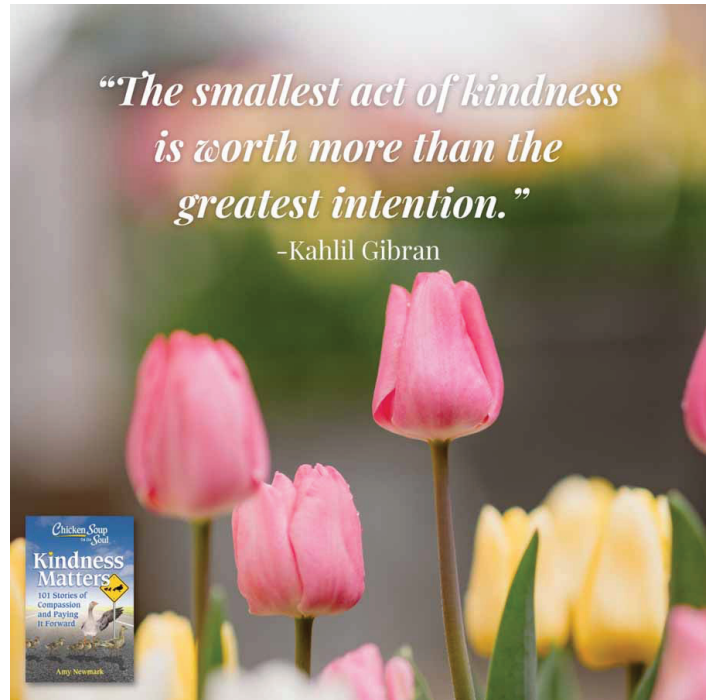


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## Groton Community Calendar

### Thursday, May 11

School Lunch: Cheeseburger, pasta bake, green beans.

Senior Menu: Tator tot hot dish, corn, apple juice, Mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.

Girls Golf at Madison.

Northeast Conference Track Meet in Groton

### Friday, May 12

School Lunch: Hot dogs, baked beans.

Senior Menu: Tuna salad on croissant, pea and cheese salad, mixed fruit.

Elementary Track and Field Day, 12:30 p.m.

### Saturday, May 13

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

## Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

## Sunday, May 14

MOTHER'S DAY

Graduation, 2 p.m.

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: 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.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.; worship at Zion, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.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

cruise missiles to Ukraine, affording Kyiv long-range strike capability ahead of its expected counteroffensive against Russian forces.

- Joran van der Sloot, a prime suspect in the disappearance of American Natalee Holloway in 2005, will be extradited to the U.S. from Peru. Holloway was last seen while on a high school graduation class trip in Aruba.

- Motherhood blogger Heather Armstrong, who found fame chronicling her struggles with alcoholism and depression, has died at age 47.

- Israel pressed ahead with a series of strikes toward Palestine as fighting intensified between the two countries. Israeli strikes in Gaza killed a fourth Palestinian Islamic Jihad commander, bringing the death toll to 25.

- The Pakistani government has called the army to quell violence sparked by the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who pleaded not guilty to corruption charges. At least three of Khan's senior party members have been arrested.

- In the ongoing war in Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukraine needs a "bit more time" to launch a counteroffensive against Russian forces, adding that his country will "lose a lot of people" if they attack now. Meanwhile, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said that Russians "haven't changed" and are exhibiting the same "brutality" in Ukraine as the Soviet troops that occupied eastern and central Europe during World War II.

### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

- The U.S. ends the federal public health emergency declared in response to the coronavirus pandemic today. This transition follows the World Health Organization's announcement last week that COVID-19 no longer presents a global public health emergency.

- Financial leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) wealth nations gather in Japan for a three-day summit amid a standoff over the debt ceiling in Washington and as fears of a recession mount.

- The 58th Academy of Country Music Awards takes place tonight at Ford Center in Frisco, Texas. Dolly Parton and Garth Brooks are co-hosting this year's ceremony, which will stream live at 7 p.m. ET on Prime Video.

- An FDA advisory panel unanimously voted in favor of making the birth control pill Opill available without a prescription. If approved, it would become the first over-the-counter contraceptive medication.

- Several people were reportedly shot as heavy gunfire erupted at a U.S.-Mexico crossing. Mexican media said the shooting occurred between "elements of the army and armed civilians," hours before the Title 42 immigration policy ends.

- The U.K. has reportedly sent several Storm Shadow

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## NEC TRACK AND FIELD MEET TIME SCHEDULE

Thursday, May 11, 2023 Groton

	4:00		POLE VAULT-Webster, May 10
FIELD EVENTS	11:00	GIRLS: BOYS:	HIGH JUMP, DISCUS SHOT PUT, LONG JUMP
	1:00	GIRLS: BOYS:	SHOT PUT, TRIPLE JUMP HIGH JUMP, DISCUS
	2:30	GIRLS: BOYS:	LONG JUMP TRIPLE JUMP
FIRST SESSION	11:30	BOYS	110 M HURDLES - PRELIMS
	11:40	GIRLS	100 M HURDLES - PRELIMS
	11:50	BOYS	3200 M RELAY - FINALS
	12:05	BOYS	100 M DASH - PRELIMS
	12:15	GIRLS	100 M DASH - PRELIMS
	12:25	GIRLS	3200 M RELAY - FINALS
FINAL SESSION	1:30	BOYS	110 M HURDLES
	1:35	GIRLS	100 M HURDLES
	1:40	BOYS/GIRLS	100 M DASH
	1:45	BOYS	800 M RELAY
	1:55	GIRLS	800 M RELAY
	2:05	BOYS	1600 M RUN
	2:15	GIRLS	1600 M RUN
	2:25	BOYS	400 M RELAY
	2:30	GIRLS	400 M RELAY
	2:35	BOYS	400 M DASH
	2:45	GIRLS	400 M DASH
	3:00	BOYS	300 M HURDLES
	3:10	GIRLS	300 M HURDLES
	3:20	BOYS	1600 M MEDLEY
	3:30	GIRLS	1600 M MEDLEY
	3:45	BOYS	800 M RUN
	3:55	GIRLS	800 M RUN
4:05	BOYS	200 M DASH	
4:15	GIRLS	200 M DASH	
4:25	BOYS	3200 M RUN	
4:45	GIRLS	3200 M RUN	
5:05	BOYS	1600 M RELAY	
5:15	GIRLS	1600 M RELAY	



