of record for so late in the season. A reading of 43 degrees at the start of the Kentucky Derby was the coldest in 115 years of records. Light snow was reported in the Upper Midwest, with an inch reported at Chicago IL. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Snow and high winds prevailed behind a Pacific cold front crossing the northwestern U.S. Wind gusts above 50 mph were reported in southeastern Idaho, and heavy snow blanketed the Cascade Mountains of Washington State, with twelve inches reported at Stampede Pass. (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NO MISTAKE

He had been playing football in a nasty, soggy, muddy field. Tired and covered with fresh mud, little James returned home for dinner. His mother horrified with his appearance and wanting to shame him said, "Who's this? I don't know of anyone who lives here who could ever get so dirty and come to the table to eat!"

"It's me, Mom," he shouted. "It's your son James who's underneath all this dirt."

Jesus once told the story of a son who went to his father and said, "Dad, I want whatever you have that has been set aside for my inheritance. I'm leaving home today."

But things did not work out the way the son thought they would. He wasted his inheritance on things that were pleasing but had no eternal value. So, one day he "came to himself!" In this famous story, Jesus described the foolishness of "passing fancies" in comparison to the gift He has to offer: a life worth living through the grace of God.

He was met by his Dad who was filled with joy and compassion, waiting for this day - the day he would realize what his father had to offer him. He wrapped his son in his arms and held him tightly, told him that he was loved and welcomed, and "all is forgiven."

What a picture of Jesus: eyes searching, ears listening, arms open, heart-pounding, and waiting and wanting to offer everyone complete forgiveness for every sin.

Prayer: Thank You, Jesus, for providing a love that exceeds our sinfulness, grace and mercy for anyone, and the opportunity to begin a life with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found. Luke 15:11-32



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:
05.05.23

16 18 28 42 43 11

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$83,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.03.23

8 9 31 43 44 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,700,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 57 Mins 49
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.05.23

6 9 28 37 39 3

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 27 Mins 49
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.03.23

9 21 25 30 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$47,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 57 Mins 49
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.03.23

11 35 57 60 64 22

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 56 Mins
DRAW: 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.03.23

21 26 30 45 47 23

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$87,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 56 Mins
DRAW: 50 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Wearing red, Indigenous families honor missing relatives

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Native Americans whose relatives have gone missing or been killed wore red on Friday, a color synonymous with raising awareness about the disproportionate number of Indigenous people who have been victims of violence.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Awareness Day is held on May 5 — the birthday of Hanna Harris, who was only 21 when she was slain on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation in Montana.

Countless more Indigenous people have gone missing since her body was found nearly a decade ago. Advocates describe it as a silent crisis, rooted in colonization, forced removal and government policies that led to the stamping out of culture and identity as entire communities were marginalized.

This weekend's marches, symposiums, prayer gatherings, art installations and ceremonies are meant to pressure policy makers in the U.S. and Canada to ensure equity when investigating such cases. The red dresses, they say, are used to call home the spirits of missing and slain Indigenous victims.

"We have to call this national state of emergency what it is -- a genocide," Carol McBride, president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, said in an email. She urged people to channel their grief into activism. "Wearing red is powerful."

Canada's House of Commons unanimously approved a motion this week calling on the government to declare a national state of emergency. Such a declaration would make more tools available, said Mel Critch, who works with the Native Women's Association of Canada and is co-chair of the group Manitoba Moon Voices.

The burden of tackling the problem has fallen largely to Indigenous women, relatives and other community members, Critch said.

"As this moves through the Senate, our communities will be watching and listening carefully, praying for its adoption and a day when this will end, when our children and families will be safe," Critch said.

Lawmakers in the U.S. introduced their own resolutions this week supporting the May 5 effort.

High rates of violence, sexual assault, homicides and disappearances of Indigenous people, particularly women, have festered for generations amid inadequate public safety resources in Indian Country, where tiny police forces are responsible for vast territories and a tangled web of local and federal jurisdictions often complicates efforts to track and communicate about cases as they happen.

About 4,200 missing and murdered cases have gone unsolved, according to U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates. Federal health statistics document murder rates for Native American and Alaska Native women at 10 times the national rate.

Still, the number of missing and slain Indigenous women remains unknown. A 2021 review by the non-partisan Government Accountability Office pointed to reporting problems, distrust of law enforcement and jurisdictional conflicts.

Recently adopted U.S. laws aim to improve data collection and law enforcement responses. A national commission began holding public meetings in April to craft more recommendations. Gary Restaino, the U.S. attorney for Arizona, will be listening to tribal leaders and families at next week's commission meeting in Flagstaff.

He said the Justice Department now prioritizes cases in Indian Country, bringing the Marshals Service, Drug Enforcement Administration and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to support the FBI when local or tribal police call for help.

"That, I think, is a real expansion from the way we have traditionally done these cases and should be an opportunity to get more resources into underserved areas in Indian Country," he said.

Many states have created their own task forces and commissions, aiming to keep cases from falling through the cracks. Prosecutors in New Mexico's largest judicial district have a special unit to help with

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missing person investigations involving Native Americans.

In California, lawmakers approved the creation of an alert system to help find Indigenous people missing under suspicious circumstances. The legislation came last year after the Yurok Tribe issued an emergency declaration after five Indigenous women were reported as missing or were killed within a span of 18 months.

"Every time someone goes missing in this state, that is tomorrow's historical trauma," said Abby Abinanti, the Yurok Tribe's chief judge.

The tribe plans to use drones to bolster its search and rescue program.

The Round Valley Indian Tribes in Northern California also declared an emergency, and imposed a curfew for minors following the recent killings of two tribal citizens.

Washington is creating a cold case investigations unit, and Oklahoma's governor signed legislation Monday ordering state public safety officials to work with tribes on an alert system named for Cherokee Nation citizen Kasey Russell, who went missing in 2016.

While there has been progress, state and federal lawmakers agree that more needs to be done.

California Assemblymember James Ramos told a hearing Tuesday that trends in his state don't show improvement. He wants qualified tribal law enforcement officers to be able to access a statewide telecommunications system as they investigate missing persons cases.

In New Mexico, advocates want the governor to issue a new executive order to chart the next phase of implementing recommendations made in an extensive task force report in 2020.

For Melody Delmar, who leads MMIP projects for New Mexico's Indian Affairs Department, the crisis is personal. As a social worker, she's often among the first people families call when they need help.

Her dream? A state office dedicated to Indian Country cases where families could be assigned a social worker.

"There's just so many levels of this and it can be complicated," she said. "But we also can look at this and know there are solutions out there too."

Nearly two years passed before federal authorities made an arrest in the case of Ella Mae Begay, a master Navajo weaver who went missing in 2021.

Her niece, Seraphine Warren, walked from the Navajo Nation to Washington D.C. to raise awareness. She has not given up finding her aunt — she's gathering volunteers for another search of the desert in the coming weeks.

Waiting for information to trickle down from authorities to grieving family members is like torture, Warren said.

"All that families want is for somebody to check on them, to see if their cases are still being investigated," said Warren, who will be marching in Seattle this weekend.

U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland received a briefing Friday in Albuquerque from her agency's Missing and Murdered Unit, created in 2021. To date, the unit has investigated 728 cases; solved or closed 263 missing persons cases; and solved eight murder cases.

Advocates are watching closely as Congress hashes out budget requests for federal agencies, including the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Cuts could result in fewer law enforcement officers in areas that are already understaffed.

U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva, an Arizona Democrat, said Congress has a responsibility to honor trust and treaty obligations with Indian Country.

"And it's important to affirm that this is a priority," he said.

Associated Press contributors include Sophie Austin in Sacramento, Calif.; Claire Rush in Portland, Ore., Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City, Okla. and Terry Tang in Phoenix, Ariz.

US to control land sales to foreigners near 8 military bases

By MARGARET STAFFORD, TARA COPP and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Foreign citizens and companies would need U.S. government approval to buy

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property within 100 miles (160 kilometers) of eight military bases, under a proposed rule change that follows a Chinese firm's attempt to build a plant near an Air Force base in North Dakota.

The Treasury Department's Office of Investment Security is set to propose the rule on Friday. The rule would give expanded powers to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, which screens business deals between U.S. firms and foreign investors and can block sales or force the parties to change the terms of an agreement to protect national security.

Controversy arose over plans by the Fufeng Group to build a \$700 million wet corn milling plant about 12 miles (19 kilometers) from the Grand Forks Air Force Base, which houses air and space operations.

As opposition to the project grew, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum and U.S. Sens. John Hoeven and Kevin Cramer, all Republicans, raised questions about the security risks and asked the federal government last July for an expedited review.

CFIUS told Fufeng in September that it was reviewing the proposal and eventually concluded that it did not have jurisdiction to stop the investment.

The plans were eventually dropped after the Air Force said the plant would pose a significant threat to national security.

The new rule would affect Grand Forks and seven other bases, including three that are tied to the B-21 Raider, the nation's future stealth bomber. The Pentagon has taken great pains to protect its new, most-advanced bomber from spying by China. The bomber will carry nuclear weapons and be able to fly manned and unmanned missions.

Six bombers are in various stages of production at Air Force Plant 42, located in Palmdale, California, while the two other bases will serve as future homes for the 100-aircraft stealth bomber fleet: Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and Dyess Air Force Base in Texas.

Also on the list were Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio and Laughlin Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas, both training bases. The others selected for greater protection are the Iowa National Guard Joint Force Headquarters in Des Moines, Iowa, and Luke Air Force Base in Glendale, Arizona.

The locations were selected for a variety of reasons, including the sensitivity of either current or future missions that would be based there, if they were near special use airspace, where military operations would be conducted or whether they were near military training routes, said a defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

CFIUS, a committee whose members come from the State, Justice, Energy and Commerce departments among others, already had the power to block property sales within 100 miles of other military bases under a 2018 law.

Hoeven said the CFIUS process for reviewing proposed projects needed to be updated.

"Accordingly, China's investments in the U.S. need to be carefully scrutinized, particularly for facilities like the Grand Forks Air Force Base, which is a key national security asset that serves as the lead for all Air Force Global Hawk intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations and has a growing role in U.S. space operations," he said.

In February, Andrew Hunter, an assistant secretary of the Air Force, said in a letter to North Dakota officials that the military considered the project a security risk but did not elaborate on the kinds of risks Fufeng's project would pose.

The letter prompted Grand Forks officials, who had initially welcomed the milling plant as an economic boon for the region, to withdraw support by denying building permits and refusing to connect the 370-acre (150-hectare) site to public infrastructure.

Fufeng makes products for animal nutrition, the food and beverage industry, pharmaceuticals, health and wellness, oil and gas, and others industries. It's a leading producer of xanthan gum. It denied that the plant would be used for espionage.

Lawmakers have also called for a review of foreign investments in agricultural lands. Earlier this year, Sens. Jon Tester, D-Mont., and Mike Rounds, R-S.D., introduced legislation aimed at preventing China, Russia, Iran and North Korea from acquiring U.S. farmland.

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"Countries like China who want to undermine America's status as the world's leading economic superpower have no business owning property on our own soil — especially near our military bases," Tester said in a statement Thursday.

Stafford reported from Liberty, Mo.

Charles III to be crowned in ancient rite at uncertain time

By DANICA KIRKA and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III is being crowned Saturday at Westminster Abbey, in a ceremony built on ancient traditions at a time when the British monarchy faces an uncertain future.

Trumpets sounded inside the medieval abbey and the congregation shouted "God save King Charles" as the ceremony began in front of more than 2,000 guests, including world leaders, aristocrats and celebrities. Outside, thousands of troops, tens of thousands of spectators and a smattering of protesters converged along a route that the king traveled from Buckingham Palace in a gilt-trimmed, horse-drawn carriage.

It was the final mile of a seven-decade journey for Charles from heir to monarch.

To the royal family and government, the occasion — code-named Operation Golden Orb — is a display of heritage, tradition and spectacle unmatched around the world.

The rite was expected to be watched by millions, though the awe and reverence the ceremony was designed to evoke are largely gone — and many greeted the day with apathy.

Some even met it with disdain. Republican protesters gathered outside to holler "Not my king" for a celebration of an institution they say stands for privilege and inequality, in a country of deepening poverty and fraying social ties. A handful were arrested.

As guests arrived, the church buzzed with excitement and was abloom with fragrant flowers and colorful hats. Among them were U.S. First Lady Jill Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, eight current and former British prime ministers as well as Judi Dench, Emma Thompson and Lionel Richie.

Thousands of people from across the U.K. and around the world camped overnight along a 1.3-mile (2-kilometer) route that the king and his wife, Camilla, traveled to reach the abbey.

At a traditional Anglican service slightly tweaked for modern times, Charles, clad in crimson and cream robes, swore on a Bible that he is a "true Protestant."

But for the first time, a preface was added to the coronation oath to say the Church of England "will seek to foster an environment where people of all faiths and beliefs may live freely," and the epistle from the King James Bible was read by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Britain's first Hindu leader.

A gospel choir performed a newly composed "Alleluia," and, for the first time, female clergy took part in the ceremony.

For 1,000 years and more, British monarchs have been crowned in grandiose ceremonies that confirm their right to rule.

These days, the king no longer has executive or political power, and the service is purely ceremonial since Charles automatically became king upon death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September.

The king remains the U.K.'s head of state and a symbol of national identity — and Charles will have to work to unite a multicultural nation and keep the monarchy relevant at a time when support for it is waning, especially among younger people.

The anti-monarchy group Republic said six of its members, including its chief executive, were arrested as they arrived at a protest. Police have said they will have a "low tolerance" for people seeking to disrupt the day, sparking criticism that they are clamping down on free speech.

A cost-of-living crisis is also making everyone in the U.K. poorer, raising questions about the cost of all the pomp.

Charles has sought to lead a smaller, less expensive royal machine for the 21st century. So this will be a shorter affair than Elizabeth's three-hour coronation.

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In 1953, Westminster Abbey was fitted with temporary stands to boost the seating capacity to more than 8,000, aristocrats wore crimson robes and coronets, and the coronation procession meandered 5 miles (8 kilometers) through central London so an estimated 3 million people could cheer for the glamorous 27-year-old queen.

Organizers this time shortened the procession route, trimmed the coronation service to less than two hours and sent out 2,300 invitations to world royalty, heads of state, public servants, key workers and local heroes. There were judges in wigs, soldiers with gleaming medals attached to red tunics and members of the House of Lords in their red robes.

Heir to the throne Prince William, his wife, Kate, and their three children were all in attendance. William's younger brother Prince Harry, who has publicly sparred with the family, arrived alone. His wife Meghan and their children remained at home in California.

Built around the theme "Called to Serve," the coronation service began with one of the youngest members of the congregation — a boy chorister — greeting the king. Charles responded by saying, "I come not to be served but to serve."

The moment is meant to underscore the importance of young people — and is a new addition in a service laden with the rituals through which power has been passed down to new monarchs throughout the centuries.

The symbolic peak of the two-hour service will come halfway through when Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby places the solid gold St. Edward's Crown on the monarch's head. Trumpets will sound and gun salutes will be fired across the U.K.

In another change, Charles has scrapped the traditional moment at the end of the service when nobles were asked to kneel and pledge their loyalty to the king.

Instead, Welby will invite everyone in the abbey to swear "true allegiance" to the monarch. He'll invite people watching on television to pay homage, too — though that part of the ceremony has been toned down after some criticized it as a tone-deaf effort to demand public support for Charles. Welby will now suggest people at home take a "moment of quiet reflection" or say "God Save the King."

The public's response to Charles, though, during the service and along the parade route, is key, said George Gross, a visiting research fellow at King's College, London and an expert on coronations.

"None of this matters if the public don't show up," Gross said. "If they don't care, then the whole thing doesn't really work. It is all about this interaction."

And today's public is very different from the audience that saw Elizabeth crowned.

Almost 20% of the population now come from ethnic minority groups, compared with less than 1% in the 1950s. More than 300 languages are spoken in British schools, and less than half of the population describe themselves as Christian.

Although organizers say the coronation remains a "sacred Anglican service," the ceremony will for the first time include the active participation of other faiths, including representatives of the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh traditions.

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

Sudan envoys begin talks amid pressure to end conflict

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

ASWAN, Egypt (AP) — Sudan's warring sides were beginning talks Saturday that aim to firm up a shaky cease-fire after three weeks of fierce fighting that has killed hundreds and pushed the African country to the brink of collapse, the United States and Saudi Arabia said.

The negotiations, the first between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, since the fighting broke out on April 15, were taking place in Saudi Arabia's coastal city of Jeddah, on the Red Sea, according to a joint Saudi-American statement.

The talks are part of a diplomatic initiative proposed by the kingdom and the U.S. that aims to stop the

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fighting, which has turned Sudan's capital, Khartoum, and other urban areas into battlefields and pushed hundreds of thousands from their homes.

In their joint statement, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. urged both parties to "actively engage in the talks towards a cease-fire and end to the conflict, which will spare the Sudanese people's suffering."

The statement did not offer a timeframe for the talks, which come after concerted efforts by Riyadh and other international powers to pressure the warring sides in Sudan to the negotiating table.

Since a 2021 coup that upended Sudan's transition to democracy, Saudi Arabia has been active in mediating between the ruling generals and a pro-democracy movement. And after Sudan's top two generals — commanders of the military and the paramilitary — turned on each other in April and the latest fighting broke out, Jeddah became a hub for those evacuated by sea from Sudan's main sea port of Port Sudan.

Officials from the military and the RSF said the talks would address the opening of humanitarian corridors in Khartoum and the adjacent city of Omdurman, which have been the centers of the battles.

They would also discuss providing protection to civilian infrastructure, including health facilities that have been overwhelmed and suffer from dire shortages of both staff and medical supplies, one military official said.

An RSF official they would also discuss a mechanism to monitor the cease-fire, which is one of a series of truces that failed to stop the fighting.

Meanwhile, Sudan's pro-democracy movement said the Jeddah talks would be "a first step" to stop the country's collapse and called on leaders of the military and the RSF to make a "bold decision" to end the conflict.

The movement, which is a coalition of political parties and civil society groups, had negotiated with the military for months to restore the country's democratic transition after a 2021 military coup led by army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, who also chairs the ruling sovereign council, and his deputy in the council Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.

On Saturday, Dagalo tweeted his first comment on the Jeddah talks, welcoming the initiative to establish a firm cease-fire and open humanitarian corridors. "We remain hopeful that the discussions will achieve their intended goals," he said.

At least 550 people were killed, including civilians, and more than 4,900 were wounded as of Monday, according to the Sudanese Health Ministry. The Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate, which tracks only civilian casualties, said Friday that 473 civilians have been killed in the violence and more than 2,450 have been wounded.

The fighting capped months of tensions between Burhan and Dagalo. It plunged the country into further chaos and forced foreign governments to evacuate their diplomats and thousands of foreign nationals out of Sudan. Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese were displaced inside Sudan or crossed into neighboring countries as the fighting dragged on in urban areas.

The U.N. refugee agency estimated that the number of Sudanese fleeing to neighboring countries would reach 860,000, and that aid agencies would need \$445 million to assist them.

On Saturday, a bus carrying Sudanese fleeing the fighting, overturned in Egypt's southern province of Beni Suef, leaving at least 36 Sudanese, including women and children, and two Egyptians injured, local authorities said.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese have crossed into Egypt since the fighting broke out.

Ukraine downs Russian hypersonic missile with US Patriot

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's air force claimed Saturday to have downed a Russian hypersonic missile over Kyiv using newly acquired American Patriot defense systems, the first known time the country has been able to intercept one of Moscow's most modern missiles.

Air Force commander Mykola Oleshchuk said in a Telegram post that the Kinzhal-type ballistic missile had been intercepted in an overnight attack on the Ukrainian capital earlier in the week. It was also the

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first time Ukraine is known to have used the Patriot defense systems.

"Yes, we shot down the 'unique' Kinzhal," Oleshchuk wrote. "It happened during the night time attack on May 4 in the skies of the Kyiv region."

Oleshchuk said the Kh-47 missile was launched by a MiG-31K aircraft from the Russian territory and was shot down with a Patriot missile.

The Kinzhal is one of the latest and most advanced Russian weapons. The Russian military says the air-launched ballistic missile has a range of up to 2,000 kilometers (about 1,250 miles) and flies at 10 times the speed of sound, making it hard to intercept.

A combination of hypersonic speed and a heavy warhead allows the Kinzhal to destroy heavily fortified targets, like underground bunkers or mountain tunnels.

The Ukrainian military has previously admitted lacking assets to intercept the Kinzhals.

"They were saying that the Patriot is an outdated American weapon, and Russian weapons are the best in the world," Air Force spokesman Yuriy Ihnat said on Ukraine's Channel 24 television. "Well, there is confirmation that it effectively works against even a super hypersonic missile." Ihnat said.

He said successfully intercepting the Kinzhal is "a slap in the face for Russia."

Ukraine took its first delivery of the Patriot missiles in late April. It has not specified how many of the systems it has or where they have been deployed, but they are known to have been provided by the United States, Germany and the Netherlands.

Germany and the U.S. have acknowledged each sending at least one system and the Netherlands has said it has provided two though it is not clear how many are currently in operation.

Ukrainian troops have received the extensive training needed to be able to effectively locate a target with the systems, lock on with radar and fire. Each battery requires up to 90 personnel to operate and maintain.

Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said he first asked for Patriot systems when visiting the U.S. in August 2021, months before Russia's full-scale invasion but seven years after Russia illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula.

He has described possessing the system as "a dream" but said he was told in the U.S. at the time that it was impossible.

The Patriot was first deployed by the U.S. in the 1980s. The system costs approximately \$4 million per missile, and the launchers cost about \$10 million each, according to analysts.

At such a cost, it was widely thought that Ukraine would only use the Patriots against Russian aircraft or hypersonic missiles.

In other developments, Ukraine's Special Operations Forces accused Russia of using phosphorous munitions in its attempt to wrest control of the eastern city of Bakhmut from Ukrainian forces.

Russian troops have been trying to take the city for more than nine months, but Ukrainian forces are still clinging to positions on the western edge of the city.

On Saturday, the Ukrainska Pravda newspaper quoted military officials as saying that "the enemy used phosphorus and incendiary ammunition in Bakhmut in an attempt to wipe the city off the face of the earth."

A photo accompanying the newspaper report showed an urban area lit up with fire in multiple places.

The allegations could not be independently verified.

Russian forces have not commented on the claim but have rejected previous accusations from Ukraine that they had used phosphorus.

International law prohibits the use of white phosphorus or other incendiary weapons — munitions designed to set fire to objects or cause burn injuries — in areas where there could be concentrations of civilians.

White phosphorous can also be used for illumination or to create smoke screens.