## **Clergy change at United Methodist Parish**

The Rev. Brandon Dunham recently announced that he will be leaving the United Methodist Church parish, but a familiar face will be returning. Dunham has served the Groton-Conde parish since 2018. The Rev. Robert Moorlach will be returning to the local parish in June. Moorlach served the Groton-Conde Parish from 2008-09. Moorlach is currently serving the United Methodist Church in Oakes, N.D.



## Groton Area Tigers JV Claws Back, but Falls Just Short Against Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV

Groton Area Tigers JV's effort to come back from down seven runs in the third inning came up just short, as they fell 10-8 to Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV on Wednesday. Groton Area Tigers JV scored five runs in the failed comeback on a error, a single by Kellen Antonsen, a fielder's choice by Brevin Fliehs, a error, and a error.

Groton Area Tigers JV couldn't keep up with Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV early in the game. Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV scored on a groundout by Gavin Lane in the first inning.

Groton Area Tigers JV notched five runs in the fourth inning. Nick Groeblichhoff, Antonsen, Fliehs, Braxton Imrie, and Carter Simon each had RBIs in the frame.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV scored four runs in the third inning. The big inning for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV came thanks to singles by Logan Fischbach and Tristan Gosch and an error on a ball put in play by Lane and Mac Heinz.

Lane was the winning pitcher for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV. The righthander lasted three innings, allowing four hits and three runs while striking out three.

Caden McInerney took the loss for Groton Area Tigers JV. McInerney allowed zero hits and five runs over one and one-third innings, striking out one.

Gavin Englund went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead Groton Area Tigers JV in hits.

Gosch led Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV with two hits in three at bats.

Groton won the varsity game, 7-0. Braxton Imrie was the winning pitcher. Stats were unavailable from the varsity game.

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## Groton Area Tigers JV 8 - 10 Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern JV

📍 Away 📅 Wednesday May 10, 2023

	1	2	3	4	R	H	E
GRTN	1	0	2	5	8	5	3
WRNR	2	4	4	X	10	6	8

### BATTING

Groton Area Tigers	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
B Flihs (CF)	3	0	0	1	0	0
B Imrie (SS)	2	2	0	1	1	0
C Simon (3B)	2	1	0	1	1	1
G Englund (1B)	2	0	2	2	0	0
C McNerney (P, 2...)	2	0	0	1	0	0
J Erdmann (LF)	2	0	1	0	0	0
K Flihs (C)	2	1	0	0	0	1
N Groeblichhoff (...)	2	1	0	0	0	0
K Antonsen (2B, P)	2	1	1	1	0	0
L Krause	2	1	1	0	0	0
T McGannon	1	1	0	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

**2B:** G Englund, **TB:** G Englund 3, K Antonsen, J Erdmann, L Krause, **SB:** B Imrie, **LOB:** 5

### PITCHING

Groton Area	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
C McNerney	1.1	0	5	3	5	1	0
K Antonsen	0.1	6	5	3	1	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

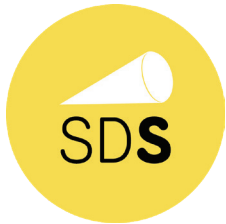
**L:** C McNerney, **P-S:** K Antonsen 38-21, C McNerney 47-18, **HBP:** K Antonsen 2, C McNerney, **BF:** K Antonsen 12, C McNerney 11

Warner-Ipswich-N	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Mansfield (C)	0	3	0	0	3	0
L Fischbach (2B)	1	3	1	1	2	0
G Lane (P)	3	1	1	2	0	0
D Bakeburg (P)	0	0	0	0	0	0
T Gosch (RF)	3	0	2	1	0	1
M Heinz (LF)	3	0	1	1	0	0
H Williams (3B)	1	0	1	1	0	0
J Schmidt (SS)	1	1	0	0	0	0
R Lee (CF)	1	1	0	0	1	1
T Wiedebush (1B)	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>

**TB:** L Fischbach, M Heinz, G Lane, T Gosch 2, H Williams, **HBP:** T Wiedebush, J Schmidt, H Williams, **SB:** J Schmidt, R Lee, **LOB:** 2

Warner-Ipswi	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
G Lane	3.0	4	3	2	2	3	0
D Bakeburg	0.0	1	5	0	1	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>

**W:** G Lane, **P-S:** G Lane 71-41, D Bakeburg 20-11, **BF:** G Lane 17, D Bakeburg 8



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **State board backs bonds for Lake Preston biofuel project** **Net-Zero 1 facility working to secure financing, pushes back construction date**

**BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 10, 2023 7:45 PM**

A massive aviation biofuel project in Lake Preston got a \$187 million boost from the Governor's Office of Economic Development (GOED) on Wednesday.

GOED's Finance Authority Board of Directors signed off on bonding of up to \$187 million for Gevo Net-Zero 1 without any debate or discussion during its monthly meeting in Pierre.

The bonds fell under GOED's "livestock nutrient management" bond program, but Gevo is not involved in any livestock operations, according to Heather Manuel, the company's head of corporate communications.

Instead, Manuel said, the board's vote clears a path for the Colorado-based company to utilize private activity bonds to cover the cost of its solid waste and sewer system. Such bonds can help a company secure better terms from financiers and spare them from some tax liability, but the company – not taxpayers – is liable for the debt.

"The bonds do not carry any financial risk to the state of South Dakota," Manuel said.

Gevo plans to invest around \$850 million in a facility that aims to turn corn into 55 million gallons of "sustainable aviation fuel" each year. The company has 240 acres of land near Lake Preston for the project, which it says will create 1,000 jobs during construction and 90 permanent positions for Kingsbury County and produce \$500 million a year in economic activity.

Gevo's Net-Zero 1 operations will also produce corn oil and feed for livestock, both of which are byproducts of the ethanol production process, and promise to be fueled entirely by renewable energy sources. Company partner Zero6 is working to build a \$120 million wind farm for that purpose.

Construction has yet to commence in Kingsbury County, however. During a Wednesday earnings call with investors, Gevo CEO Patrick Gruber said high interest rates have pushed the company to work on securing Department of Energy loans to secure the rest of its financing.

Construction will not commence until the financing is secure, Gruber said.

"This will delay the timeframe for a financial close, pushing financial close into 2024 based on current expectations and assumptions," Gruber said.

The earliest possible start for operations in Kingsbury County would be 2026, he added.

#### **State-backed development**

Wednesday's vote on private activity bonds is just the latest show of support from state government in South Dakota. The company was granted a \$12.2 million tax rebate from GOED's Board of Economic Development last October. That vote came about a month after the project's ceremonial groundbreaking on Sept. 15.

That groundbreaking, attended by Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden, was heralded as "the largest economic investment in the state's history" in a press release from Gov. Kristi Noem. Rhoden used similar verbiage at the event, echoing the company's fact sheet on the project.

Noem used the line again during her State of the State address in December. The project also got a shout-out in a March news release from the National Governors Association, which touted the \$1.7 billion of investment facilitated by GOED in South Dakota over the past year.

The sales and use tax rebate for the company was granted last fall through GOED's Reinvestment Payment Program, which launched in 2013 under Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

"Reinvestment payments are intended for projects that would not have occurred without the payment,"

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according to the office's website.

Following the Wednesday vote, Manuel sent a statement thanking the state for its continued support. "This is an important milestone in our capital formation for NZ1 and our long-term partnership with the State of South Dakota," Manuel wrote.

## Corporate filings show growth

Taken together, the May and October votes for incentives from GOED amount to about a quarter of Gevo's currently projected costs for Net-Zero 1.

The project represents a major investment for Gevo, which has been expanding its footprint recently and hopes to capitalize on agreements with major air carriers by building out several facilities in the coming years.

The company's finances saw a boost at the end of 2022, according to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission. It reported \$40.8 million in cash and cash equivalents in December of 2021. One year later, its books showed \$237.1 million in cash and total assets of \$700.7 million – up from \$645.3 million the year before.

The filings also show that \$4.2 million of its \$6.3 million in inventory at the end of 2022 came from "Environmental Attributes," which are renewable energy credits tied to its renewable natural gas operations. The company reported no environmental attribute dollars at the end of 2021.

The company's renewable natural gas is produced from manure at a facility in northwest Iowa, which picked up steam throughout 2022.

*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.*

## Ballot question group sues Minnehaha County, alleges new policy undermines First Amendment

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 10, 2023 4:59 PM**

Dakotans for Health, a health care advocacy network and ballot question committee, filed a lawsuit Wednesday against Minnehaha County officials over new restrictions on petition circulators.

The Minnehaha County Courthouse and Administration Building in Sioux Falls are popular locations for collecting signatures to place a measure on the ballot. County officials enacted new regulations on petition circulators last week, restricting them to two specific areas.

Dakotans for Health is currently gathering signatures for petitions focused on restoring abortion rights and eliminating the state sales tax on food. Initiated measures and referendums require about 17,500 signatures from registered voters, and initiated constitutional amendments require about 35,000 signatures.

"These new rules significantly impede our efforts," said Rick Weiland, co-founder of Dakotans for Health. "What they have implemented is not only unconstitutional but also undermines direct democracy."

The lawsuit contends the county's policy restricts South Dakotans' First Amendment rights by limiting the outdoor space available for political speech, with 99.3% of the previously accessible area now prohibited. It argues that the two rectangular areas established for petition circulators are inadequate.

Additionally, the lawsuit argues a requirement for all petition circulators and political speakers to pre-register infringes on the right to anonymous speech and exposes circulators and speakers to potential harassment.

The policy passed the Minnehaha County Commission 5-0.

Dakotans for Health is seeking orders from a federal judge to prevent the enforcement of the policy.

South Dakota Searchlight was unable to immediately reach Minnehaha County commissioners or the county auditor for comment.



## New state grant program aims to lure last-minute summer tourists

BY: SETH TUPPER - MAY 10, 2023 4:06 PM

RAPID CITY — Gov. Kristi Noem announced the creation of a \$200,000 grant program for tourism businesses Wednesday at Reptile Gardens in the Black Hills.

Noem cited industry data indicating 91% of this summer's travelers already have their trips planned. She wants the grant money to help South Dakota businesses target the remaining 9% of travelers.

"We want to make sure those that have a change in plans or haven't decided yet, that they decide to come and visit us," Noem said.

The Tourism Advertising Promotion program will join other tourism promotion efforts already included in the state Department of Tourism budget, which legislators recently set at \$32 million for the 2024 fiscal year. The department does not receive money from the state's general fund. Instead, its funding sources include a federal arts grant, a state tourism promotion tax and Deadwood gambling taxes.

Department Secretary Jim Hagen said he hopes to have the new program ready for applications by early July.

The department wants to pad the marketing budgets of tour operators, tourist attractions, festivals, fairs, and convention and visitor bureaus, along with other related businesses and entities. Hagen said most grants will range from \$500 to \$10,000.

"Whatever they happen to be marketing, this is a supplemental grant that will hopefully allow them to do a little extra," he said.

The state's tourism industry drew more than 14 million visitors in 2022 who spent more than \$4 billion and supported more than 50,000 jobs, according to estimates from a data firm hired by the state. This week, the industry is observing National Travel and Tourism Week.