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

Botticelli's Venus is an 'influencer' and Italy is not happy

By TRISHA THOMAS and WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS Associated Press

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ROME (AP) — The Italian tourism ministry thought it had a sure-fire way to bring travelers into the country: turning a 15th century art icon into a 21st century “virtual influencer.”

The digital rendition of Venus, goddess of love, based on Sandro Botticelli’s Renaissance masterpiece “Birth of Venus,” can be seen noshing on pizza and snapping selfies for her Instagram page. Unlike the original, this Venus is fully clothed. The influencer claims to be 30, or “maybe just a wee bit (older) than that.”

But the new ad campaign is facing significant backlash — with critics calling it a “new Barbie” that trashes Italy’s cultural heritage.

The tourist campaign “trivializes our heritage in the most vulgar way, transforming Botticelli’s Venus into yet another stereotyped female beauty,” Livia Garomersini, an art historian and activist with Mi Riconosci, an art and heritage campaign organization, said in a response to the project last month.

The yearlong campaign, produced by national tourism agency ENIT and advertising group Armando Testa, is estimated to have cost 9 million euros (about \$9.9 million), according to ENIT CEO Ivana Jelinic.

Jelinic said that the campaign was designed for overseas markets to attract younger tourists. The online Venus launched in Italy on April 20 and made her international debut in Dubai at the Arabian Travel Market earlier this week.

“We liked the idea that it would be a work of art that is timeless,” Jelinic told The Associated Press, adding that Botticelli’s Venus “seemed to us like a immortal icon who could represent Italy well.”

Already the new Venus has been memed mercilessly online, appearing among trash bins, alongside Mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, and in other less-than godly places.

The criticism extends beyond the use of a masterpiece to the manner in which the campaign was orchestrated, including its use of stock images and other gaffes like a promotional video featuring a winery in Slovenia, used as a stand-in for Italy.

An even greater sin for many is the campaign’s slogan, “Open to Meraviglia” (Open to Wonder), because it mixes English into an Italian tourist campaign even as the country’s government seeks to protect the Italian language as a pillar of its culture.

There are other language faux pas.

On the campaign’s website, an automatic translator turned Brindisi, a southern Italian port town, into its literal English definition: “Toast,” according to Matteo Flora, a professor at the University of Pavia. That part of the website has now been obscured.

“Let’s not talk about the creativity point of view,” said Flora, “You may like (the campaign) or not, but on a technical point of view, it has been... a sort of avalanche of problems.”

That includes a failure to secure domains, allowing anyone to snatch the material and mock the project with it.

Flora said the campaign also wasted money. The campaign’s creative team chose to use the “intelligence of human creativity,” rather than artificial intelligence, to build the virtual Venus — but Flora showed how he could quickly come up with a similar campaign using AI at a cost of 20 euros. His social media posts have been shared by thousands of people.

The use of a likeness of Botticelli’s masterpiece has been lambasted by art historians as well, who say it vastly diminishes the beauty and mystery of the 15th century original.

“Perhaps Botticelli would not be happy about this,” said Massimo Moretti, a professor of art history at the University of Rome, Sapienza.

Any use of an iconic image like the “Birth of Venus” risks striking a cultural nerve, marketing experts say.

“The more you try to alter something that’s historic, probably the greater the outcry,” said Larry Chiagouris, professor of marketing at Pace University’s Lubin School of Business.

“People are going to say, ‘You’re changing the culture. You’re changing who we are, because it’s part of our history,’” Chiagouris added.

“I didn’t like the fact that they used the Botticelli Venus like that, since it is a piece of art,” Riccardo Rodrigo, a high school student in Rome, said. “They made it something social friendly to amuse Gen Z, I think it was unnecessary since it can be used just like it is and not modified like they did.”

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The Uffizi Galleries, which houses Botticelli's "Birth of Venus" in Florence, declined to comment on the campaign.

For the creators of the campaign, however, any press is good press.

"It has become so viral," said Jelinic of ENIT, adding that "web users have made her come alive" even when placing the new Venus in unglamorous places.

"I find (it) interesting in terms of social communication," Jelinic said. "Our campaign is more appealing than (critics) want to admit."

Tourism officials plan to expand the campaign through the use of billboards as well as video screens in airports and railways.

Grantham-Philips reported from Washington, D.C.

5 things to look for during King Charles III's coronation

BY DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III's coronation is a chance to unite people with the history and pageantry of the monarchy, but those traditions are also full of potential controversies as he tries to show that the monarchy still has a role to play in modern Britain.

The new king has already recognized these challenges by adjusting the coronation festivities to the realities of today.

This coronation will be shorter and more inclusive than his mother's in 1953. Faith leaders from outside the Church of England will take an active role in the ceremony for the first time. And people from all four nations of the United Kingdom, as well as the Commonwealth, will take part.

Here are five artifacts that will play a central role in Saturday's events.

THE CORONATION CHAIR AND STONE OF SCONE

King Charles III will sit atop more than 1,500 years of Irish, Scottish and English history when he is crowned Saturday at Westminster Abbey.

The crown will be placed on Charles' head as he sits in the Coronation Chair suspended over the Stone of Scone (pronounced "scoon") — the sacred slab of sandstone on which Scottish kings were crowned. The chair has been part of every coronation since 1308.

The 2.05-meter (6 feet 9 inches) tall chair is made of oak and was originally covered in gold leaf and colored glass. The gold has long since worn away and the chair is now pocked with graffiti, including one message that reads "P. Abbott slept in this chair 5-6 July 1800."

Edward I had the chair built specifically to enclose the Stone of Scone, known by Scots as the Stone of Destiny, after he forcibly took the artifact from Scotland and moved it to the abbey in the late 13th Century. The stone's history goes back much further, however. Fergus Mor MacEirc, the founder of Scotland's royal line, reputedly brought the stone with him when he moved his seat from Ireland to Scotland around 498, Westminster Abbey said. Before that time, it was used as the coronation stone for Irish kings.

In 1996, Prime Minister John Major returned the stone to Scotland, with the understanding that it would come back to England for use in future coronations. In recent days, the stone was temporarily removed from its current home at Edinburgh Castle in a ceremony overseen by Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf, then transported to the abbey, where a special service was held to mark its return.

CORONATION SPOON

The gold-plated silver Coronation Spoon is the only piece of the coronation regalia that survived the English Civil War. After King Charles I was executed in 1649, the rest of the collection was either melted down or sold off as Parliament sought to abolish the monarchy forever.

The spoon is central to the most sacred part of the coronation ceremony, when the Archbishop of Canterbury will pour holy oil from an eagle-shaped ampulla, or flask, into the spoon and then rub it on the king's hands, breast and head.

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The ceremony has roots in the biblical story of the anointing of King Solomon and was originally designed to confirm that the sovereign was appointed directly by God. While the monarch is no longer considered divine, the ceremony confirms his status as supreme governor of the Church of England.

The 26.7-centimeter (10.5-inch) spoon is believed to have been made during the 12th Century for either King Henry II or King Richard I, and may have originally been used for mixing water and wine, according to the Royal Collection Trust.

THE CULLINAN DIAMOND

Two stones cut from the Cullinan Diamond — the largest rough diamond ever found — will feature prominently in the coronation, fueling controversy the royal family would rather avoid.

For many in South Africa, where the original stone was found in 1905, the gems are a symbol of colonial oppression under British rule and they should be returned.

Cullinan I, a huge drop-shaped stone weighing 530.2 carats, is mounted in the Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross. On Saturday, the scepter will be handed to Charles as a symbol of his temporal power.

Cullinan II, a cushion-shaped gem of 317.4 carats, is mounted on the front of the Imperial State Crown that Charles will wear as he leaves Westminster Abbey.

Charles sidestepped a similar controversy when Buckingham Palace announced that his wife, Camilla, wouldn't wear the crown of Queen Elizabeth, the queen mother, on coronation day.

That crown contains the famous Koh-i-noor diamond that India, Pakistan and Iran all claim. The gem became part of the Crown Jewels after 11-year-old Maharaja Duleep Singh was forced to surrender it after the conquest of the Punjab in 1849.

ST. EDWARD'S CROWN

The crowning moment of the coronation ceremony will occur, literally, when the Archbishop of Canterbury places St. Edward's Crown on Charles' head.

Because of its significance as the centerpiece of the coronation, this will be the only time during his reign that the monarch will wear the solid gold crown, which features a purple velvet cap, ermine band and criss-crossed arches topped by a cross.

After the ceremony, Charles will swap the 2.08-kilogram (4.6-pound) crown for the Imperial State Crown, which weighs about half as much, for the procession back to Buckingham Palace.

Queen Elizabeth II once said that even the lighter crown was tricky because it would fall off if she didn't keep her head upright while reading the annual speech at the state opening of Parliament.

"There are some disadvantages to crowns, but otherwise they're quite important things," the late queen told Sky News in 2018, flashing a smile.

The current St. Edward's Crown was made for the coronation of King Charles II in 1661 and has been used in every coronation since then. It is a replica of the original crown, which was created in the 11th century and melted down after the execution of Charles I in 1649.

The crown glitters with stones including tourmalines, white and yellow topazes, rubies, amethysts, sapphires, garnet, peridot, zircons, spinel and aquamarines.

Until the early 20th century, the crown was decorated with rented stones that were returned after the coronation, according to the Royal Collection Trust. It was permanently set with semi-precious stones ahead of the coronation of George V in 1911.

THE GOLD STATE COACH

King Charles III and Queen Camilla will travel back to Buckingham Palace from Westminster Abbey in the Gold State Coach, a 261-year-old relic that is renowned as much for its uncomfortable ride as its lavish decoration.

The coach was built in 1762 under the reign of King George III and it has been used in every coronation since 1831.

It is made of wood and plated with gold leaf, from the cherubs on the roof to the Greek sea gods over each wheel. About the only things that aren't gilded are the side panels painted with Roman gods and goddesses and, of course, the interior, which is upholstered in satin and velvet.

But the coach is heavy — four tons — and old, meaning it only ever travels at walking speed.

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And while it may look luxurious, the coach features a notoriously bumpy ride because it is slung from leather straps rather than modern metal springs.

The late queen wasn't a fan.

"Horrible! It's not meant for traveling in at all," she said in 2018 in an interview with Sky News. "Not very comfortable."

That's one reason Charles and Camilla will ride to the coronation in the Diamond Jubilee State Coach, which is equipped with hydraulic shock absorbers, as well as heat and air conditioning.

California reparations task force to vote on formal apology

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — California's reparations task force is set to wrap up its first-in-the-nation work Saturday, voting on recommendations for a formal apology for the state's role in perpetuating a legacy of slavery and discrimination that has thwarted Black residents from living freely for decades.

The nine-member committee, which first convened nearly two years ago, is expected to give final approval at a meeting in Oakland to a hefty list of ambitious proposals that will then be in the hands of state lawmakers.

The recommendations range from the creation of a new agency to provide services to descendants of enslaved people to tailored calculations of what the state owes residents for decades of harms such as overpolicing and housing discrimination.

"An apology and an admission of wrongdoing just by itself is not going to be satisfactory for reparations," said Chris Lodgson, an organizer with the Coalition for a Just and Equitable California, a reparations advocacy group.

The apology crafted by the Legislature must "include a censure of the gravest barbarities" carried out on behalf of the state, according to the draft recommendation to be voted on.

Such a list could include a censure of former California Gov. Peter Hardeman Burnett, the state's first elected leader and a white supremacist who encouraged laws to exclude Black people from California.

Though California entered the union as a free state, it did not enact laws to enforce such freedom, the draft states. The state Supreme Court enforced the federal Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed for the capture and return of runaway enslaved people, until the official end of enslavement in 1865, according to the draft.

"By participating in these horrors, California further perpetuated the harms African Americans faced, imbuing racial prejudice throughout society through segregation, public and private discrimination, and unequal disbursement of state and federal funding," the draft states.

The task force could vote for the state to apologize publicly and acknowledge responsibility for past wrongs in the presence of people whose ancestors were enslaved. The acknowledgement could be informed by the descendants recounting injustices they have faced and include a promise that California will not repeat the same mistakes.

The statement would follow apologies by the state for placing Japanese Americans in internment camps during World War II and perpetuating violence against and mistreatment of Native Americans.

Saturday's meeting marks a crucial moment in a long fight for local, state and federal governments to offer recompense for policies that have driven overpolicing of Black neighborhoods, housing discrimination, health disparities and other harms. But the proposals are far from implementation by the state.

"There's no way in the world that many of these recommendations are going to get through because of the inflationary impact," said Roy L. Brooks, a professor and reparations scholar at the University of San Diego School of Law.

Documents outlining recommendations to the task force by economists previously showed the state could owe upwards of \$800 billion, or more than 2.5 times its annual budget, for overpolicing, disproportionate incarceration and housing discrimination against Black people.

The estimate has dramatically decreased in the latest draft report released by the task force, which has not responded to email and phone requests seeking comment on the reduction.

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Secretary of State Shirley Weber, a former Democratic assemblymember, authored legislation in 2020 creating the task force. The goal was to study proposals for how California can offer recompense for harms perpetuated against descendants of enslaved people, according to the bill. It was not to recommend reparations in lieu of proposals from the federal government.

The task force previously voted to limit reparations to descendants of enslaved or formerly enslaved Black people who were in the country by the end of the 19th century.

The California group's work has garnered nationwide attention, with reparations efforts elsewhere experiencing mixed results.

Evanston, Illinois, a Chicago suburb, offered housing vouchers to Black residents but few have benefited from the program. New York state's latest bill to study reparations passed the state Assembly but the state Senate has not yet voted on the measure. In Congress, a decades-old proposal to create a commission studying federal reparations for African Americans has stalled.

Mary Frances Berry, a University of Pennsylvania history professor who wrote a book about a formerly enslaved woman's fight for reparations, said the California task force's efforts "should be encouraging."

"The fact that California was able to move this far in order to come up with a positive answer to the question of reparations is something that should ... have influence on people in other parts of the country," she said.

Sophie Austin 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 Austin on Twitter: @sophieadanna

Biden hopes strong job market means soft landing for economy

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For President Joe Biden, the past few days have raised hopes that the U.S. economy can stick a soft landing—possibly avoiding a recession as the 2024 election nears.

Most U.S. adults have downbeat feelings about Biden's economic leadership, as high inflation has overshadowed a strong jobs market. It's long been economic orthodoxy that efforts to beat back inflation by the Federal Reserve would result in unemployment rising and the country sinking into recession.

But to the president and some economists, the April jobs report issued Friday challenged that theory with its 3.4% unemployment rate and 253,000 jobs gained.

The strong jobs report came after a Wednesday Fed meeting that suggested the U.S. central bank might pause on its rate hikes, the primary tool for cutting inflation from its still high 5% to something closer to 2%. Talks are also starting over the need to raise the debt limit — with Biden inviting congressional leaders to the White House for a Tuesday meeting in hopes of ultimately getting a commitment to avoid a default.

For a president seeking a second term, Biden struck a confident tone Friday when meeting with aides even as he pushed GOP lawmakers for a clean increase on the debt cap.

"We're trending in the right direction and I think we're making real progress," he said about the overall economy, telling Republican lawmakers to not "undo all this progress" with the debt limit standoff.

The economy could still stumble. Several economists forecast a recession this year, considering the wild cards of the war in Ukraine, global tensions and the debt limit fight. But the steady job gains have suggested to some policymakers and economists that it's possible to curb inflation without layoffs.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell told reporters Wednesday that the current trends are going against history.

"It wasn't supposed to be possible for job openings to decline by as much as they've declined without unemployment going up," Powell said. "Well, that's what we've seen. There's no promises in this, but it just seems that to me that it's possible that we will continue to have a cooling in the labor market without having the big increases in unemployment."

Heidi Shierholz, president of the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank, said there are currently no signs of a recession and if one erupts it will be due to Fed overreach.

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"We are in the middle of a soft landing right now — we have shown we can bring down wage growth, bring down inflation," she said.

But that doesn't mean voters are pleased with the economy. Inflation remains a persistent irritant as Biden has begun the process of launching his reelection campaign. GOP lawmakers have used the high prices in the wake of the pandemic as a political cudgel, with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., insisting on spending cuts as part of a debt limit deal in order to reduce inflation. The debt limit deals with spending obligations that the United States has already incurred and not future spending.

Just as Biden trumpets the solid job market, Fed officials could interpret the hiring as evidence that they need to raise rates higher and that could cause more pain for the economy and the Democratic administration.

"The starting point is the fact that inflation remains stubbornly high and politically troublesome," said Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former director of the Congressional Budget Office and president of the center-right American Action Forum. "The Fed would like to get it down. The data don't just seem to behave. The Fed could very well hike again in June — and that would cause the financial markets to lose their collective mind."

There is also the possibility that lawmakers fail to avert a default. Or, there could be so much drama over getting to a debt limit deal that the economy gets weaker this summer. The Treasury Department has forecast that its accounting maneuvers to keep the government running could be exhausted by early June, at which point an agreement would need to be in place.

The White House released estimates showing that brinkmanship over the debt limit — even if a deal comes together — could still cost the economy 200,000 jobs.

Nor are all economists convinced the U.S. economy has escaped the gravitational pull of a recession.

Many believe it could occur later this year, possibly shaping the 2024 campaign. The jobs report might only be a temporary reassurance for Biden, rather than a lasting win. The historical pattern could reassert itself right as the campaign season begins to intensify.

"The strong performance of the labor market dampens expectations of an immediate recession," said Kathy Bostjancic, chief economist at the insurance company Nationwide. "Our view remains that a recession remains on the horizon, unfolding in the second half of the year, but the ongoing solid job gains and buoyancy in wage growth does suggest it could start later in the year."

WV candidates still fighting over 2020; voters, not so much

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Some Republican officeholders in West Virginia are already revving up campaigns for governor in 2024. But first, they have to sort out what happened in 2020.

Years after Joe Biden was declared the winner of the presidency, Secretary of State Mac Warner and Attorney General Patrick Morrisey say they remain concerned the Democrat's victory was not legitimate. They persist in those views despite repeated investigations, audits and court cases concluding there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud or improper counting that could have changed the results.

Warner, who runs elections in West Virginia, toed the line for more than two years before going on a talk show this week to say he can "now firmly say" he believes the election was stolen.

"That election was thrown, it was stolen, and we should not rest easy," he said on Talk Radio WRNR in the state's Eastern Panhandle.

Asserting that the presidential election was stolen has been a staple for some Republicans ever since Biden was named the winner over Trump in November 2020. Trump himself has flogged those accusations, though he has recently shifted his complaints somewhat from specific disputes about voting procedures in swing states. He has recently embraced broader claims that tech companies, the media and federal intelligence officials colluded to cover up incriminating information found on the laptop of Biden's only surviving son, Hunter.

It's these allegations Warner says he finds credible, pushing past social media executives' and federal

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law enforcement's adamant denials that they were pressured by Democrats to suppress the story. In an interview this week, Warner called the alleged actions "treasonous" and said they need to be examined more deeply before the next election.

But even in West Virginia, where every county voted to elect Trump in two presidential elections, some voters see recurring concerns about 2020 as nothing more than a GOP check-off.

"It doesn't matter what Republican is going to be in the field, they're all going to say that 2020 was fake," said Trevor Southerly, a 20-year-old community college student from Moorefield. "It's a political move, and they have to make the move or they're going to lose."

Southerly said what draws him to Morrissey is his support for school choice programs and growing West Virginia's energy production workforce.

The Republican Party, Southerly said, has become too focused on "national issues" and talking points instead of what matters to people at the local level — especially in West Virginia, which consistently ranks among the highest in the nation for poverty and overdose death rates and among the lowest for life expectancy and educational attainment.

He thinks Morrissey has better plans to address those issues.

Serving as Attorney General since 2013 — a year before the state Legislature flipped from Democrat to Republican majority for the first time in decades — has given Morrissey an opportunity to lean into his self-described role as the state's "conservative fighter." He's defended laws passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature on school choice, transgender participation in sports and abortion.

Before that, he joined a lawsuit to overturn the 2020 election that was dismissed by the conservative-dominated U.S. Supreme Court.

In an interview this week, Morrissey repeated past claims about "significant irregularities" in the 2020 election. He refused to say definitively whether he believes Biden's victory was fraudulent.

"He's serving as the president of the United States. We know that that's what's going on right now," Morrissey said.

After West Virginia was the last in the nation to certify a presidential winner in 2020, U.S. Army veteran Warner said he supported the state's involvement in the legal effort to challenge the results.

Warner also made an appearance at a "March for Trump" rally in Charleston after the election, where he appeared to be holding up a "Stop the Steal" sign.

Warner was one of the first GOP election officials to opt to withdraw from the Electronic Registration Information Center, a nonpartisan group with a record of combating voter fraud. Trump has characterized it as a "terrible" system that "pumps the rolls" for Democrats and does nothing to clean them up."

But Warner never said publicly before this week that he believes the election was stolen, saying that view has crystallized in his mind as new information has come out.

But even voters who agree say other issues matter more.

Ken Drum, who leads the GOP in Harrison County, said he doesn't believe Biden won the race legitimately, but his top concern is finding a candidate that will keep almost all abortions illegal in the state and protect gun rights. For him, that's Morrissey.

Dee Truman, a welder's helper from Roane County, said she trusts Warner because his family has lived in West Virginia for six generations and he understands why preserving coal and getting the state's gas pipelines going again are important to workers like her.

She said she has concerns about election security nationally after 2020, but she's been impressed by Warner's work to remove hundreds of thousands of people from the voting rolls who he said weren't eligible to vote. Those efforts make her feel like West Virginia is "probably one of the safest" states when it comes to election security.

Lori and Tim Smith are both registered independents and run a Marshall County business helping people make homes and business accessible for people with disabilities. Lori, 54, said changes Warner made as secretary of state have saved them hours of paperwork.

Warner also started a pilot project that allowed military and overseas citizens to use a mobile voting application. That mattered to Tim, an Army veteran, who had experienced challenges voting when he

was deployed.

"He is wanting people to legitimately, rightfully vote and eliminate any type of any type of cheating, quite honestly," Lori said. "I don't feel that there's anything wrong with wanting to make a system more efficient and more fair."

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.

Texas petrochemical plant fire sends 9 workers to hospital

By JUAN LOZANO and ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Fire erupted at a petrochemical plant in the Houston area Friday, sending nine workers to a hospital and causing a huge plume of smoke visible for miles.

Emergency responders were called to help around 3 p.m. at the Shell facility in Deer Park, a suburb east of Houston. The city of Deer Park said in an advisory that there was no shelter-in-place order for residents.

Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said earlier in the day that five contracted employees were hospitalized for precautionary reasons, adding that they were not burned. He said they were taken to a hospital due to heat exhaustion and proximity to the fire.