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

## U.S. House GOP wants spending cuts — and also \$10B in home-state earmarks

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 10, 2023 7:32 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Republicans have requested more than \$10 billion in earmarks to be included in next year's appropriations bills, despite demanding massive spending cuts as a contingent for raising the nation's debt ceiling.

All but a handful of House Republicans barely pushed through a bill that would temporarily raise the U.S. borrowing limit, but with stipulations for deep discretionary spending cuts and changes to federal programs, including wiping out new tax incentives meant to curb climate change and tightening access to food and medical assistance for low-income Americans.

But the lawmakers — many members of the far-right House Freedom Caucus that demanded concessions from House Speaker Kevin McCarthy such as cuts to federal spending before handing him the gavel — are still hoping to bring money back to their constituents for projects including road and bridge construction, coastal and ecosystem restoration, airport upgrades, first responder mental health services and replacement of local law enforcement vehicles.

Of the more than 5,000 direct spending requests from House members — now referred to as Community Project Funding — GOP members account for 1,864 requests, adding up to nearly \$10.2 billion.

Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, who demanded that his debt ceiling vote hinge on expediting new work rules for low-income Americans who receive food and health care benefits, submitted a single earmark request for \$141.5 million for a helicopter training hangar at a Naval air base in Milton, Florida.

Colorado's Rep. Lauren Boebert, a leader among the House Freedom Caucus members, submitted 10 requests totaling \$34.3 million. The office of the lawmaker, who previously criticized earmarks as "cor-

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rupt," did not respond for comment but referred States Newsroom to an op-ed she published explaining her reasoning for requesting road, water and sewer earmarks for her district.

House Appropriations Chair Kay Granger of Texas did lay out further ground rules for earmarks, including a "Federal Nexus Requirement," meaning the committee will only approve projects tied to a federal authorization law, Boebert pointed out.

Projects such as memorials, museums, or any plans that commemorate an individual are not eligible for earmark dollars, and total granted requests should be capped at 0.5% of the GOP's discretionary spending, according to Granger's guidance.

"As a result of our historic changes, I am now able to fight for important infrastructure projects for the 3rd Congressional District of Colorado," Boebert wrote.

## Pushing back against 'bureaucrats'

Topping the list of GOP House members seeking funding is Rep. Randy Weber of Texas, who submitted more than half a billion dollars in requests. They include efforts to restore ports and waterways, study storm risk management and ecosystems along the Texas coast and dredge the Texas City channel.

Weber said in an emailed statement to States Newsroom that the requests are justified because his district is "the world's energy capital."

"(T)he investment in our infrastructure and flood mitigation is imperative to our national security. And energy security IS national security. I have seven ports deeply tied to shipping goods and energy products worldwide, and given the nature of my district, I'm advocating on behalf of the Gulf Coast of Texas and the entire nation," Weber said.

"I was tired of faceless and nameless Washington bureaucrats making decisions we were elected to make. Our country cannot afford the woke and weaponized spending that has been foisted upon us. We must shrink Washington and grow America," he continued.

House Majority Whip Tom Emmer — who advocated for federal spending cuts just hours before the House passed its debt ceiling bill on April 26 — submitted 12 requests totaling \$47.6 million for highway and water treatment projects in Minnesota.

"Oh, the horror of a congressman requesting funds for projects that directly impact his constituents instead of leaving it to unelected Washington bureaucrats to wastefully spend billions of their taxpayer dollars," Samantha Bullock, Emmer's communications director, said in response to a request from States Newsroom for comment on earmark requests.

Jodey Arrington, House Budget Committee chair — who spoke at length about spending cuts during a six-hour hearing the night before the House GOP squeaked through its debt limit bill — submitted two requests at \$14.7 million for a regional airport and interstate planning in his Texas district.

Arrington, Boebert, Emmer and Weber were among the 200 Republicans and six Democrats in 2021 who opposed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that approved funding for roadways, bridges, dams, coastal restoration and other transportation projects.

Spokespersons for several other members, including Reps. Mike Collins of Georgia, Mike Johnson of Louisiana, Greg Murphy of North Carolina and Troy Nehls of Texas, said the earmarks will positively impact their communities and fill demands for critical infrastructure and military needs.

"There is nothing to 'reconcile' between member directed requests and comments about the need to reduce spending and votes to support limits and reductions to discretionary spending," said Richard Vaughn, chief of staff for GOP Rep. Scott DesJarlais of Tennessee.

"For too long, Congress has ceded too much of its constitutional spending authority to the executive branch in directing taxpayer dollars. Congressman DesJarlais believes we need to reduce the overall levels of federal spending, and he also believes that Congress has the right and the authority to direct the spending within those accounts when those funding levels are established — whatever the totals may be," Vaughn continued in an emailed response.

The offices of nearly 20 other GOP lawmakers did not respond to States Newsroom's requests for comment.

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McCarthy did not submit any earmarks requests.

## Proposed federal spending cuts

House Republicans, by a slim margin, passed the Limit, Save, Grow Act to raise the nation's \$31.4 trillion borrowing cap by \$1.5 trillion, or until March 31, 2024, whichever comes first, while at the same time proposing to cut spending to fiscal 2022 levels and cap discretionary expenditures at 1% annually until 2033.

The move would reduce the federal deficit by \$3.2 trillion over the next 10 years, according to analyses by Moody's Analytics and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

The bill also patches together savings by repealing energy tax credits that were passed in last year's Inflation Reduction Act; preventing any student loan cancellation; expanding work requirements for certain recipients of Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; rescinding unspent COVID-19 relief funds; and enacting energy permitting changes.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects the return to FY2022 and spending caps, plus the cuts to other federal programs listed above, would reduce the federal deficit by \$4.8 trillion over the next decade.

However, the bill as written would add to the deficit over that time period — by about \$120 billion — by slashing money approved last year by the Democratic majority meant for the Internal Revenue Service to hire more staff and improve operations for collecting tax revenue.