Shell Deer Park officials said on Twitter Friday night that they were continuing to respond to the fire, all workers were accounted for and nine workers had been released after undergoing precautionary medical evaluations.

Nothing exploded, Gonzalez said, although the sheriff's office initially responded to emergency calls saying there was an explosion.

As of Friday evening, the fire was still burning but had died down and was contained, Gonzalez said.

The cause of the blaze was still being investigated. The fire started while the olefins unit was undergoing routine maintenance. Air monitoring for any impact from the fire was ongoing, and had not detected any harmful levels of chemicals, Shell Deer Park said.

"There is no danger to the nearby community," the post said.

The fire started at about 2:56 p.m. in the facility's olefins unit. The product that ignited includes cracked heavy gas oil, cracked light gas oil and gasoline, Shell Deer Park said.

"The cause of the fire will be the subject of a future investigation, and our immediate priorities remain the safety of people and the environment," facility officials said.

Shell was conducting its own air quality monitoring, but the city has yet to receive an update, said Kaitlyn Bluejacket, a spokesperson for Deer Park.

The city was advised by Shell that there was no need at the time to shelter in place, but that the city would update residents if that changed, Bluejacket said.

Fire crews from the Deer Park facility and nearby plants responded.

Wind conditions were favorable for fighting the blaze, although temperatures soared to near 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32.2 degrees Celsius) in the Houston area, but high humidity made it feel hotter than 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius.)

Harris County Fire Marshal Captain James Singleton said his office would be in Deer Park through the weekend investigating.

"You're looking at a large number of people that need to be interviewed," Singleton said. "Everyone who was at the unit at the time of the fire, the controllers, management, anybody that called 911."

Houston meteorologists said the smoke plumes were visible from space via satellite.

Facility fires are not uncommon in the area, with the strong presence of the petrochemical industry. In March, an explosion and a fire erupted at a facility owned by INEOS Phenol in nearby Pasadena, Texas, leaving one injured.

A fire in 2019 at a facility owned by Intercontinental Terminals Company burned for days and though it

caused no injuries, it triggered air quality warnings.

Coronado reported from Austin, Texas. AP writer Lisa Baumann reported from Bellingham, Washington.

Paraguay far-right populist presidential candidate arrested

By DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Paraguayan police on Friday detained Paraguayo Cubas, a far-right populist who came in third in Sunday's presidential election and encouraged his supporters to protest over his unsubstantiated claims that the vote was marred by fraud.

Cubas was being held in preventive detention under an order by the Attorney General's Office that is accusing him of breach of the peace, Police Commissioner Gilberto Fleitas said in a radio interview.

Cubas, the candidate of the National Crusade Party who received 23% of the votes Sunday, was broadcasting live on Facebook when officers detained him outside his hotel in San Lorenzo, around 15 kilometers (9 miles) from Asunción.

Fleitas said Cubas got into a police vehicle "without any difficulty," but he continued streaming live.

In his broadcast from inside the police vehicle, Cubas chatted with officers and focused the camera on his handcuffs. "You can see now I'm being imprisoned," he said. "All the criminals in this country should be handcuffed like Paraguayo Cubas."

Cubas had been telling supporters since Monday that he was heading to the capital to lead a series of protests that had led to isolated clashes with police, largely outside the electoral court in Asunción.

"We will remain on the streets until Paraguayo Cubas is released," said Juan Reyes, one of hundreds of Cubas supporters who took part in demonstrations outside the electoral court.

At least 208 people have been detained "for disturbance of public peace and other punishable offenses within the framework of the demonstrations taking place in the national territory," police said Thursday.

Efraín Alegre, who as the candidate of a broad-based opposition coalition came in second place during Sunday's election, demanded Cubas be released along with everyone who has been detained in protests this week.

"We demand the release of Paraguayo Cubas and all citizens imprisoned for demanding transparency," Alegre wrote on social media.

Alegre, who received 27% of the vote Sunday, conceded the race shortly after polls closed, but then on Monday called for a manual count of votes and an international audit of the country's electronic voting system after Cubas aired his fraud allegations.

The Organization of American States, which deployed an observation mission for the election, said Tuesday there was "no reason to doubt the results" of the vote count.

Santiago Peña of the long-ruling Colorado Party easily won Sunday's presidential election with 43% of the vote.

Over the past few days, Cubas has published images of supporters welcoming him in different parts of the country as he made his way toward the capital from Ciudad del Este, a city on the border with Brazil and Argentina.

Some 1,500 to 1,800 law enforcement officers were deployed outside the electoral court Friday for the protest staged by Cubas supporters. Authorities also prepared for any demonstration outside the police station where Cubas was taken.

Associated Press photo journalist Jorge Sáenz in Asunción contributed to this report.

Mayorkas: US border 'very challenging' as asylum limits end

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

BROWNSVILLE, Texas (AP) — U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said Friday that

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authorities faced "extremely challenging" circumstances along the border with Mexico days before pandemic-related asylum restrictions end.

A surge of Venezuelan migrants through South Texas, particularly in and around Brownsville, has occurred over the last two weeks for reasons that Mayorkas said were unclear. On Thursday, 4,000 of about 6,000 migrants in Border Patrol custody in Texas' Rio Grande Valley were Venezuelan.

Mayorkas noted that Mexico agreed this week to continue taking back Venezuelans who enter the U.S. illegally after asylum restrictions end Thursday, along with Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans. Migrants have been expelled from the U.S. more than 2.8 million times since March 2020 under what is known as Title 42 authority.

The secretary reaffirmed plans to finalize a new policy by Thursday that will make it extremely difficult for migrants to seek asylum if they pass through another country, like Mexico, on their way to the U.S. border.

"The situation at the border is a very serious one, a very challenging one and a very difficult one," Mayorkas said.

Illegal crossings tumbled after President Joe Biden announced asylum restrictions in January, but they have risen since mid-April. Brandon Judd, president of the National Border Patrol Council, said this week they have been hovering around 7,200 daily, up from about 5,200 in March.

Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz said 1,500 active-duty troops will be dispatched to El Paso, Texas, adding to 2,500 National Guard troops already positioned across the border. Ortiz said El Paso was chosen because it has been a busy corridor for illegal crossings over the last six months. The troop deployment was announced this week but not the location.

Mayorkas, on his second day of a visit to the Rio Grande Valley, said smugglers were deceiving migrants and luring them on a dangerous journey. "The border is not open, it has not been open, and it will not be open subsequent to May 11," he said.

Mexican Foreign Affairs Secretary Marcelo Ebrard echoed Mayorkas' sentiment about smugglers spreading misinformation.

"We're seeing a very significant flow (of migrants) in recent days on the basis of a hoax," Ebrard said at a news conference. He said smugglers are saying, "Hurry up to get to the United States by crossing Mexico because on May 11 they're going to end Title 42."

"It's a trick and they're at risk," Ebrard said.

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador urged those who want to migrate to follow legal pathways, such as applying in U.S. processing centers scheduled to open in Guatemala and Colombia. He said Mexico was not making special preparations for the end of Title 42 because he didn't expect a surge.

"A lot of people won't let themselves be tricked," the president said.

Mayorkas touted new legal pathways, which include parole for up to 30,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans a month who apply online with a financial sponsor. But he said the Biden administration could only do so much without Congress.

"We have a plan, we are executing on that plan," Mayorkas said. "Fundamentally, however, we are working within a broken immigration system that for decades has been in dire need of reform."

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said Friday that it is raising the number of people admitted to the country at land crossings with Mexico to 1,000 a day from 740 using a mobile app called CBPOne that was extended in January to asylum-seekers. Demand has far outweighed available slots.

The administration faced a setback, at least a temporary one, when Colombia said Thursday that it suspended deportation flights from the U.S. due to "cruel and degrading" treatment of migrants. Colombia's immigration agency said it canceled returns of 1,200 Colombians after complaints about conditions in U.S. detention centers and on the flights.

Associated Press writer Christopher Sherman in Mexico City contributed.

Charges in NYC chokehold death may hinge on 'reasonableness'

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The potential criminal charges against a U.S. Marine veteran who put Jordan Neely in a fatal chokehold aboard a New York City subway train might depend on whether a "reasonable" New Yorker would have acted similarly.

Neely, a locally-known Michael Jackson impersonator who friends say suffered from worsening mental health, died Monday when a fellow rider pulled him to the floor and pinned him with a hold taught in combat training.

Neely had been screaming at other passengers but hadn't attacked anyone, according to a freelance journalist who recorded video of his final minutes.

The man who administered the chokehold, Daniel Penny, said through his lawyers Friday that he was only protecting himself after Neely threatened him and other passengers.

"Daniel never intended to harm Mr. Neely and could not have foreseen his untimely death," said his lawyers, Thomas Kenniff and Steven Raiser.

The Manhattan District Attorney's Office is investigating the incident and no charges have been announced.

If a case does go forward, an argument of self-defense would likely brush up against a "tricky" legal requirement, according to Mark Bederow, a former assistant district attorney in Manhattan.

Under New York's penal code, a person who uses deadly force must not only prove that they feared for their own life or someone else's, but that any reasonable person would have felt the same way.

"Suppose the Marine says, 'I honest to God thought I had no choice but to save someone,' the question would be whether an objectively reasonable person in his circumstances would have felt the same," Bederow said.

The interpretation of that statute was last clarified by the state's highest court in 1986, in response to Bernhard Goetz's shooting of four teenagers aboard a subway, an infamous case that has drawn comparisons to Neely's death.

In 1984, Goetz, who was white, shot four young Black men after one of them asked him for \$5. Goetz said he thought he was being robbed. A jury ultimately acquitted Goetz of attempted murder but convicted him of carrying an unlicensed handgun.

Neely's killing has set off an emotionally-charged debate in New York about compassion and mental illness.

Most people who ride the subway system have had occasional uncomfortable encounters with people who shout or behave in unsettling ways, but pose no danger to anyone. The most common response is to simply ignore it or move to a different car. It is unclear why either Penny, or two other men who can be seen on the video helping to restrain Neely, decided to act.

In a statement Friday, Penny's lawyers didn't offer details of what happened, other than to say that "when Mr. Neely began aggressively threatening Daniel Penny and the other passengers, Daniel, with the help of others, acted to protect themselves, until help arrived."

No arrests were made by police, prompting outrage from some who demanded criminal charges in the death.

Others, including New York City Mayor Eric Adams, have urged caution, highlighting the rights of riders to defend themselves in certain situations as well as the perils of a transit system that often serves as a shelter for the city's neediest residents.

Bederow predicted Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg may choose to bring the case before a grand jury, a process sometimes used in controversial or complex cases. A charge of second degree manslaughter or criminally negligent homicide was most likely, he said.

Walter Signorelli, a former NYPD inspector and professor at John Jay College, said he was uncertain charges would be filed, given the apparent fear among riders in response to Neely's behavior. If the case went to trial, he said a jury could empathize with the defendant.

"It's not like he's a villain," Signorelli said. "He did what he thought was right and what seemed reasonable to him. He's stepping up where most people turn away."

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The defense could also highlight Neely's criminal record, which includes dozens of arrests, ranging from disorderly conduct to assault. Most recently, in 2021, he was charged with assaulting a 67-year-old woman leaving a subway station. After pleading guilty, he missed a court date, leading to a warrant for his arrest that was still active at the time of his death.

At the same time, legal experts said Neely's record would have been unknown to people inside the subway car.

The fact that Penny served in the U.S. Marines could also count against him, if prosecutors argued that he had the training to know better than to use a dangerous chokehold. Military records show he served in the corps from 2017 to 2021, rising to the rank of sergeant. His lawyers said he's now a college student.

Video of the incident shows Penny placing Neely in a chokehold for several minutes. He maintained the grip even after Neely stopped struggling.

"Even if you found him initially justified, the question then becomes how much is too much?" Bederow said. "If you look at that video, I don't think anyone would say that guy is a threat at that point in time."

As Neely lay face down on the subway car's floor, still wrapped in the chokehold, at least one bystander can be heard on the video urging restraint, warning that they might be killing him.

"You've got to let him go," the man says.

Another witness, Johnny Grima, then tells Penny and the other riders that the unconscious Neely could choke on his spit if they aren't careful.

Grima arrived inside the subway car as the chokehold was in progress, and said he was deeply disturbed by the scene. He said the men assured him that Neely was still breathing.

"But when they let him go he just fell limp, staring off into space," Grima said. "His eyes were open, but there was no light."

Proud Boys 1/6 verdict boosts Justice Dept. in Trump probe

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío wasn't even in Washington when members of his extremist group, angry over Donald Trump's election loss, stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Yet federal prosecutors, using his words, won a conviction on the most serious charge levied in the insurrection.

The seditious conspiracy guilty verdicts of Tarrío and three lieutenants handed down Thursday — after a contentious and erratic trial that lasted more than twice as long as expected — bolster the Justice Department's record in its historic prosecution of the Capitol attack. The investigation has now led to convictions against two top extremist group leaders on a legally complex charge that's rarely ever brought and can be difficult to prove.

The verdicts could further embolden the Justice Department and special counsel Jack Smith as they dig into efforts by Trump and his allies to undo President Joe Biden's victory.

Mostly in private, Smith's work is proceeding apace. Just last week, a federal grand jury — meeting in the same courthouse where the Proud Boys trial was held — heard hours of testimony from former Vice President Mike Pence, who has publicly described a pressure campaign by Trump aimed at getting him to halt Congress' certification of the election results.

In the Proud Boys case, prosecutors secured a conviction by relying on Jan. 6 rhetoric and a legal theory alleging that Tarrío and his lieutenants mobilized a loyal group of foot soldiers — or "tools" — to supply the force necessary to carry out their plot to stop the transfer of power from Trump to Biden on Jan. 20.

Could the Justice Department follow a similar path with Trump? After all, just before the riot erupted he urged his supporters to go to the Capitol and "fight like hell." The House committee that investigated the insurrection recommended Trump be prosecuted for "assisting and providing aid and comfort to an insurrection."

"Who inspired them to do that? Who directed them to do that? Who was the person telling his followers to 'fight like hell'? Of course, that's former President Trump," said Jimmy Gurulé, a University of Notre Dame law professor. "He's not silent. He's not oblivious to what's going on. He's leading the charge. He's

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encouraging them to act.”

But some experts say the successful prosecution of the Proud Boys may not make it any easier to bring a case against Trump.

“Tarrío wasn’t there, but he was responsible because he was the one who was an organizer and leader,” said Laurie Levenson, a former federal prosecutor now a professor at Loyola Marymount Law School. “People might say ‘Well, wouldn’t that apply to Trump?’ It might,” she said.

“But you have to again have the very direct evidence that Trump calling people to storm the Capitol, he was calling them to violence. And I’m not sure we have the answer to that yet, although I think the special counsel is getting closer, putting people like Mike Pence in the grand jury,” she added.

Attorney General Merrick Garland alluded to the wider investigation after Tarrío’s conviction, declaring, “Our work will continue.”

“Today’s verdict makes clear the Justice Department will do everything in its power to defend the American people and American democracy,” Garland said.

Trump loomed large over the monthslong Proud Boys trial at the U.S. Courthouse in Washington, where the Capitol can be seen in the distance from the windows. Lawyers for one of Tarrío’s co-defendants at one point said they wanted to call the former president to the witness stand, although the idea went nowhere.

Prosecutors argued that the Proud Boys saw themselves as “Trump’s army” and were prepared to do whatever it took to keep their preferred leader in power. Messages displayed throughout the trial showed Tarrío warning that the Proud Boys would become “political prisoners” if Biden were to become president. As the riot proceeded, he gloated about his group’s role, writing in one message, “We did this.”

Tarrío’s lawyers, however, sought to use Trump as part of his defense, claiming the former president was to blame and that prosecutors were trying to use Tarrío as a scapegoat for the president — an argument jurors appear to have roundly rejected.

Trump has denied inciting any violence on Jan. 6 and has argued that he was fully permitted by the First Amendment to challenge his loss to Biden.

This was the third seditious conspiracy trial stemming from the riot, which left dozens of police officers injured and sent lawmakers dashing for safety and into hiding. Stewart Rhodes — the founder of the Oath Keepers, another far-right extremist group — was convicted in November, and the Justice Department in a court filing Friday recommended he be sentenced to 25 years in prison. Four other Oath Keepers were convicted in a second trial.

Tarrío was at a hotel in Baltimore when the chaos unfolded on Jan. 6, having been kicked out of the capital city after being arrested two days earlier on allegations that he defaced a Black Lives Matter banner. Law enforcement later said that Tarrío was picked up in part to quell potential violence.

Three Proud Boys members were convicted of the sedition charge alongside him: Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs and Zachary Rehl. A fifth defendant, Dominic Pezzola, was acquitted of seditious conspiracy, but convicted of other serious crimes.

It’s not clear how closely special counsel Jack Smith and his team of prosecutors were tracking the trial or taking stock of the verdicts. Smith has his own team of prosecutors — separate from Justice Department lawyers working on more than 1,000 Jan. 6 cases who are probing efforts by Trump and his allies to subvert the election results.

Since his appointment in November, Smith has cast a broad net in demanding interviews and testimony related to fundraising, Trump’s rally that preceded the riot on Jan. 6, and communications between Trump associates and election officials in battleground states. Separately, Smith is investigating the presence of classified documents at Trump’s Florida Mar-a-Lago estate and Trump’s potential efforts to obstruct the government’s work to get them back.

In Georgia on Friday, the attorney for eight Republican fake electors who signed a certificate falsely saying Trump had won the state said they had agreed to immunity deals in Georgia’s investigation into Trump’s actions.

As for the Proud Boys, George Washington University law professor Stephen Saltzburg, who used to

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work in the Justice Department, said he believes Thursday's verdict will have "zero impact" on Smith and his team. There hasn't been any evidence of communications between high-ranking Trump White House officials and the Proud Boys, he noted.

"If that sort of thing does exist, then it wouldn't matter what the jury did in this (Proud Boys) case because there would be independent evidence that other people were conspiring," Saltzburg said. "If there's not similar evidence involving the president and people around him, then it's a harder case."

One of the hallmarks of a conspiracy charge is that prosecutors don't have to allege a defendant took every action themselves, said Randall Eliason, another former federal prosecutor now a GW law professor.

"So someone like Tarrio doesn't have to actually participate in the riot itself and can still be held accountable," Eliason said. "The same is true of people in the White House" and anyone else who could reasonably be considered to have been part of the conspiracy without having set foot in the Capitol, he said.

Still, Eliason downplayed the impact the verdict could have on Smith's charging decisions, noting that it's hardly a revelation that conspiracies can wrap up a broad range of defendants and not just direct participants.

"I wouldn't say personally that this verdict is going to embolden him to do something he might otherwise have worried about doing," he said.

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press reporter Lindsay Whitehurst in Washington contributed to this report.

For more on Donald Trump-related investigations: <https://apnews.com/hub/donald-trump>.

Man gets 14 years in 1/6 case, longest sentence imposed yet

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Kentucky man with a long criminal record was sentenced Friday to a record-setting 14 years in prison for attacking police officers with pepper spray and a chair as he stormed the U.S. Capitol with his wife.

Peter Schwartz's prison sentence is the longest so far among hundreds of Capitol riot cases. The judge who sentenced Schwartz also handed down the previous longest sentence — 10 years — to a retired New York Police Department officer who assaulted a police officer outside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Prosecutors had recommended a prison sentence of 24 years and 6 months for Schwartz, a welder.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta sentenced Schwartz to 14 years and two months in prison, followed by three years of supervised release.

Mehta said Schwartz was a "soldier against democracy" who participated in "the kind of mayhem, chaos that had never been seen in the country's history."

"You are not a political prisoner," the judge told him. "You're not somebody who is standing up against injustice or fighting against an autocratic regime."

Schwartz briefly addressed the judge before learning his sentence, saying, "I do sincerely regret the damage that Jan. 6 has caused to so many people and their lives."

The judge said he didn't believe Schwartz's statement, noting his lack of remorse.

"You took it upon yourself to try and injure multiple police officers that day," Mehta said.

Schwartz was armed with a wooden tire knocker when he and his then-wife, Shelly Stallings, joined other rioters in overwhelming a line of police officers on the Capitol's Lower West Terrace, where he threw a folding chair at officers.

"By throwing that chair, Schwartz directly contributed to the fall of the police line that enabled rioters to flood forward and take over the entire terrace," prosecutor Jocelyn Bond wrote in a court filing.

Schwartz, 49, also armed himself with a police-issued "super soaker" canister of pepper spray and sprayed it at retreating officers. Advancing to a tunnel entrance, Schwartz coordinated with two other rioters, Markus Maly and Jeffrey Brown, to spray an orange liquid toward officers clashing with the mob.

"While the stream of liquid did not directly hit any officer, its effect was to heighten the danger to the

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officers in that tunnel," Bond wrote.

Before leaving, Schwartz joined a "heave ho" push against police in the tunnel.

Stallings pleaded guilty last year to riot-related charges and was sentenced last month to two years of incarceration.

Schwartz was tried with co-defendants Maly and Brown. In December, a jury convicted all three of assault charges and other felony offenses.

Mehta sentenced Brown last Friday to four years and six months in prison. Maly is scheduled to be sentenced June 9.

Schwartz's attorneys requested a prison sentence of four years and six months. They said his actions on Jan. 6 were motivated by a "misunderstanding" about the 2020 presidential election. Then-President Donald Trump and his allies spread baseless conspiracy theories that Democrats stole the election from the Republican incumbent.

"There remain many grifters out there who remain free to continue propagating the 'great lie' that Trump won the election, Donald Trump being among the most prominent. Mr. Schwartz is not one of these individuals; he knows he was wrong," his defense lawyers wrote.

Prosecutors said Schwartz has bragged about his participation in the riot, shown no remorse and claimed that his prosecution was politically motivated. He referred to the Capitol attack as the "opening of a war" in a Facebook post a day after the riot.

"I was there and whether people will acknowledge it or not we are now at war," Schwartz wrote.

Schwartz has raised over \$71,000 from an online campaign entitled "Patriot Pete Political Prisoner in DC." Prosecutors asked Mehta to order Schwartz to pay a fine equaling the amount raised by his campaign, arguing that he shouldn't profit from participating in the riot.

Schwartz was on probation when he joined the Jan. 6 riot. His criminal record includes a "jaw-dropping" 38 prior convictions since 1991, "several of which involved assaulting or threatening officers or other authority figures," Bond wrote.

Schwartz was working as a welder in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, before his arrest in February 2021, but he considers his home to be in Owensboro, Kentucky, according to his attorneys.

More than 100 police officers were injured during the riot. More than 1,000 people have been charged with federal crimes related to Jan. 6. Nearly 500 of them have been sentenced, with over half getting terms of imprisonment.