McCarthy faced pressure from the far-right members of the GOP conference to attach spending cuts to any movement on the debt ceiling.

With the House GOP holding a slim margin, with wiggle room for only four votes, 20 of the party's far-right contingent — Boebert and Gaetz among them — were able to block McCarthy's path to becoming speaker for several days until he agreed to their concessions. The handshake deal included tying spending cuts to raising the debt ceiling, seating far-right members on key committees, and changing some House rules, including lowering the threshold of members needed to oust the speaker.

The debt ceiling is the legal amount of money the U.S. can use to pay the nation's creditors. If Congress fails to raise the limit, the U.S. will default on its bills. Most economists say there are only weeks left before the country reaches that tipping point.

Four Republican members voted against the GOP debt ceiling bill, including Andy Biggs of Arizona, Ken Buck of Colorado, Tim Burchett of Tennessee and Gaetz, who alleged the legislation would actually increase the deficit over the next 10 years.

## House Freedom Caucus

The chair of the House Freedom Caucus, Republican Rep. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, and the Freedom Caucus policy chair, Republican Rep. Chip Roy of Texas, both hard-line advocates for cutting spending, have not submitted any earmark requests.

One of the remaining original co-founders of the caucus in 2015, Rep. Jim Jordan of Ohio, also has not submitted earmark requests.

Perry and Roy were leaders among the architects of the handshake deal with McCarthy in January.

In March, Perry held a press conference where he and more than a dozen conservative members of the caucus laid out their spending demands, such as a cap on non-defense discretionary spending at fiscal 2022 levels for the next decade, in exchange for raising the debt ceiling.

"This current debt crisis has been created solely by reckless Democrat policies and out of control spending," Perry said during the press conference.

A July 2022 Freedom Caucus document outlining "aggressive reforms" the group wanted by the new year contained on its wishlist a return to an outright ban on earmarks.

"Earmarks facilitate federal overreach by spending taxpayer-dollars on personal pet projects of lawmakers and lobbyists. Earmarks also extend Congress's power of spending beyond items genuinely connected to the nation's welfare," according to the document. "In practice, they are often used to buy votes and coerce support for bills that might otherwise not pass muster. Essentially, earmarks amount to taxpayer-financed bribery."

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The caucus does not publicize its membership, and only about a dozen lawmakers list an affiliation on their member websites. Drawing from House Freedom Fund records and multiple news media accounts, the Pew Research Center identified 49 lawmakers either belonging to the House Freedom Caucus, or closely aligned with it. The subscription-based clearinghouse LegiStorm lists 51 lawmakers as part of the HFC.

Of the list of lawmakers identified by Pew, 44.8% submitted earmark requests.

States Newsroom's attempts to contact Perry's office and Tim Reitz, who is listed as the caucus' executive director, went unanswered.

Matthew Green, a professor of politics at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., said it's important to remember that the House Freedom Caucus isn't a monolith.

Green, who specifically studies the group, said there's no rule in the caucus that members can't request money from the federal government, and the "other way to think about it is that you know, sometimes parochialism trumps ideology."

"You can blame Freedom Caucus members for being hypocritical, but this is what lawmakers have done for forever, which is they'll say one thing on principle, but then when it comes down to their actual districts, they want to help their district, they want to get reelected," Green said.

Arrington and Emmer are not part of the Freedom Caucus, and are not considered aligned with the group, according to the Pew analysis.

## Embattled earmarks

Earmarks historically have been requested by both Democrats and Republicans. After intense public criticism for "pork-barrel spending," they were banned by the House GOP for roughly a decade before they were revived by Democrats during the 117th Congress under a new name and new requirements and restrictions.

Upon the return of earmarks in 2021, new rules established by the Democratic majority included a limit of 10 project requests per member, a requirement for members to post all requests online in a searchable format, a ban on requests relating to for-profit entities, and a certification that neither the member nor the member's spouse or immediate family has a financial stake in the project.

Rules now established under the current GOP-led House include a 15-project request limit for members, capping total earmarks at a half percent of discretionary spending, only allowing earmarks tied to a federal authorization law, guidelines for "careful vetting" of projects and stewardship of funds.

The GOP rules keep requirements for transparency — that members must submit them in writing and post requests publicly — and keep in place financial conflict safeguards and a ban on any eligibility for for-profit entities.

New transparency rules for earmarks had already been established under the 117th Congress.

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

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

## U.S. senators press pharma executives on cost of insulin, prescription medications

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 10, 2023 6:28 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators sparred with pharmaceutical companies and pharmacy benefit managers during a Wednesday hearing on the costs of insulin and other prescription medications.

Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, the top Republican on the panel and a physician, noted that a century ago a diabetes diagnosis was essentially a death sentence for patients before the prevalence of insulin.

When he graduated from medical school, Cassidy said, management of the illness was much more challenging than it is with today's insulin.

"It goes without saying in that time period, we've had a remarkable increase in the quality of life," Cas-



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sidy said, before questioning whether that matters if patients cannot afford the medicine that allows them to stay alive.

"The ability to afford the insulin is equally important to the innovation that may have occurred because if you can't afford the innovation it's as if the innovation has never occurred," Cassidy said.

Democrats' signature climate change, healthcare and tax package enacted last year capped the cost of insulin for Medicare at \$35 per month.

Democrats tried to include language in that package, known as the Inflation Reduction Act, that would have capped the cost of insulin for all consumers at that price, but the GOP successfully removed that element from the measure.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont independent and chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said that 1.3 million Americans are rationing their insulin while "all over the world people are paying a fraction of the price, not only for insulin but for other drugs."

Sanders urged the witnesses to think about the people who die because they can't afford medicine.

"I, for the life of me, just don't understand how, when you have something that saves a life and it costs you a few bucks to manufacture ... why we can't make that product available to all at a price that they can afford," Sanders said. "That is a moral issue, so we've got a lot of work to do. But we clearly need revolutionary changes in the way we do prescription drugs in this country."

Wisconsin Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin recalled previously asking officials about the array of prices for insulin and being told that "it's complicated."

"One thing I can say when we look at people over profits, is greed is not complicated," Baldwin said before getting the six witnesses to confirm stock buybacks their companies or patient companies issued during 2022.

Maine Republican Sen. Susan Collins told a story about a hearing she held in the Senate Aging Committee on why the cost of insulin was so high, including a father who traveled to Canada to purchase affordable insulin for his son.

"What we found was a system of getting insulin from the manufacture to the customer that was rife with perverse incentives, convoluted and opaque — so opaque that the witness we had, who had done the study on the system, could not fully explain the chart showing all the links," Collins said.

Collins criticized the system that's in place to manufacture and move pharmaceuticals through pharmacies to consumers, saying it defies logic.

"I think we have a very strange system here to say the least, because most of us would think that the rebate, the discount that is negotiated by the (pharmacy benefit managers) would largely benefit the consumer at the pharmacy counter," Collins said. "But, in fact, it goes to the PBMs themselves, and it goes to the plan sponsor."

David Ricks, chair and chief executive officer at Eli Lilly and Company in Indiana; Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen, president and chief executive officer at Novo Nordisk in Denmark; Paul Hudson chief executive officer at Sanofi in France; David Joyner, executive vice president and president of pharmacy services at CVS Health in Rhode Island; Adam Kautzner, president of Express Scripts in Missouri; and Heather Cianfrocco, chief executive officer at OptumRx in Minnesota, all testified before the committee.

Ricks, Jørgensen and Hudson all testified that their companies ensure that customers pay less than \$35 for all of their insulin products.

All three later testified that they have programs in place to help people in the United States who don't have health insurance to access insulin for less than \$35.

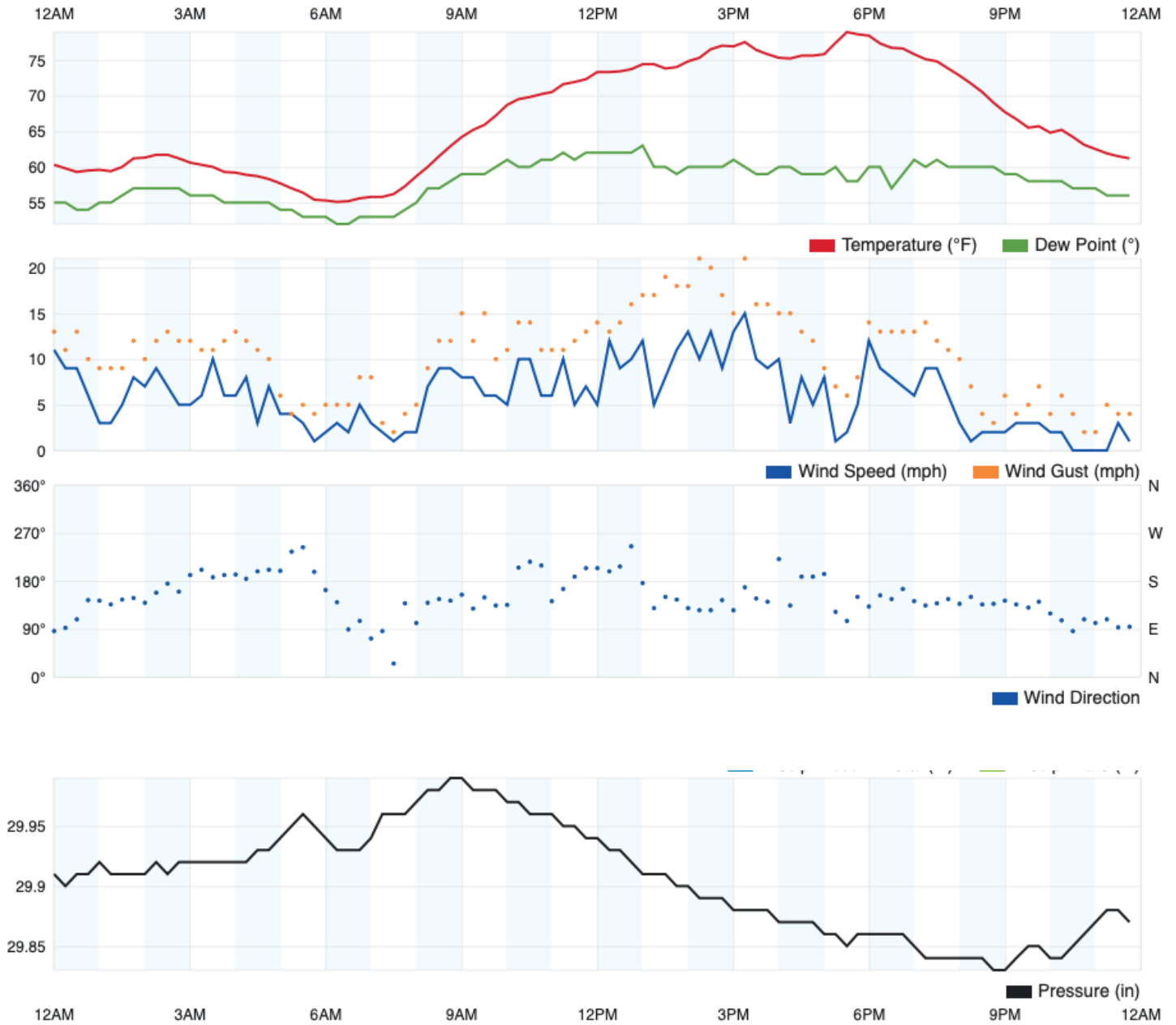
*Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.*



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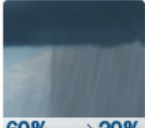