The 10-year prison sentence that Mehta handed down in September to retired NYPD officer Thomas Webster had remained the longest until Friday. Webster had used a metal flagpole to assault an officer and then tackled the same officer as the mob advanced toward the Capitol.

Trump's video deposition in rape lawsuit made public

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A video recording of former President Donald Trump being questioned about the rape allegations against him was made public for the first time Friday, providing a glimpse of the Republican's emphatic, often colorful denials.

Jurors got to see the video of Trump's October 2022 deposition over the past few days at the trial over a lawsuit filed against him by advice columnist E. Jean Carroll. Written transcripts of Trump's testimony had also previously been made public, but not the recording itself.

The video was made available Friday to news organizations covering the proceedings.

The video shows Trump answering questions in his trademark navy suit and a bright blue tie. He called Carroll's claim that he raped her in a luxury Manhattan department store "a false, disgusting lie."

"It's a disgrace. Frankly it's a disgrace that something like this can be brought," Trump said.

Trump reiterated his assertion that Carroll is "not my type," but also mistook her for his second wife, Marla Maples, when shown a photo of him meeting Carroll and her then-husband at an event in the 1980s.

Trump was also asked about the infamous "Access Hollywood" video in which Trump bragged about

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grabbing women's genitals. He said, as he has previously, that he was engaging in "locker room talk." Trump justified his comments about famous people being able to have their way with women, saying: "Historically that's true with stars."

All planned testimony in the trial concluded Thursday, clearing the way for closing arguments by the lawyers to happen Monday barring a last-minute decision by Trump to testify.

Sudan's warring sides send envoys for talks in Saudi Arabia

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

ASWAN, Egypt (AP) — Sudan's two warring generals sent their envoys on Friday to Saudi Arabia for talks aimed at firming up a shaky cease-fire after three weeks of fierce fighting that has killed hundreds and pushed the African country to the brink of collapse, three Sudanese officials said.

The negotiations would be the first between Sudan's military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, since clashes broke out on April 15.

According to the three — two senior military officials and one from their paramilitary rival — the talks will begin in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah on Saturday, following concerted efforts by Riyadh and other international powers to pressure the warring sides in Sudan to the negotiating table.

The three officials spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss the upcoming peace talks. No timeframe was given for the length of the talks.

The fighting has turned Sudan's capital of Khartoum and other urban areas into battlefields and pushed hundreds of thousands from their homes. There is increasing concern for those trapped and displaced by the fighting, and aid workers and civilians have said there is a dire lack of basic services, medical care, food and water.

Foreign governments have rushed to evacuate their diplomats and thousands of foreign nationals out of Sudan. Saudi warships have been ferrying those fleeing from Port Sudan, on Sudan's Red Sea coast, which has now become the entry hub for aid sent to the embattled nation.

A series of fragile and often violated cease-fires over the past three weeks has failed to stop the fighting. Fierce battles raged Friday in areas around the military's headquarters and the international airport in Khartoum, according to residents. <https://apnews.com/article/sudan-military-rsf-conflict-civilians-port-sudan-war-bd675f2ce360e7d40f4926c81057cdbf>

According to the three officials, the talks in Jeddah would address the opening of humanitarian corridors in Khartoum and the adjacent city of Omdurman, which have been the centers of the battles.

One of the military officials said the talks are part of an initiative proposed by Saudi Arabia and the United State. He said they would also discuss providing protection to civilian infrastructure, including health facilities.

The RSF official said Saudi and American officials would facilitate the talks. He said they would also discuss a mechanism to monitor the cease-fire and confirmed on Friday that the RSF delegation had left for Jeddah. Sudan's military also later its delegation had departed to Saudi Arabia, saying the talks would discuss "details of the truce," without elaborating.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, meanwhile, discussed the initiative in a phone call with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It said the initiative aims to "prepare the ground" for dialogue to deescalate tensions in the African country. The statement also did not provide further details.

U.S. State department spokesperson Matthew Miller said Blinken expressed his "gratitude for Saudi Arabia's invaluable assistance in facilitating the safe arrival in Jeddah of U.S. citizens and their family members departing Sudan."

The two top diplomats "affirmed their countries' intensive collaboration on diplomatic work to bring about an end to the fighting in Sudan," Miller said.

The U.N. envoy in Sudan, Volker Perthes, lauded the move as "a positive sign," but cautioned about high expectations from the meeting.

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"It is a positive sign, a sign of getting more realistic, realizing that there will be no easy or quick win," he told the AP from Port Sudan. "We need to realize, however, that this is a first encounter."

The meeting may be "exploratory rather than concrete," he said and added that achieving a "lasting cease-fire" would need more than one meeting.

The battle for control of Sudan, which capped months of tensions between Burhan and Dagalo, has so far killed at least 550 people, including civilians, and — as of Monday — wounded more than 4,900, according to the Sudanese Health Ministry.

The Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate, which tracks only civilian casualties, said Friday that 473 civilians have been killed in the violence, and more than 2,450 have been wounded.

James Elder, a spokesman for the the U.N. children agency, said at least 190 children have been killed and 1,700 have been wounded in the fighting.

"This means that every single hour, you have seven boys or girls ... killed or injured," he said at a press conference Friday in Geneva. "I think this is underlining the enormity of how violent this is."

The power struggle has put millions of Sudanese in the line of gun battles, artillery bombardments and airstrikes. So far, at least 334,000 people have been displaced inside Sudan, and tens of thousands more have crossed to neighboring countries — Egypt, Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Ethiopia, according to U.N. agencies.

The U.N. World Food Program projects that the number of acutely food insecure people in Sudan will increase by between 2 million and 2.5 million people — raising the number to a total of 19 million people — in the next three to six months if the current conflict continues, U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said. The U.N. refugee agency announced that \$445 million will be needed to support an estimated 860,000 Sudanese refugees fleeing Sudan to five countries affected by the emergency.

Associated Press writer Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

Supreme Court blocks Richard Glossip's execution in Oklahoma

By MARK SHERMAN and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Friday blocked Oklahoma from executing death row inmate Richard Glossip for his role in a 1997 murder-for-hire after the state's attorney general agreed Glossip's life should be spared.

While it's rare for the conservative-dominated court to put executions on hold, it's even more unusual for a prosecutor to side with the inmate.

Glossip had been scheduled to be put to death on May 18 despite statements by new Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond that Glossip did not receive a fair trial.

An Oklahoma appeals court subsequently upheld Glossip's conviction and the state's pardon and parole board deadlocked in a vote to grant him clemency.

The high court put the execution on hold indefinitely while it reviews the case. Justice Neil Gorsuch took no part in the decision, presumably because he dealt with the case earlier as an appeals court judge.

"There is nothing more harrowing than the thought of executing a man who the state now admits has never received a fair trial," Glossip attorney Don Knight said in a statement. "Our hope is that the court will reverse the decision of the (Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals) and vacate Mr. Glossip's conviction once and for all."

Drummond, a Republican and the state's top prosecutor, supported a high-court reprieve for Glossip, telling the justices, "Glossip's trial was unfair and unreliable." He in a statement he was grateful for the high court's decision.

"I will continue working to ensure justice prevails in this important case," he said.

But Drummond also has said he does not believe Glossip is innocent of the murder-for-hire killing of Glossip's former boss, Barry Van Treese, in 1997. Another man, Justin Sneed, admitted robbing and killing Van Treese after Glossip promised to pay him \$10,000. Sneed received a life sentence in exchange for his testimony and was the key witness against Glossip.

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Van Treese's brother, Ken Van Treese, declined to comment on Friday's ruling.

Former Oklahoma County District Attorney David Prater has long said he believes Glossip persuaded Sneed to kill Van Treese. He said that while Sneed's testimony was most compelling, there was plenty of evidence to corroborate it.

"When police came to talk to Glossip about Van Treese's whereabouts, he directed him away from the room he knew Van Treese was in," Prater said Friday. "At any point, Glossip had the opportunity to tell the police that Sneed did this. He never did that. He even helped Sneed clean up everything."

Prater said Sneed and Glossip also both had a large amount of cash that Prater said they stole from Van Treese's car.

"In light of Gentner Drummond's position regarding the stay, I don't feel like the Supreme Court had much of a choice," Prater said. "But the truth will come out."

Two separate independent investigations have revealed problems with the prosecution's case.

Drummond said Sneed lied on the stand about his psychiatric condition and his reason for taking the mood-stabilizing drug lithium, and that prosecutors knew Sneed was lying.

Also, evidence was destroyed, Drummond said.

Some Republican state lawmakers who support the death penalty have joined the growing chorus of Glossip supporters who are seeking to overturn his conviction.

"We're just ecstatic," state Rep. Kevin McDugle said in a brief telephone interview on Friday.

Glossip was spending his last day of contact visitation with his wife, Lea Glossip, at the prison when he learned of the news, she said.

"We were reaching the end of the visit where we would have to say our goodbyes when the warden came in, pulled us out into the hallway and told us the news," Lea Glossip said in a text message to The Associated Press. "It truly feels like answered prayers."

Glossip's case has been to the Supreme Court before. He was given a reprieve in 2015, although the court later ruled 5-4 against him in a case involving the drugs used in lethal executions.

Glossip has been just hours away from being executed three separate times. His last scheduled execution, in September 2015, was halted just moments before he was to be led to the death chamber when prison officials realized they had received the wrong lethal drug. That mix-up helped prompt a nearly seven-year moratorium on the death penalty in Oklahoma.

Glossip's case attracted international attention after actress Susan Sarandon — who won an Academy Award for her portrayal of death penalty opponent Sister Helen Prejean in the 1995 movie "Dead Man Walking" — took up his cause in real life. Prejean herself has served as Glossip's spiritual adviser and frequently visited him in prison. His case also was featured in the 2017 documentary film "Killing Richard Glossip."

Glossip is the first inmate who was granted a reprieve by the justices since their term began in October. The court rejected pleas from 15 others, including Darryl B. Barwick, who was executed in Florida on Wednesday.

But in a similar situation to Glossip's, the justices in January ordered a Texas appeals court to look again at the case of a death-row inmate who also had the backing of prosecutors. The inmate, Areli Escobar, had been convicted and sentenced to death based of forensic evidence that a judge later found to be flawed. But the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals overturned the judge's order for a new trial, even though the newly elected prosecutor in Travis County, Texas, was no longer standing behind the conviction. When Escobar appealed to the Supreme Court, the prosecutor supported his bid. Escobar was not facing imminent execution.

Murphy reported from Oklahoma City.

Listen both ways: Blind walkers winning safer road crossings

By JEFF McMURRAY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — After a retinal disease left him legally blind, architect John Gleichman was struck by a taxicab while walking home near Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo — at the same intersection where a 4-year-old girl was killed by a hit-and-run driver years earlier.

Although Maya Hirsch's death in 2006 ignited a citywide crusade for pedestrian safety improvements, almost all the electronic upgrades since then have been for people who can see. Nearly 3,000 Chicago intersections are now equipped with visual crossing signals, yet fewer than three dozen include audible cues.

A federal judge ruled in March that such disparity in the nation's third-largest city violates the Americans with Disabilities Act, a second landmark victory for blind residents who challenged the accessibility of a major city's signalized crosswalks.

"Every time I go out to go downtown for a meeting, I have to think I could get hit today and not make it home," said Gleichman, 65, who has been struck four times by vehicles while navigating the city with his white cane since being diagnosed as legally blind in 2005. He considers himself fortunate to have escaped serious injury each time.

Future court proceedings could decide how many audible crossing signals Chicago must install, but a similar case in New York City suggests it could be substantial. A federal judge there appointed an independent monitor and in December 2021 gave officials a decade to gradually make at least 10,000 of its approximately 13,000 signalized intersections accessible to blind pedestrians. It's already well ahead of schedule.

"It's been huge progress. It's a game-changer to the blind and visually impaired community," said Terence Page, president of the Greater New York Council of the Blind. "As new cities begin to build infrastructure, we want accessibility to not be an afterthought but work in parallel with the upgrades."

Accessible pedestrian signals, known as APS, have been around for decades, though the technology has evolved.

Many of Chicago's few APS-equipped intersections — including on a busy street outside The Chicago Lighthouse, which provides services to blind and low-vision residents — still rely on beeps or cuckoo chirps to announce when it's safe to cross. Newer models actually speak the words "walk" or "don't walk," and feature tactical buttons to clarify directions so blind pedestrians don't stray into traffic. Some also convey the time remaining before the light turns red.

Sandy Murillo, a lifelong Chicago-area resident who was born with glaucoma and lost her sight at age 2, said she didn't even know about APS until she heard a strange voice say "walk" during a childhood family trip to Southern California.

"That kind of made it dawn on me," said Murillo, who produces a radio show for The Chicago Lighthouse and writes a blog on issues facing the blind community. "I thought, 'Oh, so that's what it is. They're there for people like me.'"

Chicago's Department of Transportation declined to comment on the judge's ruling, citing the ongoing litigation. But spokesperson Erica Schroeder told The Associated Press in an email that APS devices are installed at 35 intersections and "under construction, in design, or in procurement" at more than 150 others.

The department estimates a \$50,000 to \$200,000 price tag per intersection to install APS. Grant money is available through the 2021 federal infrastructure law to help cities defray some costs.

Advocates for Chicago's blind residents say they pushed the city for years to add APS with little success before taking legal action.

Kathy Austin, a community engagement specialist at Second Sense — a downtown organization serving blind residents — recalls a meeting in 2017 or 2018 in which she and others in the blind community presented a list of the most dangerous intersections, only to be told by city officials that APS was too difficult to install in many of those places.

"There was a laundry list of excuses," Austin said.

Blind residents know from their mobility training to wait to hear the sounds of parallel traffic before

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crossing a street. That's often difficult in noisy downtowns like Chicago's with its overhead L trains stations and other ambient noises. Then, when the pandemic hit and downtown traffic steeply declined, they encountered the opposite problem — not enough vehicles or even people around to help decipher when to walk or stop.

"Sometimes I would stand at an intersection for like half a minute and no car would come by," Gleichman said. "So you either ask somebody walking by, 'Do I have the light?' or you just go out in the road and hope you don't get hit."

London-based Waymap, which created a smartphone navigation app for blind pedestrians that Washington, D.C.'s subway system uses as an accessibility tool, found in a study that blind people average just 2.5 regular routes — such as from home to the office or grocery store and back — if they use a cane or 3.5 if they use a guide dog. Celso Zuccollo, Waymap's chief operating officer, said the study found that people who lack independent mobility were far more likely to experience depression.

Maureen Reid, a job-placement counselor at The Chicago Lighthouse, said she feels more comfortable than many of her blind friends moving about the city because of her familiarity with its sidewalks and the help of her guide dog, Gaston. But she acknowledges there's room for numerous safety improvements — including more tactile strips at pedestrian crosswalks and transit stations. Her previous dog slipped off a platform edge at an L station and dangled from his harness over the commuter train track as Reid yelled for help. The dog was unharmed.

San Francisco voluntarily entered a settlement with blind residents nearly two decades ago to add APS, and numerous other U.S. cities as well as the state of Maryland require it, said Torie Atkinson, senior staff attorney with Disability Rights Advocates, which represents plaintiffs in both the New York and Chicago cases.

Matt Baker, vice president of sales and marketing at Greenville, Texas-based Polara, a leading manufacturer of APS products, said the Chicago market has been one of the toughest to crack — with just a few intersections equipped with Polara devices. Baker said that could change due to the court ruling and expectations that the federal board reviewing public right-of-way issues will eventually require APS at most new or rebuilt signalized intersections nationwide.

Either way, Chicago will almost certainly be compelled to include the technology in future construction. Atkinson said the Chicago verdict expanded on the New York ruling in several key areas, reinforcing the need for Chicago to equip all its signalized intersections with APS.

"I would genuinely hope these lawsuits are a wake-up call," Atkinson said.

New Hampshire history marker for communist draws GOP anger

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — A historical marker dedicated to a New Hampshire labor activist who championed women's rights and was a founder of the American Civil Liberties Union — but who also joined the Communist Party and was sent to prison — has draw objections from Republican officials and scrutiny from the governor.

Known as "The Rebel Girl" for her fiery speeches, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was born in Concord in 1890. A green and white Historical Highway Marker dedicated to her, one of 278 across the state, was unveiled Monday near her birthplace.

In addition to her rights activism, the marker also says she joined the Communist Party in 1936 and was sent to prison in 1951. She was one of many party members prosecuted "under the notorious Smith Act," the marker says, which forbade any attempts to advocate, abet or teach the violent destruction of the U.S. government.

Flynn later chaired the Communist Party of the United States and she died in Moscow during a visit in 1964, at age 74. She was cremated, and her ashes were taken on a "flower-decked bier" to Red Square during a funeral tribute, according to Associated Press accounts at the time.

Republican Gov. Chris Sununu is calling for a review of the state's historical marker program.

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"This is a devout communist," said Joseph Kenney, a Republican member of the Executive Council, at a regular meeting Wednesday. "We are the 'Live Free or Die' state. How can we possibly promote her propaganda, which still exists now through this sign in downtown Concord?"

David Wheeler, a Republican who's also on the five-member Executive Council, which votes on state contracts and Sununu's department appointees, said he wants the council to have more oversight of the historical marker process.

Sarah Stewart, the commissioner for the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, said at the meeting that the marker program is very popular "because it's initiated at the local level. There is no state top-down effort to populate the state with historical highway markers."

There are "many potentially controversial" markers, Stewart said. "The purpose of them is not to commemorate heroes. The purpose is to provide a snapshot that the local community feels is of historic value."

Any person, municipality or agency can suggest a marker as long as they get 20 signatures from New Hampshire residents. Supporters must draft the marker's text and provide footnotes and copies of supporting documentation, according to the state Division of Historical Resources. The division and a historical resources advisory group evaluate the criteria.

The sign was approved last year by the Concord City Council following a recommendation from the marker program, which is jointly administered by the Historical Resources Division and the Transportation Department. It currently stands at the edge of a parking lot near the county courthouse.

Concord Mayor Jim Bouley said Friday that the council's approval was limited to the location of the sign for safety purposes. He said he was puzzled by a letter Stewart sent him Thursday saying the city can reevaluate its approval of the marker.

"We don't approve content," the mayor said.

Plus, Bouley said the sign is on state, not city, property. "They can do whatever they want on their own property. Why would the city care?"

Historical markers run the gamut, telling stories about the last living Revolutionary War soldier, poets and painters who lived nearby, long-lost villages and contemporary sports figures.

Flynn is "one of the most significant radical leaders of the twentieth century," the marker's supporters said in a letter to City Council last year. The sign also notes Flynn's support for women's voting rights and for access to birth control.

"We're going to review the whole process," Sununu said at Wednesday's meeting.

"I completely agree with the sentiment here," the governor said, adding, "It's the state marker. You can't say we don't have any responsibility in terms of what it says and where it goes."

One marker from 2011 that was brought up during Wednesday's meeting celebrates the 50th anniversary of the "Betty and Barney Hill incident," during which the couple reported a close encounter with a UFO. Their experience was described in a best-selling book, a television movie, and numerous speaking engagements.

"The UFO one I'm gonna live with," said Kenney, the Executive Council member. "That's a funny story."

Associated Press researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York contributed to this story.

Berkeley professor apologizes for false Indigenous identity

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — An anthropology professor at the University of California, Berkeley, whose identity as Native American had been questioned for years apologized this week for falsely identifying as Indigenous, saying she is "a white person" who lived an identity based on family lore.

Elizabeth Hoover, associate professor of environmental science, policy and management, said in an apology posted Monday on her website that she claimed an identity as a woman of Mohawk and Mi'kmaq descent but never confirmed that identity with those communities or researched her ancestry until recently.

"I caused harm," Hoover wrote. "I hurt Native people who have been my friends, colleagues, students,

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and family, both directly through fractured trust and through activating historical harms. This hurt has also interrupted student and faculty life and careers. I acknowledge that I could have prevented all of this hurt by investigating and confirming my family stories sooner. For this, I am deeply sorry."

Hoover's alleged Indigenous roots came into question in 2021 after her name appeared on an "Alleged Pretendian List." The list compiled by Jacqueline Keeler, a Native American writer and activist, includes more than 200 names of people Keeler says are falsely claiming Native heritage.

Hoover first addressed doubts about her ethnic identity last year when she said in an October post on her website that she had conducted genealogical research and found "no records of tribal citizenship for any of my family members in the tribal databases that were accessed."

Her statement caused an uproar, and some of her former students authored a letter in November demanding her resignation. The letter was signed by hundreds of students and scholars from UC Berkeley and other universities along with members of Native American communities. It also called for her to apologize, stop identifying as Indigenous and acknowledge she had caused harm, among other demands.

"As scholars embedded in the kinship networks of our communities, we find Hoover's repeated attempts to differentiate herself from settlers with similar stories and her claims of having lived experience as an Indigenous person by dancing at powwows absolutely appalling," the letter reads.

Janet Gilmore, a UC Berkeley spokesperson, said in a statement she couldn't comment on whether Hoover faces disciplinary action, saying discussing it would violate "personnel matters and/or violate privacy rights, both of which are protected by law."

"However, we are aware of and support ongoing efforts to achieve restorative justice in a way that acknowledges and addresses the extent to which this matter has caused harm and upset among members of our community," Gilmore added.

Hoover is the latest person to apologize for falsely claiming a racial or ethnic identity.

U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren angered many Native Americans during her presidential campaign in 2018 when she used the results of a DNA test to try and rebut the ridicule of then-President Donald Trump, who had derisively referred to her as "fake Pocahontas."

Despite the DNA results, which showed some evidence of a Native American in Warren's lineage, probably six to 10 generations ago, Warren is not a member of any tribe, and DNA tests are not typically used as evidence to determine tribal citizenship.

Warren later offered a public apology at a forum on Native American issues, saying she was "sorry for the harm I have caused."

In 2015, Rachel Dolezal was fired as head of the Spokane, Washington, chapter of the NAACP and was kicked off a police ombudsman commission after her parent told local media their daughter was born white but was presenting herself as Black. She also lost her job teaching African studies at Eastern Washington University in nearby Cheney.

Hoover said her identity was challenged after she began her first assistant professor job. She began teaching at UC Berkeley in the Fall of 2020.

"At the time, I interpreted inquiries into the validity of my Native identity as petty jealousy or people just looking to interfere in my life," she wrote.

Hoover said that she grew up in rural upstate New York thinking she was someone of mixed Mohawk, Mi'kmaq, French, English, Irish and German descent, and attending food summits and powwows. Her mother shared stories about her grandmother being a Mohawk woman who married an abusive French-Canadian man and who committed suicide, leaving her children behind to be raised by someone else.

She said she would no longer identify as Indigenous but would continue to help with food sovereignty and environmental justice movements in Native communities that ask her for her support.

In her apology issued Monday, Hoover acknowledged she benefited from programs and funding that were geared toward Native scholars and said she is committed to engaging in the restorative justice process taking place on campus, "as well as supporting restorative justice processes in other circles I have been involved with, where my participation is invited."

Royal Drama: King's fractious family on stage at coronation

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III lives in a palace, travels in a chauffeur-driven Bentley and is one of Britain's richest men, but he's similar to many of his subjects in one very basic way: His family life is complicated — very complicated.

There's a second wife, an embarrassing brother, and an angry son and daughter-in-law, all with allies who aren't shy about whispering family secrets in the ears of friendly reporters.

The new king will hope to keep a lid on those tensions when his royally blended family joins as many as 2,800 guests for Charles' coronation on May 6 at Westminster Abbey. All except Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, are attending.

How Charles manages his family drama over the coming weeks and years is crucial to the king's efforts to preserve and protect the 1,000-year-old hereditary monarchy he now embodies. Without the respect of the public, the House of Windsor risks being lumped together with pop stars, social media influencers and reality TV contestants as fodder for the British tabloids, undermining the cachet that underpins its role in public life.

Royal historian Hugo Vickers says people should look past the sensational headlines and focus on what Charles accomplishes now that he is king.

"In a sense, he sort of becomes a new man when he becomes king," said Vickers, author of "Coronation: The Crowning of Elizabeth II."

"Look at him as he is now, look at him the way he is approaching everything, look at his positivity and look at how right he's been on so many issues," he added. "Unfortunately, he had those difficult times with his marriages and some of the other issues, but we live in a very tricky era."

The horror show came back to haunt Charles last week, when the king's estranged younger son, Prince Harry, dropped a new round of allegations Tuesday about the royal family into the middle of the coronation buildup.

In written evidence for his invasion of privacy claim against a British newspaper, Harry claimed his father prevented him from filing the lawsuit a decade ago. The prince said Charles didn't want to dredge up graphic testimony about his extramarital affair with the former Camilla Parker-Bowles when he was married to the late Princess Diana.

Diana was the mother of Harry and his elder brother and heir to the throne, William, the Prince of Wales. Camilla, now the queen consort, went on to marry Charles in 2005 and will be crowned alongside her husband at Westminster Abbey.

If the past is any indication, attention will now shift to body language, seating plans and even wardrobe choices during the coronation, as royal watchers look for any signs of a thaw in the family tensions.

But Joe Little, managing editor of Majesty magazine, doesn't expect Harry to have a lot of contact with the rest of his family. In any case, Harry won't be in the U.K. for long, so there's not much time for fence mending.

"The stuff that we discovered (Tuesday) is really not going to help his cause," Little said. "But, you know, will there be time to go over all that with the king and the Prince of Wales? Unlikely."

The royal soap opera didn't begin with the current generation of royals. After all, Edward VIII sparked a constitutional crisis in 1936 when he abdicated the throne to marry the twice-divorced American Wallis Simpson.

Charles' grandfather, George VI, is credited with saving the monarchy with a life of low-key public service after he replaced his flamboyant elder brother. The late Queen Elizabeth II burnished the family's reputation during a 70-year reign, in which she became a symbol of stability who cheered the nation's victories and comforted it during darker times.

But Charles grew up in a different era, under the glare of media attention as deference to the monarchy faded.

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He has been a controversial figure ever since the very public breakdown of his marriage to Diana, who was revered by many people for her looks and her compassion.

Diana alleged that there had been "three people" in the marriage, pointing the finger at Charles' long-time love Camilla Parker-Bowles.

Camilla, initially reviled by Diana's fans, has worked hard to rehabilitate her image. Her ex-husband and their children are expected to attend the coronation, with her grandsons serving as pages of honor.

She supports a raft of causes, ranging from adult literacy to protecting the victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. But even that effort has sparked tensions.

Harry claimed in his memoir "Spare" that the senior royals leaked unflattering stories about him to the news media in return for more favorable coverage, particularly to improve Camilla's image.

At the time of their marriage in 2018, Harry and Meghan were celebrated as the new face of the monarchy. Meghan, a biracial American actress, brought a touch of Hollywood glamour to the royal family and many observers hoped she would help the Windsors connect with younger people in an increasingly multicultural nation.

Those hopes quickly crumbled amid allegations that palace officials were insensitive to Meghan's mental health struggles as she adjusted to royal life.

Harry and Meghan walked away from frontline royal duties three years ago and moved to California, from which they have lobbed repeated critiques at the House of Windsor.

In a 2021 interview with Oprah Winfrey they hinted at racism in the palace, alleging that one unidentified member of the royal family had inquired about the color of their unborn son's skin before his birth.

Harry, in a Netflix series broadcast last year, said the episode was an example of unconscious bias and that the royal family needed to "learn and grow" so it could be "part of the solution rather than part of the problem."

The repeated attacks led to months of speculation about whether the couple would be invited to the coronation. The palace finally answered that question two weeks ago when it announced that Harry would attend but Meghan would remain in California with their two children.

And then there is Charles' brother Prince Andrew, who became a toxic time bomb inside the royal family when the world learned about his friendship with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein and the financier's long-time girlfriend, Ghislaine Maxwell.

Epstein, who was convicted of sex crimes in 2008, died in a New York jail cell in 2019 while awaiting trial on a second set of charges. Maxwell was convicted last year of helping procure young girls for Epstein and is serving a 20-year sentence at a federal prison in Florida.

Andrew gave up his royal duties in 2019 after a disastrous interview with the BBC in which he tried to explain away his links to Epstein and Maxwell. He was stripped of his honorary military titles and patronages as he prepared to defend a civil lawsuit filed by a woman who said she was forced to have sex with the prince when she was a teenager.

Andrew denied the allegations but settled the suit last year before it came to trial. While terms of the agreement weren't released, The Sun newspaper reported that Charles and the late queen paid the bulk of the estimated 7 million pound (\$8.7 million) settlement.

"I think it was inevitable that when Charles became king, a lot of the personal stuff would come back to haunt him," Little said. "I think as far as the king is concerned, he just has to shrug his shoulders and get on with the job in hand."

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

States add laws on pronouns, sports for transgender students

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb this week signed into a law a requirement that schools notify a parent when their student asks to be called a different name or uses pronouns that correspond with their gender, not their sex.

It's the latest law to emerge from a focus in Republican-controlled states on restricting transgender students in the name of parental rights or protecting other students.

LTBTQ+ advocates say the measures are harmful to students, especially those who are trans.

Some things to know:

PRONOUNS

As the idea that people should be referred to by the pronouns they choose has taken root, there's been a strong conservative political backlash — part of a broader backlash against acceptance of transgender people.

On Thursday, Florida's lawmakers gave final passage to a bill that would prevent students and teachers from being required to use pronouns that don't correspond to someone's sex. Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is expected to seek the Republican presidential nomination next year, has signaled he will sign the measure.

Montana earlier this year passed a law that would block schools from punishing students who misgender or deadname peers — referring to them by the wrong gender or by names they previously used — so long as it doesn't rise to the level of bullying. An earlier version of the legislation would have blocked schools from punishing students for purposely using peers' wrong names or gender.

Indiana's version, which takes effect July 1, goes a step further, requiring schools to tell parents when their students ask to be called by a different name or by a pronoun that corresponds with their gender.

It's not the first state with a similar provision. Alabama adopted a law last year requiring schools to notify parents if a child discloses that they think they might be transgender and also blocking school staff from encouraging students to withhold that information from their parents.

The pronoun restrictions aren't catching on in all Republican-controlled states. North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum vetoed a bill that would have barred public school teachers and staff from using the pronouns a transgender student uses without a parent's permission. The veto narrowly survived an override attempt last month.

BLOCKING LESSONS ON GENDER IDENTITY

DeSantis has been leading the charge against pronouns and other causes he incorrectly refers to as "woke." Last year, his state became the first to adopt what critics call a "Don't Say Gay" law barring schools from teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.

Last month, Florida's state school board expanded the ban on teaching about sexual orientation and gender identity to all grades. The bill passed this week that DeSantis is expected to sign would legally reinforce that, banning the instruction through eighth grade with exceptions for when it's required by existing state standards or are part of reproductive health instruction classes that parents can choose for their students not to take.

Some of the pronoun provisions, including Indiana's, are included in broader prohibitions on teaching about gender identity similar to Florida's law.

PARENTAL RIGHTS

Other states, including Arizona and Idaho, have passed laws in the last two years intended to give parents more control over their children's education.

They both require that information about their student's health and education be made available to parents.

In Idaho's case, the law, which is to take effect July 1, requires parents be told of changes in students' mental, emotional or physical well-being.

Critics say that while the laws do not specifically list gender identity, they will end up outing transgender students to families who might not be accepting.

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BATHROOMS, SPORTS AND HEALTHCARE

Other state policies aimed at curtailing the rights of transgender young people have been centerpieces of legislative sessions in red states, especially the past two years.

At least nine states have adopted laws to keep transgender students out of bathrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identities.

Laws adopted in at least 21 states would keep transgender girls and women from playing on girls and women's sports teams. Courts have blocked enforcement of some of those. President Joe Biden's administration last month proposed a rule that would find that broad bans on transgender sports participation would violate federal law.

The U.S. House last month also approved a ban on transgender girls and women on girls and women's sports teams, but it's unlikely to be passed by the Democrat-controlled Senate.

And at least 20 states have adopted laws or policies — including some blocked by courts — barring gender-affirming care, such as puberty blockers, hormone therapy and surgery for minors. At least 10 states have taken action to protect access to the care.

Oil boom transforms Guyana, prompting a scramble for spoils

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

ANN'S GROVE, Guyana (AP) — Villagers in this tiny coastal community lined up on the soggy grass, leaned into the microphone and shared their grievances as someone in the crowd yelled, "Speak the truth!"

And so they did. One by one, speakers listed what they wanted: a library, streetlights, school buses, homes, a grocery store, reliable electricity, wider roads and better bridges.

"Please help us," said Evadne Pellew-Fomundam — a 70-year-old who lives in Ann's Grove, one of Guyana's poorest communities — to the country's prime minister and other officials who organized the meeting to hear people's concerns and boost their party's image ahead of municipal elections.

The list of needs is long in this South American country of 791,000 people that is poised to become the world's fourth-largest offshore oil producer, placing it ahead of Qatar, the United States, Mexico and Norway. The oil boom will generate billions of dollars for this largely impoverished nation. It's also certain to spark bitter fights over how the wealth should be spent in a place where politics is sharply divided along ethnic lines: 29% of the population is of African descent and 40% of East Indian descent, from indentured servants brought to Guyana after slavery was abolished.

Change is already visible in this country, which has a rich Caribbean culture and was once known as the "Venice of the West Indies." Guyana is crisscrossed by canals and dotted with villages called "Now or Never" and "Free and Easy" that now co-exist with gated communities with names like "Windsor Estates." In the capital, Georgetown, buildings made of glass, steel and concrete rise above colonial-era wooden structures, with shuttered sash windows, that are slowly decaying. Farmers are planting broccoli and other new crops, restaurants offer better cuts of meat, and the government has hired a European company to produce local sausages as foreign workers transform Guyana's consumption profile.

With \$1.6 billion in oil revenue so far, the government has launched infrastructure projects including the construction of 12 hospitals, seven hotels, scores of schools, two main highways, its first deep-water port and a \$1.9 billion gas-to-energy project that Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo told The Associated Press will double Guyana's energy output and slash high power bills by half.

And while the projects have created jobs, it's rare for Guyanese to work directly in the oil industry. The work to dig deep into the ocean floor is highly technical, and the country doesn't offer such training.

Experts worry that Guyana lacks the expertise and legal and regulatory framework to handle the influx of wealth. They say it could weaken democratic institutions and lead the country on a path like that of neighboring Venezuela, a petrostate that plunged into political and economic chaos.

"Guyana's political instability raises concerns that the country is unprepared for its newfound wealth without a plan to manage the new revenue and equitably disburse the financial benefits," according to a USAID report that acknowledged the country's deep ethnic rivalries.

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A consortium led by ExxonMobil discovered the first major oil deposits in May 2015 more than 100 miles (190 kilometers) off Guyana, one of the poorest countries in South America despite its large reserves of gold, diamond and bauxite. More than 40% of the population lived on less than \$5.50 a day when production began in December 2019, with some 380,000 barrels a day expected to soar to 1.2 million by 2027.

A single oil block of more than a dozen off Guyana's coast is valued at \$41 billion. Combined with additional oil deposits found nearby, that will generate an estimated \$10 billion annually for the government, according to USAID. That figure is expected to jump to \$157 billion by 2040, said Rystad Energy, a Norwegian-based independent energy consultancy.

Guyana, which has one of the world's highest emigration rates with more than 55% of the population living abroad, now claims one of the world's largest shares of oil per capita. It's expected to have one of the world's fastest-growing economies, too, according to a World Bank report.

The transformation has lured back Guyanese such as Andrew Rampersaud, a 50-year-old goldsmith who left Trinidad last July with his wife and four daughters, encouraged by changes he saw in his country.

He makes some 20 pairs of earrings and four necklaces a day, mostly with Guyanese gold, but where he's really noticed a difference is in real estate. Rampersaud owns seven rental units, and before the oil discovery, he'd get a query every month or so.

Now, three to four people call daily. And, unlike before, they always pay on time in a country where a two-bedroom apartment now costs \$900, triple the price in 2010, according to Guyana's Real Estate Association.

But many Guyanese, including those living in Ann's Grove, wonder whether their community will ever see some of that wealth. Here, bleating goats amble down the village's main road, wide enough for a single car or the occasional horse-drawn cart. Dogs dart through wooden homes with zinc roofs, and the sole marketplace where vendors once sold fruits and vegetables is now a makeshift brothel.

"I expected a better life since the drilling began," said Felasha Duncan, a 36-year-old mother of three who spoke as she got bright pink extensions braided into her hair at an open-air salon.

Down the road, 31-year-old Ron Collins was busy making cinderblocks and said he didn't bother attending the recent Saturday morning meeting with officials.

"It makes no sense," he said, leaning on his shovel.

He doesn't believe his village will benefit from the ongoing projects that have employed people such as Shaquiel Pereira, who's helping build one of the new highways and earning double what he did three months ago as an electrician. The 25-year-old bought land in western Guyana last month and is now saving to build his first home and buy a new car.

"I feel hopeful," he said as he scanned the new highway from his car, pausing before the hourlong drive home.

His boss, engineer Arif Hafeez, said that while people aren't seeing oil money directly in their pockets by way of public wage increases, construction projects are generating jobs and new roads will boost the economy.

"They say it's going to look like Dubai, but I don't know about that," he said with a laugh.

At a job fair at the University of Guyana, excitement and curiosity were in the air as students met with oil companies, support and services firms, and agricultural groups.

Greeting students was Sherry Thompson, 43, a former hospital switchboard operator and manager of a local inn who joined a company that provides services such as transportation for vice presidents of major oil companies.

"I felt like my life was going nowhere, and I wanted a future for myself," Thompson said.

Jobs like hers have become plentiful, but it's rare to find Guyanese working directly in the oil industry.

Richie Bachan, 47, is among the exceptions. As a former construction worker, he had the foundation, with some additional training, to begin working as a roustabout, assembling and repairing equipment in the offshore oil industry two years ago. His salary tripled, and his family benefits: "We eat better. We dress better. We can keep up with our bills."

But beyond the slate of infrastructure projects and jobs they're creating, experts warn the huge windfall

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could overwhelm Guyana.

"The country isn't preparing and wasn't prepared for the sudden discovery of oil," said Lucas Perelló, a political science professor at New York's Skidmore College.

Three years after the 2015 oil discovery, a political crisis erupted in Guyana, which is dominated by two main parties: the Indo-Guyanese People's Progressive Party and the Afro-Guyanese People's National Congress, which formed a coalition with other parties.

That coalition was dissolved after a no-confidence motion approved by a single vote in 2018 gave way to snap general elections in 2020. Those saw the Indo-Guyanese People's Progressive Party win by one seat in a race that's still being contested in court.

"That's why the 2020 elections were so important. Everyone knew what was at stake," Perelló said.

The USAID report accused the previous administration of a lack of transparency in negotiations and oil deals with investors, adding that the "tremendous influx of money opens many avenues for corruption."

When The Associated Press asked Prime Minister Mark Phillips about concerns over corruption, his press officers tried to end the interview before he interjected, saying his party had a zero-tolerance policy: "Wherever corruption exists, we are committed to rooting it out."

Guyana signed the deal in 2016 with the ExxonMobil consortium, which includes Hess Corporation and China's CNOOC, but did not make the contract public until 2017 despite demands to release it immediately.

The contract dictates that Guyana would receive 50% of the profits, compared with other deals in which Brazil obtained 61% and the U.S. 40%, according to Rystad Energy. But many have criticized that Guyana would only earn 2% royalties, something Jagdeo said the current government would seek to increase to 10% for future deals.

"The contract is front-loaded, one-sided and riddled with tax, decommissioning and other loopholes that favor the oil companies," according to a report from the Ohio-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Aubrey Norton, leader of the opposition People's National Congress that was part of the coalition that signed the deal, told AP that it made mistakes: "I have no doubt about that. And therefore, moving forward, we should rectify those mistakes."

Activists also have raised concerns that the oil boom will contribute to climate change, given that one barrel of fuel oil produces on average about 940 pounds (about 425 kilograms) of carbon dioxide, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

AP reached out to ExxonMobil spokeswoman Meghan Macdonald for comment about how the company handled the deal in Guyana and environmental concerns, and unsuccessfully sought to arrange an interview with the company's top official in the country. Macdonald said in a statement that the terms of the company's agreement with the government "are competitive with other countries at a similar stage of resource discovery."

Norton said he was concerned about the current government's focus on building infrastructure instead of developing people, adding that he worries the oil wealth will intensify ethnic divisions in Guyana and create other problems: "It will result in the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer."

Jagdeo, the vice president who once served as president, told AP that his party has created a special fund for oil revenues with safeguards to prevent corruption, including appointment of an independent monitor and a board of directors to oversee the fund along with the finance minister.

Parliamentary approval also is needed to decide how the funds would be used, he said, adding that oil revenues currently represent only a third of Guyana's budget and that increases in salaries might happen later: "At this point in time, we are not awash with money."

"We have seen the mistakes made by other countries," he said. "We have to be cautious."

Despite the oil boom, poverty is deepening for some as the cost of living soars, with goods such as sugar, oranges, cooking oil, peppers and plantains more than doubling in price while salaries have flatlined.

Many are still scraping by, like Samuel Arthur, who makes \$100 a month selling large, heavy-duty plastic bags in Georgetown and other areas, hauling some 40 pounds of weight every day.

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"All we live on is promises," he said of the oil boom. "I have to do this because I don't have any other way to survive."

It's the kind of need familiar to many in Ann's Grove.

When the meeting between residents and officials ended, the prime minister pledged that most requests would be fulfilled.

"Looking forward to your promise," resident Clyde Wickham said. Officials nodded and vowed to return with more details on how they'll help Ann's Grove.

Hopeful residents clapped. Like Wickham, many say they'll work to hold the government to its word.

Hundreds of pounds of pasta dumped near New Jersey stream

OLD BRIDGE, N.J. (AP) — Authorities in a central New Jersey town say they are no longer noodling over the mystery of how hundreds of pounds of pasta were dumped near a stream.

Old Bridge Mayor Owen Henry said Friday that the pasta, including spaghetti and macaroni, was cleaned up last week by public works crews, shortly after officials learned about the oodles of noodles that quickly drew national attention when photos of the pasta were posted on social media.

The estimated 500 pounds (225 kilograms) of pasta were apparently raw when it was dumped, but subsequent heavy rains softened the food and made the mounds look like they had been cooked, officials have said. It's unclear who dumped the pasta there or why, but it's not believed the pasta had been at the site for long before it was discovered.

Henry said the pasta did not cause any environmental damage or health issues and he considers the matter closed.

"It certainly shouldn't have ended up in the woods — putting in or near the stream bed was not the best idea — but I certainly hope our police are not putting more time into this" he said. "Assuming the pasta was still usable, I wish it had ended up in our food bank, which could have really used it."

WHO says COVID emergency is over. So what does that mean?

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — The World Health Organization downgraded its assessment of the coronavirus pandemic on Friday, saying it no longer qualifies as a global emergency. The action reverses a declaration that was first made on January 30, 2020, when the disease had not even been named COVID-19 and when there were no major outbreaks beyond China.

A look at what WHO's decision means:

WHY END THE GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCY?

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the pandemic has been "on a downward trend for more than a year, with population immunity increasing from vaccination and infection." That, he said, has allowed most countries "to return to life as we knew it before COVID-19," meaning that the worst part of the pandemic is over.

Tedros said that for the past year, WHO and its emergency committee experts have been analyzing COVID-19 data to decide when the time would be right to lower its level of alarm. On Thursday, the experts recommended to Tedros that COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency and the WHO chief said he accepted that advice.

WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL EFFECTS?

For the average person, nothing. The classification of a health threat as a global emergency is meant to warn political authorities that there is an "extraordinary" event that could constitute a health threat to other countries and requires a coordinated response to contain it. WHO's emergency declarations are typically used as an international SOS for countries who need help. They can also spur countries to introduce special measures to combat disease or release extra funds.

Many countries, including Britain, France, Germany and the U.S., have long dropped many of their pandemic-era restrictions. The U.S. is ending its public health emergency next Thursday, which Dr. Rochelle

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Walensky cited Friday in announcing her decision to leave as head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention next month.

IS COVID-19 STILL A PANDEMIC?

Yes. Although WHO chief Tedros said the coronavirus emergency was over, he warned that the virus is here to stay and that thousands of people continue to die every week. "The risk remains of new variants emerging that cause new surges in cases and deaths," Tedros said. "What this news means is that it's time for countries to transition from emergency mode to managing COVID-19 alongside other infectious diseases."

In April, there were nearly 3 million cases and more than 17,000 deaths reported, including spikes in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, the United Nations agency noted.

SO WHEN WILL THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC END?

It's unclear. WHO emergencies chief Dr. Michael Ryan said the coronavirus is still a public health threat and that its continued evolution could yet cause future problems. "It took decades...for the pandemic virus of 1918 to disappear," he said, referring to the Spanish flu that is thought to have killed at least 40 million people.

"Pandemics only truly end when the next pandemic begins," he said. Ryan said that while COVID-19 will continue to spread among people for a very long time, it is doing so at a much lower level of threat that does not require the extraordinary measures taken to try to curb the virus' spread.