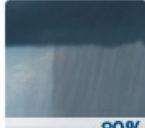
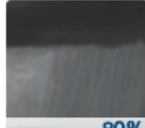
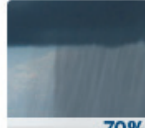
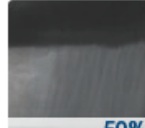

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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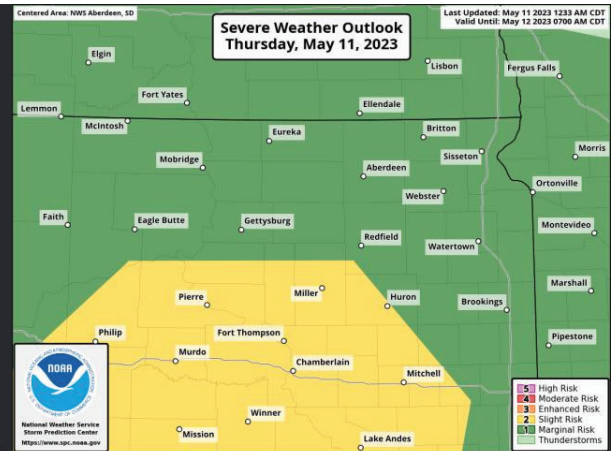
Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
60% → 30%	30%	80%	80%	70%	50%	
Showers Likely then Chance Showers	Chance T-storms	Showers	Showers and Breezy	Showers Likely and Breezy	Chance Showers and Breezy	Mostly Sunny
High: 78 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 74 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 68 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 66 °F

## Today & Tonight

May 11, 2023  
3:57 AM

A few strong to severe thunderstorms are possible today. Central SD has the higher potential (slight risk - yellow)

Quarter-sized hail and wind gusts in excess of 60 mph are possible with the strongest storms. A tornado or two cannot be ruled out this evening.

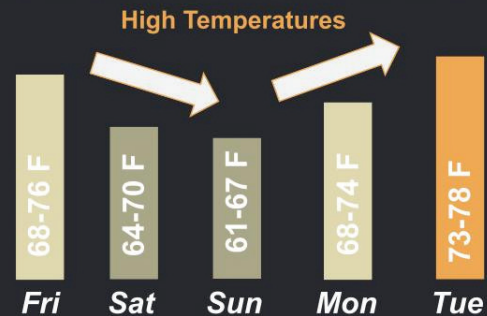


## Next 5 Days

Storms and showers continue into Saturday, no severe storms expected.

Dry weather to end the weekend and start the new work week.

[www.weather.gov/abr](http://www.weather.gov/abr)



Potentially strong storms will move into central SD this morning and gradually weaken as they move north and into northern/northeastern SD late this morning and afternoon. These storms could produce abundant lightning and small hail. Storms this evening and tonight are more likely to be severe with a potential for large hail, damaging winds, and a tornado or two in central SD. Temperatures will decrease going into the weekend but should start to warm up into next week.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 79 °F at 5:29 PM

Low Temp: 55 °F at 6:18 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 2:07 PM

Precip: : 0.62

Day length: 14 hours, 47 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 95 in 1900