WHAT ELSE HAS BEEN DECLARED AN EMERGENCY?

WHO has previously declared global emergencies for outbreaks of swine flu, Zika, Ebola, polio and mpox, formerly called monkeypox. Polio was declared nearly nine years ago. Its emergency status has persisted even as officials work to wipe out the disease from a shrinking number of countries.

Last July, WHO chief Tedros declared the explosive spread of mpox to dozens of countries to be a global emergency, overruling the emergency committee he had convened to assess the situation. The disease peaked in Europe and North America shortly after, but technically remains a global emergency.

DO WE STILL NEED TO TAKE COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS?

Yes. Health officials say the virus isn't going anywhere and advise people to get vaccinated, including getting booster doses if they qualify. Although many of the measures seen at the height of the pandemic — including masks and social distancing — aren't required except in certain settings, like hospitals or nursing homes, officials say people with other health conditions or compromised immune systems may still want to continue with some of those precautions.

Unlike in the early years of COVID-19, high immunization levels, both from vaccination and previous infection, have helped dramatically reduce disease spread.

Simon Clarke, an associate professor of microbiology at Britain's University of Reading, warned against people dropping all COVID-19 protections.

"The message to the public should still be to take care and think of others. If you're ill with a respiratory infection, like a bad cough, don't put others at risk, especially not those who are vulnerable," he said. "If you pass on a COVID infection, no one will thank you. If you're fit and young, COVID can still be nasty and if you're old and frail, it can kill you."

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Column: Stench of death hangs over the Kentucky Derby

By PAUL NEWBERRY AP Sports Columnist

They'll come by the tens of thousands for the party of the year, adorned in the gaudiest of hats and sipping on mint juleps, witnesses to the most thrilling two minutes in sports.

Hopefully, they won't ignore the stench of death that hangs over the Kentucky Derby and its magnificent athletes.

Four horses perished in the past week at Churchill Downs, again raising troubling questions about the

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sport of kings ahead of the 149th run for the roses on Saturday.

If this can happen at the world's most famous track, with the eyes of the world focused on its biggest race, what's happening when no one is looking?

Is enough being done to make this sport as safe as possible for 1,200-pound thoroughbreds that can reach top speeds of 45 mph?

"I don't think we're close to that right now," said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and a long-time advocate for greater regulation of the racing industry. "When you're in competition, there are risks. I don't think a zero-injury or zero-death standard is achievable. But we can do so much better than the present circumstances."

It's hard to argue with that point.

According to a database kept by the Jockey Club, which oversees the breed registry for thoroughbreds in the United States and Canada, more than 7,200 horses died in races from 2009-21.

"There's a lot less injuries here with legs than there are in other sports, but here it means your life is over," said Mike Repole, co-owner of early Derby favorite Forte. "God, it's depressing as you can get."

There's no getting around that some horses will break down on the track, and many of those will be catastrophic injuries that require them to be euthanized. The risk of paying the ultimate price can never be removed from such a perilous sport.

But four deaths so close to the Derby have rocked the industry, much like more than 40 deaths during the 2019 racing season at California's Santa Anita track forced a reckoning over health and safety issues.

Churchill Downs indefinitely suspended trainer Saffie Joseph Jr., who worked with two horses that collapsed on the track and died after races. Lord Miles, who also was trained by Joseph, was scratched from the Derby.

Kudos for that decision, even though Joseph insisted he had done nothing wrong and there hasn't been a finding on why either of his horses died.

"It shatters you," Joseph said, his voice breaking. "Anyone around me knows how much I care about my horses. Whether it just be a small issue, I care. When you care, it hurts."

Pacelle said it was highly unusual for two horses from the same stable to die under such mysterious circumstances.

"The sort of people who know something about the sport find it incredibly unusual that 4-year-old and 5-year-old horses dropped dead after their races," he said. "It wasn't like they broke a leg and had to be euthanized. It's just a sudden-death circumstance — and two horses with that end-of-life circumstance. It's so incredibly unusual that it speaks to something the trainer did to put them at some risk."

In the wake of the Santa Anita carnage, new rules were written to address track safety, the health of the horses, and a hodge-podge of doping rules that varied from state to state. Part of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA) took effect last summer, but new antidoping rules have been delayed by court challenges that seemed largely designed to maintain the status quo.

Sadly, those regulations won't be implemented until after the first two legs of the 2023 Triple Crown.

Too late for the four horses that died at Churchill Downs.

"We should have had federal authority in place by now for testing horses and making sure the race day anti-doping provisions and other provisions of the law were being enforced," Pacelle said. "It's like the Miami Dolphins having different rules in Florida for football compared to the Detroit Lions. It doesn't make sense."

Horse racing, by its very nature, will always have a bit of a PR problem compared to other sports.

"If every athlete, when they break their leg they have to be put down, you'd stop sports. You'd have to," Repole said. "You see a football player carried out. Unfortunately, if that happened to a horse, he gets more than carried out. That's the reality of it."

Horse racing needs to demonstrate once and for all that it truly cares about the athletes at the heart of its sport. The safety rules are a good start. Doping guidelines that apply across the nation will help even more. But that won't be the end of it.

Breeding practices that produce faster horses but perhaps increase the risk of other health problems

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is the next big frontier that needs to be addressed. That's going to be the most perplexing issue of all.

"No one has moved into this area," Pacelle said. "The industry needs to pick it up, but the problem is — just like getting trainers to stop doping voluntarily — are you going to do something that might make your horses a tad bit slower? You're worried that a competitor is not going to do this and you're going to lose the race."

There are some encouraging signs at Churchill Downs.

Bob Baffert, the sport's most famous — or should we say, infamous — trainer, won't be at the track Saturday. He's still serving a two-year ban that was imposed after his 2021 Derby winner, Medina Spirit, failed a post-race drug test and was disqualified.

Joseph won't be there, either.

More than 100,000 fans will be at Churchill Downs, carrying on a tradition that has survived world wars and worldwide pandemics.

Pacelle, unlike some animal-rights activists, is not calling for horse racing to be eliminated. He knows that sort of stance is unrealistic, and only provides fuel to those who resist any meaningful change.

"The industry is here and will be here for decades," he said. "Horse racing is a big industry in the United States. A lot of jobs are tied to it. The fan base is passionate about this enterprise."

This isn't greyhound racing, which has largely been wiped out in the U.S. This isn't one of those animal acts in the circus or an amusement park, which have come under increasing scrutiny.

Despite the challenges posed by other forms of legalized gambling, horse racing still holds a significant niche in our sporting world.

"Horse racing is in a different political, economic and cultural position," Pacelle conceded. "It's going to be around. We just hope we can have safe competition for the horses in racing."

Here's to those 19 horses that will burst from the starting gate at the Kentucky Derby.

May they all make it to the finish line safely.

May the roses be red, not black.

AP Racing Writer Beth Harris in Louisville, Kentucky, contributed to this report.

Paul Newberry is the national sports columnist for The Associated Press. Write to him at pnewberry@ap.org or at <https://twitter.com/pnewberry1963>

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

WHO downgrades COVID pandemic, says it's no longer emergency

By MARIA CHENG and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization said Friday that COVID-19 no longer qualifies as a global emergency, marking a symbolic end to the devastating coronavirus pandemic that triggered once-unthinkable lockdowns, upended economies and killed millions of people worldwide.

The announcement, made more than three years after WHO declared the coronavirus an international crisis, offers some relief, if not an ending, to a pandemic that stirred fear and suspicion, hand-wringing and finger-pointing across the globe.

The U.N. health agency's officials said that even though the emergency phase was over, the pandemic hasn't finished, noting recent spikes in cases in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

WHO says thousands of people are still dying from the virus every week, and millions of others are suffering from debilitating, long-term effects.

"It's with great hope that I declare COVID-19 over as a global health emergency," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"That does not mean COVID-19 is over as a global health threat," he said, warning that new variants could yet emerge. Tedros noted that while the official COVID-19 death toll was 7 million, the real figure

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was estimated to be at least 20 million.

Tedros said the pandemic had been on a downward trend for more than a year, acknowledging that most countries have already returned to life before COVID-19.

He bemoaned the damage that COVID-19 had done to the global community, saying the pandemic had shattered businesses, exacerbated political divisions, led to the spread of misinformation and plunged millions into poverty.

The political fallout in some countries was swift and unforgiving. Some pundits say missteps by President Donald Trump in his administration's response to the pandemic had a role in his losing reelection bid in 2020. The United States saw the deadliest outbreak anywhere in the world — where more than 1 million people died across the country.

Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO's emergencies chief, said it was incumbent on heads of states and other leaders to negotiate a wide-ranging pandemic treaty to decide how future health threats should be faced.

Ryan said that some of the scenes witnessed during COVID-19, when people resorted to "bartering for oxygen canisters," fought to get into emergency rooms and died in parking lots because they couldn't get treated, must never be repeated.

When the U.N. health agency first declared the coronavirus to be an international crisis on Jan. 30, 2020, it hadn't yet been named COVID-19 and there were no major outbreaks beyond China.

More than three years later, the virus has caused an estimated 764 million cases globally and about 5 billion people have received at least one dose of vaccine.

In the U.S., the public health emergency declaration made regarding COVID-19 is set to expire on May 11, when wide-ranging measures to support the pandemic response, including vaccine mandates, will end. Many other countries, including Germany, France and Britain, dropped most of their provisions against the pandemic last year.

When Tedros declared COVID-19 to be an emergency in 2020, he said his greatest fear was the virus' potential to spread in countries with weak health systems.

In fact, some of the countries that suffered the worst COVID-19 death tolls were previously judged to be the best-prepared for a pandemic, including the U.S. and Britain. According to WHO data, the number of deaths reported in Africa account for just 3% of the global total.

WHO doesn't "declare" pandemics, but first used the term to describe the outbreak in March 2020, when the virus had spread to every continent except Antarctica, long after many other scientists had said a pandemic was already underway.

WHO is the only agency mandated to coordinate the world's response to acute health threats, but the organization faltered repeatedly as the coronavirus unfolded.

In January 2020, WHO publicly applauded China for its supposed speedy and transparent response, even though recordings of private meetings obtained by The Associated Press showed top officials were frustrated at the country's lack of cooperation.

WHO also recommended against mask-wearing for the public for months, a mistake many health officials say cost lives.

Numerous scientists also slammed WHO's reluctance to acknowledge that COVID-19 was frequently spread in the air and by people without symptoms, criticizing the agency's lack of strong guidance to prevent such exposure.

Tedros was a vociferous critic of rich countries who hoarded the limited supplies of COVID-19 vaccines, warning that the world was on the brink of a "catastrophic moral failure" by failing to share shots with poor countries.

Most recently, WHO has struggled to investigate the origins of the coronavirus, a challenging scientific endeavour that has also become politically fraught.

After a weeks-long visit to China, WHO released a report in 2021 concluding that COVID-19 most likely jumped into humans from animals, dismissing the possibility that it originated in a lab as "extremely unlikely."

But the U.N. agency backtracked the following year, saying "key pieces of data" were still missing and that it was premature to rule out that COVID-19 might have ties to a lab.

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Mark Woolhouse, an infectious diseases professor at the University of Edinburgh, described COVID-19 as a "once-in-a-lifetime disaster" and said that broad immunity against the virus meant we were now in a new phase of the outbreak.

Woolhouse noted there had also been significant criticism of WHO's pandemic response, in addition to those of its member countries and others.

He lamented that the global community missed numerous chances to stop the coronavirus earlier, in addition to causing much "self-inflicted harm" by shutting down much of society.

"Given the ever-present threat of another pandemic, lessons need to be learned," he said.

_____ Maria Cheng reported from London.

No love lost between Russian military and Wagner mercenaries

A threat by the owner of private Russian military company Wagner on Friday to withdraw his fighters from the battle to seize an eastern Ukrainian city is another flareup in his dispute with Russia's regular military over credit and tactics in the war.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, a wealthy entrepreneur with close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, has led the push to jump-start Russia's stalemated offensive in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk province. He threatened to pull out his soldiers from the city of Bakhmut next week, citing high casualties and ammunition shortages.

Russia's nine-month campaign to take Bakhmut has made the city the focus of the war's longest battle. Ferocious house-to-house fighting there has produced some of the bloodiest encounters since Russia sent troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

Here is a look at Wagner's history and its role in the fighting.

WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF WAGNER'S LEADER?

Prigozhin, who received a 12-year prison term in 1981 on charges of robbery and assault, started a restaurant business in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s following his release from prison. It was in this capacity that he got to know Putin, the city's deputy mayor at the time.

Prigozhin used his connection with Putin to develop a catering business and won lucrative Russian government contracts that earned him the nickname "Putin's chef." He later expanded into other areas, including media outlets and an infamous "troll factory" that led to his indictment in the U.S. for meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

In January, Prigozhin, 61, acknowledged founding, leading and financing the shadowy Wagner company.

WHERE HAS WAGNER WORKED?

Wagner was first spotted in action in eastern Ukraine soon after a separatist conflict erupted there in April 2014, weeks after Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

While backing the separatist insurgency in the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, Russia denied sending its own weapons and troops there despite ample evidence to the contrary. Engaging private contractors in the fighting allowed Moscow to maintain a degree of deniability.

Prigozhin's company was called Wagner after the nickname of its first commander, Dmitry Utkin, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Russian military's special forces. It soon established a reputation for its extreme brutality and ruthlessness.

Wagner personnel also deployed to Syria, where Russia supported President Bashar Assad's government in a civil war. In Libya, they fought alongside forces of commander Khalifa Hifter. The group has also operated in the Central African Republic and Mali.

Prigozhin has reportedly used Wagner's deployment to Syria and African countries to secure lucrative mining contracts. U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January that the company was using its access to gold and other resources in Africa to fund its operations in Ukraine.

Some Russian media have alleged that Wagner was involved in the July 2018 killings of three Russian journalists in the Central African Republic who were investigating the group's activities. The slayings remain

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unsolved.

WHAT IS THE GROUP'S REPUTATION?

Western countries and U.N. experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of committing human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

In December 2021, the European Union accused the group of "serious human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings," and of carrying out "destabilizing activities" in the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

Video footage has surfaced that purported to show some of the activities that have contributed to Wagner's fearsome reputation.

A 2017 video posted online showed a group of armed people, reported to be Wagner contractors, torturing a Syrian man, beating him to death with a sledgehammer and cutting his head before mutilating and burning his body. Russian authorities ignored requests by the media and rights activists to investigate.

In November 2022, another video showed a former Wagner contractor beaten to death with a sledgehammer after he allegedly fled to the Ukrainian side and was recaptured. Despite public outrage and demands for an investigation, the Kremlin turned a blind eye.

WHAT IS WAGNER'S ROLE IN UKRAINE?

Wagner has taken an increasingly visible role in the war in Ukraine as regular Russian troops have suffered heavy attrition and lost control over territory in humiliating setbacks.

Prigozhin claimed full credit in January for capturing the Donetsk region salt-mining town of Soledar and accused the Russian Defense Ministry of trying to steal Wagner's glory. He has repeatedly complained that the Russian military failed to supply Wagner with sufficient ammunition to capture Bakhmut, the reason he cited Friday for his withdrawal threat.

Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survived a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner.

The U.S. estimates Wagner has about 50,000 personnel fighting in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 of the convicts the company enlisted.

A U.S. official says nearly half of the 20,000 Russian forces killed in Ukraine since December have been Wagner's troops in Bakhmut.

The U.S. assesses that Wagner is spending about \$100 million a month in the fight. In December, the United States accused North Korea of supplying weapons, including rockets and missiles, to the Russian company in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Both Wagner and North Korea denied the reports.

HOW HAS WAGNER'S LEADER CRITICIZED RUSSIA'S MILITARY?

If the U.S. accusation is true, Wagner's reach for North Korean weapons may reflect its long-running dispute with the Russian military leadership, which dates back to the company's creation.

Troops purported to be Wagner contractors on the front line in Ukraine recorded a video in which they showered the chief of the Russian military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, with curses for the alleged failure to provide ammunition.

Prigozhin himself accuses top-ranking Russian military officers of incompetence. His frequent complaints are unprecedented for Russia's tightly controlled political system, in which only Putin could air such criticism.

Prigozhin has increasingly raised his public profile, issuing daily messaging app statements to boast about Wagner's purported victories, sardonically mock his enemies and make complaints about Russia's military brass.

Asked recently about a media comparison of him with Grigory Rasputin, a mystic who gained fatal influence over Russia's last czar by claiming to have the power to cure his son's hemophilia, Prigozhin snapped: "I don't stop blood, but I spill blood of the enemies of our Motherland."

WILL WAGNER REALLY WITHDRAW FROM BAKHMUT?

Yohann Michel, a research analyst with the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank, took Prigozhin's threat with "a shovel of salt, at least, or maybe a truck."

Michel said Prigozhin might want to regroup without being accused of retreating; he may worry about

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being fired for not taking the city and prefer to say he left on his own; or he could genuinely need more ammunition.

"The only thing I am taking seriously from that declaration is that Bakhmut is probably not ready to fall," Michel, who is based in Berlin, said.

If Prigozhin did pull Wagner's troops out of Bakhmut, it would have serious implications, according to Michel said.

"If he's removed from the front line — except if Russia surprisingly has reserves that they did not want to use before — I think we can say it is the end of this phase of the offensive for Russia," he said.

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

With detailed race question, Census may end ancestry ask

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

Is ancestry history? The U.S. Census Bureau is contemplating getting rid of a question about a person's ancestry on its most comprehensive survey, saying it may duplicate a newly-revised race question that allows respondents to write from where they or their antecedents came.

The Census Bureau is conducting research to determine if they get fewer responses, if data quality is compromised and what similarities or differences there are between the race and ancestry questions on the American Community Survey. The ancestry question has been asked since the 1980s.

Preliminary findings show that respondents are more likely to answer the race question than the ancestry query and that the data pulled from the race question covers 88% of the 126 ancestry groups the statistical agency lists, Census Bureau officials told an advisory committee on Friday.

Some civil rights groups, though, are worried the changes are premature and want the bureau to wait until detailed race data from the 2020 census is released for comparison. They also say proposed changes to the federal government's race and ethnicity categories by the White House's Office of Management and Budget could impact the way people respond.

The OMB's proposed changes, currently under review, would combine the race and ethnic origin questions into a single query because some advocates say the current method of asking about race and separately about ethnic origin often confuses Hispanic respondents. It also would create a new category for people of Middle Eastern and North African descent, also known by the acronym MENA, who are now classified as white but say they have been routinely undercounted.

"It is possible, for example, that respondents view their 'ancestry' — and the ancestry of their household members, including children — differently than they view their race or ethnicity subgroup or national origin," The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights said last month in a letter asking the Census Bureau to pause its research on the matter.

The Census Bureau's decision on whether to eliminate the ancestry question likely won't come for another year or two, well after any changes to the federal government's race and ethnicity categories are decided next year.

The American Community Survey is the bureau's largest survey and asks about more than 40 topics ranging from income, internet access, rent, disabilities and language spoken at home. Along with the census, it helps determine how \$1.5 trillion in federal spending is distributed each year, where schools are built and the location of new housing developments, among other things.

Starting in 2020, the Census Bureau has allowed respondents to write detailed information about their background for the race question. For instance, the race question now allows a respondent to check a box for "Black" and then write in Haitian, Nigerian or other backgrounds in a blank box. The ancestry question asks "What is this person's ancestry of ethnic origin?" and allows respondents to fill in a blank box with answers like Brazilian or Lebanese.

During the 2021 American Community Survey, estimates from the race question were larger or no different than estimates from the ancestry query in 87% of the 111 ancestry groups available from the race

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data, Census Bureau officials on Friday told members of the National Advisory Committee.

However, it was lower for respondents with ancestry in several Caribbean nations as well as those with Azerbaijani, British, Celtic, French Canadian, Guyanese, Pennsylvania German, Romani and Scotch-Irish backgrounds. Census Bureau officials said Friday they want to study the reasons for that.

Moving forward, the Census Bureau needs to consider how the questions are worded and what race and ancestry terms mean in people's everyday lives, said Iheoma Iruka, a committee member and research professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"They are social and political, meaning they can change over time," Iruka said.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP

It's Cornell for New Orleans student with \$10M in offers

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A 16-year-old high school senior in New Orleans who received scholarship offers from 149 colleges and universities totaling \$10 million said Friday that he has chosen to attend Cornell University.

Dennis "Maliq" Barnes will graduate on May 24 from the International High School of New Orleans, where he earned a 4.98 grade point average. He also has 27 college credits through a dual enrollment program with Southern University of New Orleans.

He plans to study computer science at Cornell, an Ivy League school in Ithaca, New York. He has also said he is considering law school.

"Today is an exciting day for me and my family, and I look forward to working with Cornell's College of Engineering over the course of my undergraduate education," Barnes said.

In an interview last week, Barnes said that a major reason he cranked out applications to close to 200 schools was his desire to have numerous educational and financial options. He ultimately was accepted at 186 colleges and universities. The school said it believes the \$10 million in scholarship offers from 149 of them to be a record for U.S. college-bound seniors.

Russia's Wagner boss threatens Bakhmut pullout in Ukraine

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The owner of Russia's Wagner military contractor threatened Friday to withdraw his troops next week from the protracted battle for the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, accusing Moscow's military command of starving his forces of ammunition.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, a wealthy entrepreneur with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, claimed that Wagner fighters had planned to capture Bakhmut by May 9, Russia's Victory Day holiday celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany. But they were undersupplied and suffering heavy losses, he said, and would hand over operations to the regular army on May 10.

It is not the first time Prigozhin has raged about ammunition shortages and blamed Russia's military, with which he has long been in conflict. Known for bluster, he has previously made unverifiable claims and threats he hasn't carried out.

Prigozhin's spokespeople also published a video of him Friday shouting, swearing and pointing at about 30 uniformed bodies lying on the ground. He says they are Wagner fighters who died on Thursday alone, and demands ammunition from Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov.

"These are someone's fathers and someone's sons," Prigozhin says. "The scum that doesn't give us ammunition will eat their guts in hell."

Yohann Michel, a research analyst with the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank, said Prigozhin's comments should usually be taken with a grain of salt, but "this time I would take a shovel of salt, at least, or maybe a truck."

But why Prigozhin is threatening to pull his forces out is an open question, Michel said. He might want

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to regroup without being accused of retreating; he may worry about being fired for not taking the city and prefer to say he left on his own; or he could genuinely need more ammunition.

"The only thing I am taking seriously from that declaration is that Bakhmut is probably not ready to fall," said Michel, who is based in Berlin.

Wagner has spearheaded the struggle for Bakhmut, the war's longest — and likely bloodiest — battle. U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Monday the U.S. estimates that nearly half of the 20,000 Russian troops killed in Ukraine since December were Wagner fighters in Bakhmut.

A pullout by Wagner would be a huge blow to the Russian campaign.

For the Ukrainian side, Bakhmut has become an important symbol of resistance to Russia's invasion. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says its loss could build international support for a deal that could require Ukraine to make unacceptable compromises.

Like Michel, Ukrainian officials were skeptical about Prigozhin's claims of ammunition shortages. Military intelligence representative Andrii Cherniak told The Associated Press that Prigozhin was trying to "justify their unsuccessful actions" in Bakhmut.

Shoigu didn't immediately respond to Prigozhin, but his ministry reported Friday that he ordered a top official to ensure a "continuous supply" of all necessary weapons and military equipment to Russian troops. And in a counterpoint to Prigozhin's visibility, an official video showed Shoigu inspecting tanks and other military equipment destined for Russian troops in Ukraine.

At the end of last year, the U.S. estimated Wagner had about 50,000 personnel fighting in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 convicts the company has enlisted. That makes it a small part of Russian fighting forces.

If Prigozhin did pull Wagner's troops out of Bakhmut, it would have serious implications, Michel said.

"If he's removed from the front line — except if Russia surprisingly has reserves that they did not want to use before — I think we can say it is the end of this phase of the offensive for Russia," he said.

Prigozhin's acrimonious relations with the military brass date back to Wagner's creation in 2014. During the war in Ukraine, he has publicly accused some top Russian military officials of incompetence — behavior that is highly unusual in Russia's tightly controlled political system.

Prigozhin alleged Friday that Russia's regular army was supposed to protect the flanks as Wagner troops pushed forward but is "barely holding on to them," deploying "tens and rarely hundreds" of troops.

"Wagner ran out of resources to advance in early April, but we're advancing despite the fact that the enemy's resources outnumber ours fivefold," Prigozhin's statement said. "Because of the lack of ammunition, our losses are growing exponentially every day."

Hanna Maliar, deputy head of Ukraine's Defense Ministry, said Friday that Ukrainian artillery had destroyed some Wagner ammunition depots, and other military officials said Ukrainian forces were holding their own in Bakhmut. The Russian Defense Ministry, meanwhile, said its forces had destroyed a bridge that Ukrainian troops used to supply their side in Bakhmut. It wasn't possible to independently verify either side's claims.

Prigozhin has toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising inmates pardons if they survive a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. Western countries and United Nations experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of committing numerous human rights abuses throughout Africa.

Bakhmut, about 55 kilometers (34 miles) north of the Russian-held regional capital of Donetsk, has tactical military value for Moscow, though analysts say it won't be decisive in the war's outcome. The city had a prewar population of 80,000 and was an important industrial center. It is now a ghost town.

Western officials and analysts believe Russia has run low on ammunition as the 14-month conflict became bogged down in a war of attrition over the winter.

Prigozhin had already threatened to withdraw from Bakhmut once before, in an interview with a Russian military blogger last week.

Asked by The AP about Prigozhin's statement Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined comment.

Also on Friday, an oil refinery in Russia's southern Krasnodar region, which borders the Crimean Peninsula that Russia illegally annexed, briefly caught fire after it was attacked by a drone, Russia's state news agency Tass reported. The fire was small and was quickly put out, the report said.

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It was the second straight day that the Ilyinsky refinery had come under a drone attack. Drone attacks on oil facilities in Russian regions bordering Ukraine have been reported almost daily over the past week.

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

TurboTax customers to receive checks for \$141M settlement

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Millions of Americans who qualified for free tax services — but were instead deceived into paying TurboTax for their returns — will soon get settlement checks in the mail.

In a settlement last year, TurboTax's owner Intuit Inc. was ordered to pay \$141 million to some 4.4 million people across the country. Those impacted were low-income consumers eligible for free, federally-supported tax services — but paid TurboTax to file their federal returns across the 2016, 2017 and 2018 tax years due to "predatory and deceptive marketing," New York Attorney General Letitia James said.

All 50 states and the District of Columbia signed the May 2022 settlement, which was led by James.

Consumers eligible for restitution payments do not need to file a claim, the New York Attorney's General Office said Thursday. They will be notified by an email from Rust Consulting, the settlement fund administrator, and receive a check automatically.

Checks will be mailed starting next week, and continue through the month of May. The amount paid to each eligible consumer ranges from \$29 to \$85 — depending on the number of tax years they qualify for.

"TurboTax's predatory and deceptive marketing cheated millions of low-income Americans who were trying to fulfill their legal duties to file their taxes," James said in a Thursday statement. "Today we are righting that wrong and putting money back into the pockets of hardworking taxpayers who should have never paid to file their taxes."

At the time of the May 2022 settlement, James said her investigation into Intuit was sparked by a 2019 ProPublica report that found the company was using deceptive tactics to steer low-income tax filers away from the free, federal services they qualified for — and toward its own commercial products instead.

Under the terms of last year's settlement, Intuit Inc. agreed to suspend TurboTax's "free, free, free" ad campaign. According to documents obtained by ProPublica, Intuit executives were aware of the impact of advertising free services that were actually not free for everyone.

"The website lists Free, Free, Free and the customers are assuming their return will be free," an internal company PowerPoint presentation said, per ProPublica. "Customers are getting upset."

When contacted by The Associated Press on Friday, Intuit pointed to the company's May 2022 statement following the settlement agreement.

"Intuit is pleased to have reached a resolution with the state attorneys general that will ensure the company can return our focus to providing vital services to American taxpayers today and in the future," Kerry McLean, Intuit's executive vice president and general counsel, said at the time.

King Charles III surprises crowd outside Buckingham Palace

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — King Charles III surprised cheering fans who started gathering outside Buckingham Palace on Friday, a day ahead of his coronation, as final touches were made in preparation for an occasion that London hasn't celebrated in 70 years.

People in the crowd screamed his name as Charles stepped from a chauffeur-driven Bentley wearing a blue suit. One person could be heard yelling "God save the king" as the British monarch approached the throng lined up behind a barricade.

Charles thanked the well-wishers for coming, shaking hands as he slowly moved along the line.

Theresa Iredale, wearing a plastic crown, said she trembled when the king approached her after she screamed his name.

"I saw his hand coming out to mine and I was like, 'I can't believe I'm shaking the king's hand,'" she said.

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Prince William, heir to the throne, and his wife, Kate, also greeted the public during the walkabout, talking to fans on the opposite side of The Mall, posing for selfies and chit-chatting.

The royals made the stop after a luncheon that followed the final rehearsal for Charles' Saturday morning coronation service at Westminster Abbey.

Charles ascended the throne automatically when his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died last year. The religious ceremony of the coronation represents his formal crowning.

The celebration has been months in the making, choreographed down to the finest detail and includes a huge security operation.

Beyond the massive planning, Charles is trying to remain relevant as support for the monarchy has waned, particularly among a younger generation that cares less about its traditions. His crowning takes place as some question the large expense of public funds — with no estimate provided yet — during a cost-of-living crisis that has left many Britons struggling.

On Thursday, William and Kate, the Prince and Princess of Wales, took a subway train and visited a pub in Soho as part of the lead-up to the coronation.

The crowd outside the palace has been growing for several days, with visitors from around the world assembling to witness history as the latest monarch is crowned in a tradition that dates back more than 1,000 years.

Fans of the royal family were decked out in the red, white and blue of the Union Jack, waving flags, wearing full outfits made of the distinctive pattern and one man had it painted on his face.

Many of those assembled had already camped out or planned to spend the night hoping for a prime perch for the procession Saturday and maybe a view of the newly crowned monarch and Queen Camilla, his wife, waving from the balcony of the palace after returning from the ceremony.

Those who only expected a fleeting glimpse of the king, were richly rewarded to get to meet him in person.

"Absolutely amazing, just surreal," said Gillian Holmes.

"My daughter said her legs were shaking, she was in shock," Holmes said. "I never ever dreamt that I would meet the king. I can't believe it."

Throughout the day, rail travelers throughout the United Kingdom were greeted with a recorded message from the king as they boarded trains wishing them and their families "a wonderful coronation weekend."

The message concluded with Charles providing the familiar warning passengers get before they board or leave subways and trains: "And remember, please mind the gap."

'Yellowstone' to end in November, sequel starts in December

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The popular television western "Yellowstone" with Kevin Costner will end this fall and be replaced almost immediately by a sequel. But like any good drama, there's some mystery involved.

The sequel, still untitled, will premiere December on the Paramount cable network, which also televises "Yellowstone," Paramount said on Friday.

Behind Costner, who plays Montana rancher John Dutton, series creator Taylor Sheridan launched a phenomenon. The opening of its fifth season last November was seen by 12.1 million viewers on the night of its debut, more people than any other scripted series last fall — a remarkable feat for a show not on a broadcast network.

"We've been able to create a show that didn't start out being popular but did it on its own terms," Costner told The Associated Press last fall.

"Yellowstone" will wrap up with new episodes airing in November; how many was not announced on Friday. Those episodes haven't been filmed yet, and it's not clear whether Costner will participate following reports that he may want out of the series.

Paramount would not comment on that Friday, with a spokesperson saying only, "Kevin Costner is a big part of 'Yellowstone' and we hope that's the case for a long time to come."

David Glasser, CEO of 101 Studios, which produces "Yellowstone" with MTV Entertainment, said the new

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series "will be picking up where 'Yellowstone' leaves off in another epic tale." While the series hasn't been named, the word "Yellowstone" will be part of the title — an important distinction because that wasn't the case for spinoffs like "1883" or "1923."

Paramount has denied published reports that actor Matthew McConaughey is signed to star in the sequel. But a spokesperson said Friday that McConaughey "is a phenomenal talent with whom we'd love to partner."

Following its debut on the cable network, the sequel will also air on the Paramount+ streaming network.

That's a hugely important distinction for the company. "Yellowstone" streams on NBC Universal's Peacock service, owned by Comcast, meaning a big chunk of revenue created by the popular drama has been going elsewhere.

DeSantis celebrates wins at end of busy legislative session

By STEVE PEOPLES and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — On the day he took office, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis vowed to pursue an agenda that would heal the state's political divisions.

In an op-ed, he pledged to prioritize environmental protection, the economy, education. He highlighted the "diverse, bipartisan group of qualified individuals" he hired for his administration.

"It is time for our state to come together," he declared in the January 2019 piece.

On Friday, more than four years later, DeSantis concluded a legislative session that establishes him as perhaps the most aggressive and accomplished conservative governor in the nation's bitter culture wars — just as he prepares to enter the 2024 presidential contest as a top rival to former President Donald Trump.

Intensifying his hard-right shift that began during the pandemic, the 44-year-old Republican governor in recent weeks has pushed the limits of divisive cultural battles over abortion, LGBTQ rights, sex education, guns, immigration and diversity. And in most cases, backed by Republican supermajorities in Florida's Legislature, he won.

DeSantis in recent weeks signed a law to ban abortion at six weeks of pregnancy and another to allow people to carry concealed guns without a permit. He expanded what critics call his "Don't Say Gay" law that now blocks classroom instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity for all grades. And in the coming days, he will sign a law banning diversity, equity and inclusion programs in state colleges, along with another bill that prevents students and teachers from being required to use pronouns that don't correspond to someone's sex.

The governor has also used the power of his office to seize partial control of Disney World, one of his state's largest employers, which spoke out against the "Don't Say Gay" law.

And as the 2024 presidential contest heats up, he's eager to celebrate his accomplishments.

"When I became governor, the first day, sat in the office, I kind of just looked around and I thought to myself, 'I don't know what SOB is going to succeed me in this office, but they ain't going to have much to do because we're getting all the meat off the bone,'" he said during a Thursday news conference about fishing dates.

DeSantis' unapologetic conservative shift, an evolution years in the making, positions him well among GOP presidential primary voters, who tend to be fiercely partisan. But it has sparked concerns among others, including donors, GOP officials and even some moderate Democrats, who initially welcomed DeSantis' approach but now fear that his crusade to champion conservative culture may alienate as many people as it attracts.

"His unrelenting focus on the cultural issues more than the economic issues gets to be tiresome," said longtime Republican donor Bobbie Kilberg. "I think people over time will want someone who does not add to the scenario of pushing people further and further and further apart."

DeSantis is poised to launch a presidential bid as soon as next week, though allies believe that a formal announcement, which could begin with an exploratory committee, is more likely to come around the end of May. For much of the year, he has sidestepped questions about his national ambitions, insisting that he was focused on Florida's legislative session.

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DeSantis' team is optimistic that his conservative accomplishments will strengthen his appeal among primary voters who may be willing to move on from Trump.

"He's got a lot done," former Georgia Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, a fierce Trump critic, said of DeSantis. "Ron DeSantis is more of a conservative than Donald Trump has ever been."

Still, would-be supporters like Duncan are concerned that DeSantis' fight with Disney has gone too far and that he should be zeroed in on more important issues.

"He's focusing on the wrong Disney character," Duncan said. "Instead of picking on Mickey, you need to pick on Donald."

Those who know DeSantis best trace his emergence as a leading voice in the nation's cultural divisions to the pandemic.

After initially agreeing to COVID-19 shutdowns, DeSantis soon established himself as one of the GOP's most aggressive critics of public health measures. He became a conservative hero of sorts as he promoted what he called "the free state of Florida."

Before the pandemic, he followed through on his promise to focus on education funding and environmental protection. He dedicated billions of dollars to Everglades restoration and other water protection projects over his first term, and he continued such efforts into the early days of his second. He has also consistently pushed for and secured pay raises for teachers in the state budget.

Democrat Bob Buckhorn, the former mayor of Tampa, said he was "pleasantly surprised" at the governor's first months in office. But he said his hope faded soon after the pandemic exploded in the spring of 2020.

"I think we all knew he was ambitious, but I don't think all of us knew how far he would go and the extent to which he would go to build credibility with an audience that doesn't represent Florida," Buckhorn said.

DeSantis' team rejects the notion that he has fixated on red meat policies. They note the governor's spending on education and the environment in addition to recent moves to cut taxes on household items such as diapers.

DeSantis' super PAC, which already has a half dozen paid staffers on the ground in each of the first four states on the Republican presidential primary calendar, did not mention his bipartisan achievements in a statement touting DeSantis' "incredible success."

"Gov. DeSantis' robust record of legislative accomplishments includes enacting a Parents Bill of Rights and standing up to draconian COVID mandates to supporting law and order and pursuing the death penalty for child rapists," said super PAC spokesperson Erin Perrine. "Ron DeSantis will never back down from pursuing strong conservative policies."

Indeed, as 2024 has grown closer, DeSantis has done as much or more than any other Republican governor in America to use the levers of government to lean into cultural fights. Along the way, he embraced a new catchphrase: "Florida is where woke comes to die."

In other legislative wins, DeSantis has made it illegal for state and local investment funds to consider companies' environmental, social and governance stances in his fight against "woke" corporations. He also signed a bill allowing the death penalty in child rape convictions, despite a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that banned capital punishment in such cases. And he signed a bill to end a unanimity requirement in death penalty sentencing.

Another new law to harden the state's immigration policy and add millions of dollars to his controversial migrant relocation program awaits his signature.

"It's all red meat," Kilberg said. "I think a Republican would have a better shot getting elected in the general election if they were less divisive and more willing to work together with people for the common good. That clearly is not his mantra."

Still, Kilberg said she would "most likely" vote for DeSantis and help him raise money if he becomes the Republican nominee in a general election against President Joe Biden.

"I say most likely, because it would be important to me to see DeSantis soften his image, have a more caring image, have a more inclusive image," she said. "DeSantis is not the only alternative to Trump."

Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writer Brendan Farrington in Tallahassee, Fla., con-

tributed to this report.

Follow the AP's coverage of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis at <https://apnews.com/hub/ron-desantis>.

April hiring gains reflect a still-resilient US job market

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's employers added a healthy 253,000 jobs in April, evidence of a labor market that still shows surprising resilience despite rising interest rates, chronically high inflation and a banking crisis that could weaken the economy.

The unemployment rate dipped to 3.4%, matching a 54-year low, the Labor Department said Friday. The jobless rate fell in part, though, because 43,000 people left the labor force, the first drop since November, and were no longer counted as unemployed.

In its report Friday, the government noted that while hiring was solid in April, it was much weaker in February and March than it had previously estimated. Job gains for those months was downgraded by a combined 149,000. And hourly wages rose last month at the fastest pace since July, which may alarm the inflation fighters at the Federal Reserve.

April's hiring gain compares with 165,000 in March and 248,000 in February and is still at a level considered vigorous by historical standards. The job market has remained durable despite the Fed's aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes over the past year to fight inflation. Layoffs are still relatively low, job openings comparatively high.

Job growth was particularly strong last month among health care companies, restaurants and bars and a broad category that includes managers, administrators and technical support workers.

In one sign of the benefits of a consistently tight job market, Black unemployment dipped in April to 4.7% — the lowest such level in government records dating to 1972.

Looked at broadly, the nation's job market appears to be easing into a more moderate phase, roughly akin to the pace of hiring that preceded the pandemic recession of 2020. Job gains for February through April marked the weakest three-month average since January 2021 yet still slightly exceeded the pre-pandemic pace.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell himself sounded somewhat mystified this week by the job market's durability. He and other Fed officials have expressed concern that a robust job market exerts upward pressure on wages and prices. They hope to achieve a so-called soft landing — cooling the economy and the labor market just enough to tame inflation yet not so much as to trigger a recession. Most economists doubt that the Fed will succeed and expect a recession to begin sometime this year.

Last month, the proportion of Americans who either have a job or are looking for one — the so-called labor force participation rate — was unchanged at 62.6%. The Fed would like to see labor participation grow: More people in the job market would likely put downward pressure on pay growth and help contain inflation.

Average hourly wages rose by 0.5% from March to April, nearly twice what economists had expected.

"Wage pressures on inflation are proving persistent," Brian Coulton, chief economist at Fitch Ratings, wrote in a research note. "And with the participation rate failing to improve, this jobs report will not convince the Fed that they are on top of inflation."

The ever-higher borrowing costs the Fed has engineered have weakened some key sectors of the economy, notably the housing market. Pounded by higher mortgage rates, sales of existing homes were down a sharp 22% in March from a year earlier. Investment in housing has cratered over the past year.

America's factories are slumping, too. An index produced by the Institute for Supply Management, an organization of purchasing managers, has signaled a contraction in manufacturing for six straight months.

Even consumers, who drive about 70% of economic activity and who have been spending healthily since the pandemic recession ended three years ago, are showing signs of exhaustion: Retail sales fell in February and March after having begun the year with a bang.

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As the Fed has raised rates — 10 consecutive hikes since March 2022 — inflation has slowed from a year-over-year peak of 9.1% last June to 5% in March. That's still well above the Fed's 2% target. But it may signify enough progress, along with signs that the job market is decelerating, to persuade the central bank to pause its rate hikes.

"Everything's moving in the right direction," said Tom Garretson, senior portfolio strategist at RBC Wealth Management. "The Fed's probably done enough."

The Fed's rate hikes are hardly the economy's only headwind. Congressional Republicans are threatening to let the federal government default on its debt, by refusing to raise the limit on what it can borrow, if Democrats don't accept sharp cuts in federal spending. 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.

Since March, America's financial system has been rattled by three of the four biggest bank failures in U.S. history. Worried that jittery depositors will withdraw their money, banks are likely to reduce lending to conserve cash. Multiplied across the banking industry, that trend could cause a credit crunch that would hobble the economy.

Several big technology companies, including Google and Amazon, have announced layoffs this year. Such job cuts, though, haven't been widespread enough across the economy to boost the U.S. jobless rate or the number of people applying for unemployment benefits. One reason is that many tech workers who were laid off have quickly landed new jobs.

Pinnacol Assurance, a workers' compensation insurance firm in Denver, has hired 100 people over the past year and now has a staff of about 700. Some of the newcomers to Pinnacol had been laid off by technology companies.

"They're double-dipping," said Tim Johnson, the firm's human resources chief. "They're getting severance, and they're getting a paycheck."

Mike Trepper, CEO at Pasco Kids First in New Port Richey, Florida, agreed that a sizable number of job seekers still "have many options."

His nonprofit, which helps child abuse victims, recently lost two employees, including a therapist who took a higher-paying job in private practice.

Some employers, though, report signs that labor shortages might be starting to ease. Gaston Curk, co-founder of OSM Worldwide, an e-commerce parcel carrier based in Glendale Heights, Illinois, has seen a 55% increase in applicants for open positions over the past six months.

Curk attributed the increase, in part, to more people re-entering the labor market as well as an increase in the company's starting pay.

Lisa Mason, another Pinnacol human resources executive, has noticed that workers aren't quite as willing to change jobs as they were a few months ago.

"We are seeing individuals not jumping as much as we had previously seen," she said. "They're strapping in a little bit to see what's happening in the market, what's going on with the economy."

AP Retail Writer Anne D'Innocenzio in New York contributed to this story.

Pride organizers keep eye on drag laws ahead of festivals

By SUSAN HAIGH and PAT EATON-ROBB Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Tennessee organizers booked more than 50 drag entertainers for next month's Midsouth Pride festival in Memphis now that the state's new law placing strict limits on cabaret shows is temporarily on hold.

But they are being cautious, making adjustments to performances should the limits of the first-in-the-nation law essentially banning drag from public property or in the presence of minors kick in before June celebrations.

"As soon as this stuff started making its way, I immediately started coming out with plans to be able to counteract that," said longtime festival organizer Vanessa Rodley. "Because, at the end of the day, we

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can't put on an event that then segregates a huge portion of our community, right? We just can't do that. So you have to find ways around it."

The show must go on.

Organizers of Pride festivals and parades in mostly conservative states where there's been a broader push targeting LGBTQ+ rights have been under increasing pressure to censor their events. They're taking steps like editing acts and canceling drag shows in order to still hold their annual celebrations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer identity in today's contentious climate.

In some cases, they are trying to navigate broad legislative language that can equate drag performances and story hours with "adult-oriented performances that are harmful to minors," as in the Tennessee law. In other places, Pride organizers have had to fight for local permits that were pro forma in past years, facing off with critics at local city council meetings who oppose drag.

Most Pride organizations are busy "doing their homework" and investigating how legislation popping up around the country may impact their events, said Ron deHarte, co-president for the U.S. Association of Prides. And in more progressive states like California, this year's Pride events will be an opportunity to make a larger statement and raise awareness about the LGBTQ+ community, he said.

"Our members attract more than 20 million people in the United States to their events every year," deHarte said. "So when you talk about the collective impact that Pride organizers can have, not only in their community but across the country, it is powerful."

Bills to limit or ban drag were filed in more than a dozen states. The only other state set to enact a law is Florida, where Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis is expected to sign a bill.

Kayla Bates, a founder of ELGbtq+, an organizer of the community Pride festival and parade in Elgin, Illinois, said they expect a large turnout for the inaugural event given the legislation targeting transgender rights and drag shows elsewhere.

"I think people want to really make it known that they back us and that we should feel safe and protected in our community," Bates said.

Often held in June, Pride events began as way to commemorate the uprising by New York's LGBTQ+ communities in 1969, known as the Stonewall rebellion, and as a way to celebrate the LGBTQ+ rights movement.

In New York City, a Pride rally planned for June 17 and a parade on June 25 will have a national theme: "Strength in Solidarity." Sue Doster, co-chairperson of NYC Pride, said they're putting a spotlight on the transgender community and drag queens, targets of the recent legislation in conservative states.

"They're attacking these people because they're less likely to stand up and fight back, which is why it's important that we all come together in solidarity and speak up when we see these injustices," Doster said.

Backlash against transgender individuals, drag performances and Pride events is not new. Last year, 31 members of a white supremacist group were arrested near an Idaho Pride event after they were found packed into the back of a U-Haul truck with riot gear.

This year, the Pride Alliance of the Treasure Coast in Port St. Lucie, Florida has reacted to possible legislation, canceling a planned gay pride parade and restricting other events to people 21 years and older.

The Pride festival in Hutchinson, Kansas, has also adjusted its program and secured a new venue after losing its original one when a local business owner posted a video on social media decrying the event, which included a drag queen story hour, as depraved.

"Our event is completely family friendly," said Hutchinson Salt City Pride chair Julia Johnson.

Meanwhile, organizers in the Nashville, Tennessee, suburb of Franklin, opted not to include drag performances in their Pride celebrations so they can work with local officials to get other events permitted.

In Naples, Florida, Pride organizers agreed they wouldn't allow drag performers to be tipped on stage, and later announced that the drag show portion of its festival will be held at an indoor venue because of safety concerns.

In Memphis, drag entertainers plan to not change costumes mid-performance or accept tips from the audience if the limits are reinstated.

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Even in progressive-leaning Massachusetts, there's been debate about whether a drag show could be part of a Pride celebration in the small town of North Brookfield, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) west of Boston. The three-member select board had rescinded a previous vote and determined a drag show violated restrictions on "adult entertainment." Last week, the town's lawyer said the event could take place on the town common as planned after the ACLU got involved.

Support for the community is also making a difference. In Iowa, the Cedar Falls Mayor Rob Green, this week reversed his controversial decision not to sign a proclamation declaring June as Pride Month. He wrote on Facebook that he signed the proclamation out of concern for the safety and health of LGBTQIA+ residents after hearing stories and receiving letters from constituents.

"I learn a lot from these kind of letters and very much appreciate the opportunity to re-examine my assumptions and thought processes," he wrote.

Dog Show 101: What's what at the Westminster Kennel Club

By JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — To the casual viewer, competing at the Westminster Kennel Club dog show might look pretty simple: Get a dog. Groom it. Pose it. Lead it around a ring.

But there's a lot more than that to getting to and exhibiting in the United States' most prestigious canine event, now in its 147th year.

So here are the ins and outs of the show, which starts Saturday at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York.

HOW MANY DOGS COMPETE?

Twenty-five hundred dogs from 210 different breeds and varieties signed up to vie for the best in show trophy that gets awarded Tuesday night. (Varieties are subsets of breeds. Think smooth, longhaired and wirehaired dachshunds.)

Hailing from 49 states and 13 countries, contestants range from tiny Chihuahuas to giant Great Danes. They include familiar breeds like Labrador retrievers, rarities such as the sloughi, and a newcomer, the bracco Italiano. Agility and obedience contests Saturday involve a few hundred more dogs, including some mixed-breed ones.

HOW DO DOGS GET INTO THE SHOW?

All the dogs are champions, meaning they've racked up a certain amount of prior accolades. Certain top dogs in the sport's complicated rankings are invited, but other pooches also can enter.

The process of becoming a potential best in show begins when breeders suss out which puppies in a litter have the physical attributes and disposition to shine in what's known as "conformation" competition.

Some pups eventually get to Westminster with owners who learned the ropes after getting a show-quality dog. Other canine contestants crisscross the country by road or even air, hitting shows every weekend with big-name professional handlers and a strategy that can entail gathering intel about rivals' schedules, pondering judges' past picks and even running ads to celebrate the animal's accomplishments and boost its profile. They don't call it "campaigning a dog" for nothing!

WHAT'S A DOG SHOW DOING AT A TENNIS FACILITY?

It's a new venue for Westminster, which was held for decades all or partly at Madison Square Garden. The pandemic prompted a move to outdoor digs at an estate in suburban Tarrytown, New York, for the past two years. Organizers were keen to return to New York City this year. Amid construction plans at a pier building that used to house the show's early rounds, organizers linked up with the U.S. Open tennis tournament's base in Flushing Meadows. "An iconic dog show event in an iconic venue," Westminster President Donald Sturz enthuses.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

"Conformation" dogs first face off against others of their breed – sometimes dozens of others, sometimes few or even none. Each breed's winner moves on to a semifinal round of judging against others in its "group," such as hounds, herding dogs or terriers. In the final round, the seven group winners compete

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for best in show.

WHAT DO JUDGES LOOK FOR?

They're tasked with determining which dog best matches the ideal, or "standard," for its breed.

The standard is derived from the breed's original function and may speak to anything from teeth to tail to temperament. For example, a hound developed to hunt in rough terrain might be required to have thick paw pads. A herding dog might need proportions that allow for quick, tight turns.

Judges do hands-on examinations and watch the dogs in motion, taking in each dog's assets and imperfections. Especially in the finals, distinctions can be very subtle. Show folk often say that victory can go to "the dog on the day" — or as the rest of us might say, the one that just brings it.

WHAT BREEDS HAVE WON THE MOST?

In records going back to 1907, Wire fox terriers have scampered away with the top prize 15 times, most recently in 2019. Scottish terriers, English springer spaniels, standard poodles and Pekingeses all have five or more wins.

Many breeds have yet to triumph, including such popular ones as the Labrador retriever. But winless breeds should never say never: A bloodhound took best in show for the first time just last year.

Westminster's agility and obedience competitions were added only within the last decade. So far, almost all the agility championships have gone to border collies, and nearly all the obedience titles to Labs. One Lab, named Heart, won five times in a row.

HAS A MIXED-BREED DOG EVER WON?

While Westminster has said there a few mixed-breed entrants in early shows, the best in show prize wasn't awarded until 1907 and has gone only to purebreds. The pedigreed set also has won all the agility and obedience trials to date, but there's a special prize every year for the top mix (or "all American dog," in show parlance).

The focus on purebreds irks groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which regularly protests Westminster as a reprehensible canine beauty pageant. The kennel club says it celebrates all dogs while highlighting "preservation breeding" of those with skills and traits that have been honed over generations.

WHAT DO WINNERS GET?

Bragging rights and trophies. There are no cash prizes, though the agility and obedience winners each get to direct a \$5,000 Westminster donation to a training club or to the American Kennel Club Humane Fund.

SO WHAT'S THE POINT?

Showcasing dogs, particularly breeds that many people don't see regularly, participants say. Many also value the friendships that develop at shows that bring dog lovers together across miles and backgrounds.

"We can all talk about dogs," says dog expert David Frei, who hosted the Westminster telecast for over two decades. "That's the beauty of the sport, and the beauty of dogs."

___ New York-based Associated Press journalist Jennifer Peltz has covered the Westminster dog show since 2013.

Could AI pen 'Casablanca'? Screenwriters take aim at ChatGPT

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — When Greg Brockman, the president and co-founder of ChatGPT maker OpenAI, was recently extolling the capabilities of artificial intelligence, he turned to "Game of Thrones."

Imagine, he said, if you could use AI to rewrite the ending of that not-so-popular finale. Maybe even put yourself into the show.

"That is what entertainment will look like," said Brockman.

Not six months since the release of ChatGPT, generative artificial intelligence is already prompting widespread unease throughout Hollywood. Concern over chatbots writing or rewriting scripts is one of the leading reasons TV and film screenwriters took to picket lines earlier this week.

Though the Writers Guild of America is striking for better pay in an industry where streaming has up-

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ended many of the old rules, AI looms as rising anxiety.

"AI is terrifying," said Danny Strong, the "Dopesick" and "Empire" creator. "Now, I've seen some of ChatGPT's writing and as of now I'm not terrified because Chat is a terrible writer. But who knows? That could change."

AI chatbots, screenwriters say, could potentially be used to spit out a rough first draft with a few simple prompts ("a heist movie set in Beijing"). Writers would then be hired, at a lower pay rate, to punch it up.

Screenplays could also be slyly generated in the style of known writers. What about a comedy in the voice of Nora Ephron? Or a gangster film that sounds like Mario Puzo? You won't get anything close to "Casablanca" but the barest bones of a bad Liam Neeson thriller isn't out of the question.

The WGA's basic agreement defines a writer as a "person" and only a human's work can be copyrighted. But even though no one's about to see a "By AI" writers credit at the beginning a movie, there are myriad ways that regenerative AI could be used to craft outlines, fill in scenes and mock up drafts.

"We're not totally against AI," says Michael Winship, president of the WGA East and a news and documentary writer. "There are ways it can be useful. But too many people are using it against us and using it to create mediocrity. They're also in violation of copyright. They're also plagiarizing."

The guild is seeking more safeguards on how AI can be applied to screenwriting. It says the studios are stonewalling on the issue. The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which bargains on the behalf of production companies, has offered to annually meet with the guild to go over definitions around the fast-evolving technology.

"It's something that requires a lot more discussion, which we've committed to doing," the AMPTP said in an outline of its position released Thursday.

Experts say the struggle screenwriters are now facing with regenerative AI is just the beginning. The World Economic Forum this week released a report predicting that nearly a quarter of all jobs will be disrupted by AI over the next five years.

"It's definitely a bellwether in the workers' response to the potential impacts of artificial intelligence on their work," says Sarah Myers West, managing director of the nonprofit AI Now Institute, which has lobbied the government to enact more regulation around AI. "It's not lost on me that a lot of the most meaningful efforts in tech accountability have been a product of worker-led organizing."

AI has already filtered into nearly every part of moviemaking. It's been used to de-age actors, remove swear words from scenes in post-production, supply viewing recommendations on Netflix and posthumously bring back the voices of Anthony Bourdain and Andy Warhol.

The Screen Actors Guild, set to begin its own bargaining with the AMPTP this summer, has said it's closely following the evolving legal landscape around AI.

"Human creators are the foundation of the creative industries and we must ensure that they are respected and paid for their work," the actors union said.

The implications for screenwriting are only just being explored. Actors Alan Alda and Mike Farrell recently reconvened to read through a new scene from "M(asterisk)A(asterisk)S(asterisk)H" written by ChatGPT. The results weren't terrible, though they weren't so funny, either.

"Why have a robot write a script and try to interpret human feelings when we already have studio executives who can do that?" deadpanned Alda.

Writers have long been among notoriously exploited talents in Hollywood. The films they write usually don't get made. If they do, they're often rewritten many times over. Raymond Chandler once wrote "the very nicest thing Hollywood can possibly think to say to a writer is that he is too good to be only a writer."

Screenwriters are accustomed to being replaced. Now, they see a new, readily available and inexpensive competitor in AI — albeit one with a slightly less tenuous grasp of the human condition.

"Obviously, AI can't do what writers and humans can do. But I don't know that they believe that, necessarily," says screenwriter Jonterri Gadson ("A Black Lady Sketchshow"). "There needs to be a human writer in charge and we're not trying to be gig workers, just revising what AI does. We need to tell the stories."

Dramatizing their plight as man vs. machine surely doesn't hurt the WGA's cause in public opinion. The

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writers are wrestling with the threat of AI just as concern widens over how hurriedly regenerative AI products has been thrust into society.

Geoffrey Hinton, an AI pioneer, recently left Google in order to speak freely about its potential dangers. "It's hard to see how you can prevent the bad actors from using it for bad things," Hinton told The New York Times.

"What's especially scary about it is nobody, including a lot of the people who are involved with creating it, seem to be able to explain exactly what it's capable of and how quickly it will be capable of more," says actor-screenwriter Clark Gregg.

The writers finds themselves in the awkward position of negotiating on a newborn technology with the potential for radical effect. Meanwhile, AI-crafted songs by "Fake Drake" or "Fake Eminem" continue to circulate online.

"They're afraid that if the use of AI to do all this becomes normalized, then it becomes very hard to stop the train," says James Grimmelman, a professor of digital and information law at Cornell University. "The guild is in the position of trying to imagine lots of different possible futures."

In that way, the long work stoppage that many are expecting — Moody's Investor Service forecasts that the strike may last three months or longer — could offer more time to analyze how regenerative AI might reshape screenwriting.

In the meantime, chanting demonstrators are hoisting signs with messages aimed at a digital foe. Seen on the picket lines: "ChatGPT doesn't have childhood trauma"; "I heard AI refuses to take notes"; and "Wrote ChatGPT this." ___ Associated Press Writer Krysta Fauria in Los Angeles and Robert Bumsted and Aron Ranen in New York contributed to this report.

___ Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: <http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP>

Yeezy shoes still stuck in limbo after Adidas split with Ye

By DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Germany (AP) — It's been nearly seven months since Adidas split with the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, and boxes of his popular Yeezy shoes are still piled up in warehouses.

The fate of 1.2 billion euros (\$1.3 billion) worth of unsold Yeezy stock is weighing on the German sports-wear company as it tries to engineer a turnaround from the loss of the lucrative sneaker line and the continued fallout over its former ties to Ye.

Adidas is "getting closer and closer to making a decision" on what to do with the sneakers and the "options are narrowing," new CEO Bjorn Gulden said in a conference call Friday after reporting 400 million euros (\$441 million) in lost sales at the start of the year.

But with "so many interested parties" involved in the discussions, no decision had yet been reached, he said.

Adidas is stuck with stacks of its flagship Yeezy brand shoes after ending its relationship with Ye in October over his antisemitic and other offensive comments on social media and in interviews.

Gulden, who became CEO in January after the Ye split, declined to say if destroying the shoes had been ruled out but that the company was "trying to avoid that."

He has previously said other options have drawbacks: selling the sneakers would mean paying royalties to Ye, restitching them to remove the brand identification would be dishonest, and giving them away to people in need could lead to resale because of their high market value.

Gulden would not say how many pairs of Yeezy shoes that Adidas is stuck holding "because then the consumer would know how many we have and that could have an impact on demand."

Losing the Yeezy brand is "of course hurting us," Gulden said in a statement. The breakup will reduce earnings by 500 million euros this year if Adidas decides not to sell the remaining Yeezy stock, the Herzogenaurach-based company said.

Net sales declined 1% in the first quarter, to 5.27 billion euros, and would have risen 9% with the Yeezy line, the company said. It reported a net loss of 24 million euros, a plunge from a profit of 310 million

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euros in the same period a year ago.

Operating profit, which excludes some items like taxes, was down to 60 million euros from 437 million euros a year earlier.

Gulden said the results for the Adidas were "a little better than we had expected" as the company seeks to restart growth and move beyond the breakup with Ye. He called 2023 "a year of transition" on the way to "a better '24 and a good '25."

The company faces other problems tied to the rapper. Investors sued Adidas a week ago in the U.S., alleging the company knew about Ye's offensive remarks and harmful behavior years before the split and failed to take precautionary measures to limit financial losses.

The lawsuit — representing people who bought Adidas securities between May 3, 2018, and February 21, 2023 — pointed to 2018 comments where Ye suggested slavery was a "choice" and reports of Ye making antisemitic statements in front of Adidas staff.

The company said last week that it rejected "these unfounded claims and will take all necessary measures to vigorously defend ourselves against them."

Ending the Ye partnership also cost Adidas 600 million euros in lost sales in the last three months of 2022, helping drive the company to a net loss of 513 million euros.

An operating loss of 700 million euros is possible this year, Adidas said, mostly due to the 500 million-euro hit it would take if it doesn't sell the existing Yeezy shoes.

Press group: China biggest global jailer of journalists

WASHINGTON (AP) — China was the biggest global jailer of journalists last year with more than 100 behind bars, according to a press freedom group, as President Xi Jinping's government tightened control over society.

Xi's government also was one of the biggest exporters of propaganda content, according to Reporters without Borders. China ranked second to last on the group's annual index of press freedom, behind only neighbor North Korea.

The ruling Communist Party has tightened already strict controls on media in China, where all newspapers and broadcasters are state-owned. Websites and social media are required to enforce censorship that bans material that might spread opposition to one-party rule.

Xi, China's most powerful figure in decades, called during a 2016 meeting with journalists who had been awarded official prizes for them to adhere to "the correct orientation of public opinion."

Xi is pursuing a "crusade against journalism," Reporters Without Borders said in a report Wednesday. It called China's decline in press freedom "disastrous."

Beijing operates what is regarded as the world's most extensive system of internet controls. Its filters try to block the Chinese public from seeing websites abroad operated by news outlets, governments and human rights and other activist groups.

Chinese journalists have been prosecuted on charges of spying, leaking national secrets and picking quarrels, a vague accusation used to jail dissidents. Others are subjected to surveillance, intimidation and harassment.

Journalist Dong Yuyu, who worked at a ruling party-affiliated newspaper and is a former Harvard University fellow, faces espionage charges after being detained for more than one year, his family said last week.

In 2022, Chinese-born Australian journalist Cheng Lei was tried in China on national security charges but has yet to learn the verdict, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in March.

Cheng worked for CGTN, the English-language state TV channel aimed at foreign audiences. She was detained in August 2019 and accused of sharing state secrets.

In Hong Kong, the Communist Party forced a prominent newspaper, Apple Daily, to shut down as part of a crackdown on pro-democracy sentiment.

Apple Daily's founder, Jimmy Lai, was convicted of fraud last year that his supporters said were politically motivated. Six other former executives of the newspaper pleaded guilty.

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Today in History: May 6, the Hindenburg crashes

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 6, the 126th day of 2023. There are 239 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 6, 1937, the hydrogen-filled German airship Hindenburg caught fire and crashed while attempting to dock at Lakehurst, New Jersey; 35 of the 97 people on board were killed along with a crewman on the ground.

On this date:

In 1882, President Chester Alan Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred Chinese immigrants from the U.S. for 10 years (Arthur had opposed an earlier version with a 20-year ban).

In 1910, Britain's Edwardian era ended with the death of King Edward VII; he was succeeded by George V.

In 1935, the Works Progress Administration began operating under an executive order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In 1941, Josef Stalin assumed the Soviet premiership, replacing Vyacheslav (VEE'-chek-slav) M. Molotov. Comedian Bob Hope did his first USO show before an audience of servicemen as he broadcast his radio program from March Field in Riverside, California.

In 1942, during World War II, some 15,000 American and Filipino troops on Corregidor island surrendered to Japanese forces.

In 1954, medical student Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile during a track meet in Oxford, England, in 3:59.4.

In 1994, former Arkansas state worker Paula Jones filed suit against President Bill Clinton, alleging he'd sexually harassed her in 1991. (Jones reached a settlement with Clinton in November 1998.)

In 2004, President George W. Bush apologized for the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers, calling it "a stain on our country's honor"; he rejected calls for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's resignation.

In 2006, Lillian Gertrud Asplund, the last American survivor of the sinking of the Titanic, died in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, at age 99.

In 2010, a computerized sell order triggered a "flash crash" on Wall Street, sending the Dow Jones industrials to a loss of nearly 1,000 points in less than half an hour.

In 2013, kidnap-rape victims Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight, who went missing separately about a decade earlier while in their teens or early 20s, were rescued from a house just south of downtown Cleveland. (Their captor, Ariel Castro, hanged himself in prison in September 2013 at the beginning of a life sentence plus 1,000 years.)

In 2020, New York City began shutting down its subway system overnight to allow for additional cleaning and disinfecting of cars and stations amid the pandemic. President Donald Trump reversed course on plans to wind down his COVID-19 task force; he said the force would shift its focus toward rebooting the economy and developing a vaccine.

Ten years ago: Grammy-winning singer Lauryn Hill was sentenced by a federal judge in Newark, New Jersey, to three months in prison for failing to pay about \$1 million in taxes over the previous decade. Italian statesman Giulio Andreotti, 94, died in Rome.

Five years ago: The number of homes destroyed by Hawaii's Kilauea volcano reached 26, as scientists reported lava spewing more than 200 feet into the air. Lebanon's Iranian-backed Hezbollah group scored major gains in parliamentary elections, as the main Western-backed faction headed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri lost a third of its seats. Actor Ashley Judd sued disgraced producer Harvey Weinstein, alleging sexual harassment and defamation.

One year ago: The United Nations raced to rescue more civilians from the tunnels under a besieged steel plant in Mariupol and the city at large, even as fighters holed up at the sprawling complex made their last stand to prevent Moscow's complete takeover of the strategic port. In Cuba, a powerful explosion ap-

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parently caused by a natural gas leak killed at least nine people and injured 40 when it blew away outer walls from a luxury hotel in the heart of Havana. No tourists were staying at the 96-room Hotel Saratoga because it was undergoing renovations. It was revealed that America's employers added 428,000 jobs in the previous month, extending a streak of solid hiring that defied punishing inflation, chronic supply shortages, the Russian war against Ukraine and much higher borrowing costs.

Today's Birthdays: Baseball Hall of Famer Willie Mays is 92. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., is 89. Rock singer Bob Seger is 78. Singer Jimmie Dale Gilmore is 78. Gospel singer-comedian Lulu Roman is 77. Actor Alan Dale is 76. Actor Richard Cox is 75. Actor Gregg Henry is 71. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair is 70. TV personality Tom Bergeron is 68. Actor Roma Downey is 63. Rock singer John Flansburgh (They Might Be Giants) is 63. Actor Julianne Phillips is 63. Actor-director George Clooney is 62. Actor Clay O'Brien is 62. Rock singer-musician Tony Scalzo (Fastball) is 59. Actor Leslie Hope is 58. Actor Geneva Carr (TV: "Bull") is 57. Rock musician Mark Bryan (Hootie and the Blowfish) is 56. Rock musician Chris Shiflett (Foo Fighters) is 52. Actor Stacey Oristano is 44. Model/TV personality Tiffany Coyne is 41. Actor Adrienne Palicki is 40. Actor Gabourey Sidibe (GA'-bah-ray SIH'-duh-bay) is 40. Actor-comedian Sasheer Zamata is 37. Rapper Meek Mill is 36. Houston Astros infielder Jose Altuve is 33. Actor-singer Naomi Scott is 30. Actor Noah Galvin is 29.