Record Low: 18 in 1946

Average High: 69

Average Low: 42

Average Precip in May.: 1.21

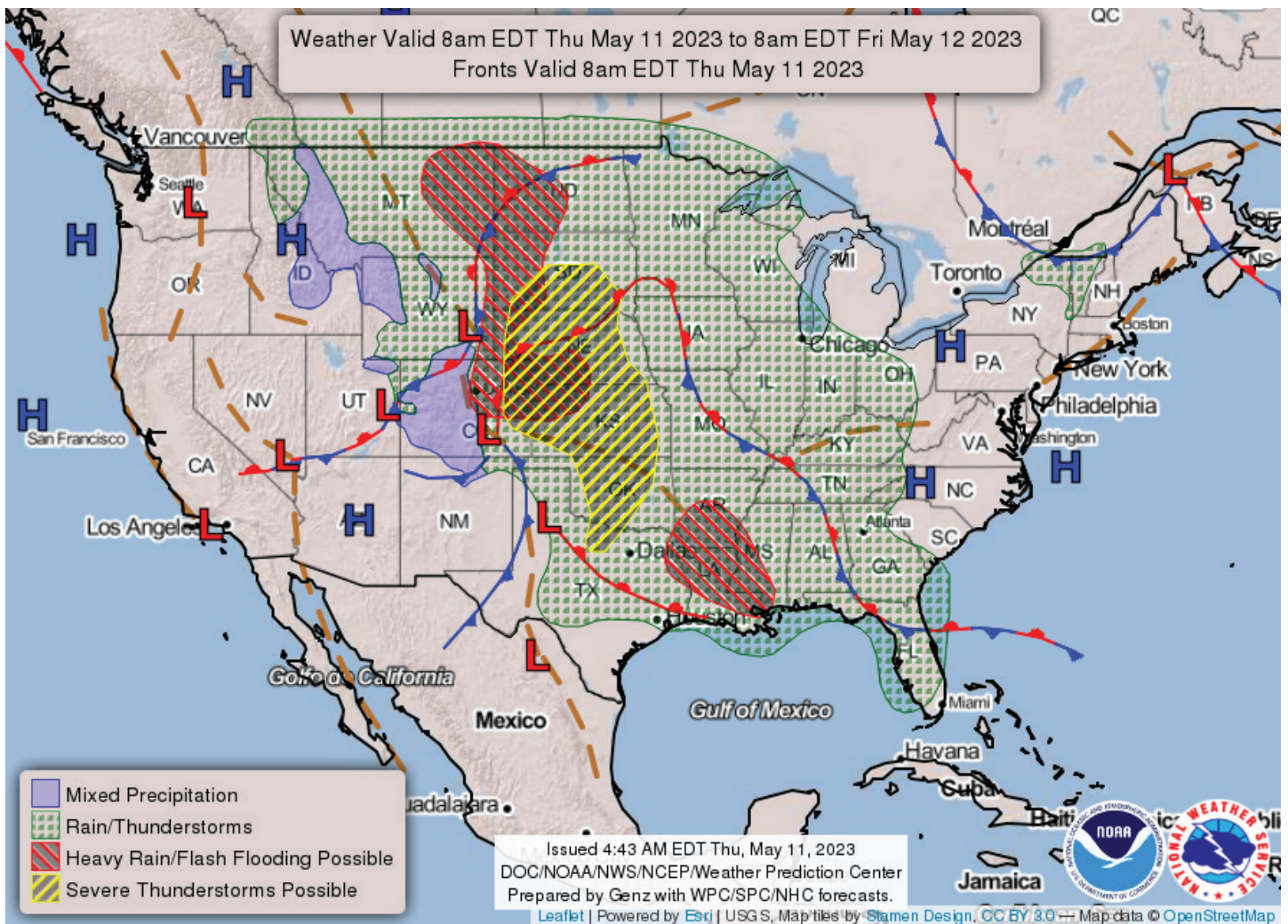
Precip to date in May.: 1.49

Average Precip to date: 5.18

Precip Year to Date: 7.21

Sunset Tonight: 8:52:39 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:03:38 AM





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## Today in Weather History

May 11, 1966: Late season snow fell in parts of north central and northeast South Dakota and into west central Minnesota. Amounts include; 4 inches in Timber Lake; 3 in Eureka, 2 NNW of Mobridge, and Roscoe; and 2 inches in Artichoke Lake MN, Pollock, and Waubay.

May 11, 1998: Torrential rains of 2 to 4 inches with some amounts nearing 5 inches fell across a large part of Brown, Marshall, Day, Spink, and Clark counties on the evening of the 11th. This round of heavy rain only exacerbated the already extensive flooding occurring from many years of above-average precipitation. Day County was most affected by this round of heavy rain where area lakes were already at new record levels. Blue Dog, Waubay, Rush, and Bitter Lake in Day County were just a few of the lakes hard hit. In fact, extensive sandbagging was done around Blue Dog Lake to save many homes. Some residents of Blue Dog Lake said they had never seen the lake so high in over 35 years of living there. Many more roads become flooded after this heavy rain event and will remain so for quite some time. Spots on U.S. Highway 12 and U.S. Highway 25 become flooded near Holmquist and Webster. Also, more of U.S. Highway 212, 4 miles east of Clark was flooded. There remained only one road opened to the town of Grenville in northeastern Day County. In all five counties, the rising water took away many more acres of farm and pastureland, as well as drowning many crops that had already been planted. One farmer in Spink County said sixty percent of his farm was under water. Some farmhouses and outbuildings became surrounded by water leaving some families stranded. After this heavy rain, around sixty percent of the crop and pastureland in Day County and one-third of it in Spink County had been inundated by a swollen water table and several years of above normal precipitation. Overall, the continued flooding has had a tremendous impact on the economy in the five county areas. Some rainfall amounts on this day include; 4.7 inches just north of Crocker in Clark County; 4.52 at Webster; 4.01 at Doland; 3.81 at Waubay NWR; 3.60 at Turton; 2.63 at Conde; 2.60 at Groton; 2.41 at Clark; and 2.18 inches at Aberdeen.

Additional heavy rain of 2 to 4 inches fell mainly during the evening of the 11th across southern and central Hand County. Many creeks in the area became rushing torrents through the night and the day of the 12th. Also, low-lying areas and a lot of crop and pastureland were flooded. Some businesses and homes in the Miller, Saint Lawrence, Ree Heights, and Vayland areas were flooded. Some sandbagging was done to try and save some properties in Miller. U.S. Highway 14 at the east end of Miller was flooded over for several hours along with many other streets, county and township roads in southern and central Hand County. Many of the roads were damaged as the result of the flooding. Some people in Miller said they had never seen it flood this bad in 35 years. Some rainfall amounts include; 3.99 inches at Miller; 3.10 inches 3 miles south of Ree Heights; and 2.65 at Ree Heights.

1865: A tornado touched down in Philadelphia around 6 PM ET, killing one person and injuring 15 others. There was a considerable destruction of property, with 23 houses blown down, damage to the Reading Railroad depot, with the water tank, carried 150 yards. Fairmont Park was damaged to the amount of \$20,000.

1934: A tremendous dust storm affected the Plains as the Dust Bowl era was in full swing. According to The New York Times, dust "lodged itself in the eyes and throats of weeping and coughing New Yorkers," and even ships some 300 miles offshore sawdust collect on their decks.

1953: A terrifying F5 tornado rips through downtown Waco, Texas, killing 114 people and injuring nearly 600 more. More than 850 homes, 600 businesses, and 2,000 cars are destroyed or severely damaged. Losses have been estimated at \$41 million. The tornado is the deadliest in Texas history and the tenth deadliest in the US.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### SHARE AND SUCCEED

Disheartened by the lack of opportunities for work in Cuba, a refugee made his way to America. He submitted one application after another only to have it rejected because he could not speak English.

Finally, in desperation he tried once again at a Pizza Hut, but with little hope. He was rejected and felt defeated. Then, while eating a piece of their pizza, he noticed a sign that announced their need for a dishwasher. Expecting nothing in return, he went into the kitchen and began to wash dishes. The owners were so pleased with his work that they offered him a permanent job, and he began a successful career with the company. Years later he became an owner, and one day sold his Pizza Hut franchises for \$125 million.

Education and talent are no guarantee of success. Paul writes, "Do what is good" and do not "get discouraged and give up for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time." We must always be sensitive to the needs of others and have a willingness to help anyone in need. Sharing another's burden and meeting the needs of others always honors God. What we do for others will not go unnoticed by Him.

Prayer: Father, open our eyes to see and ears to hear the needs of others. When others need our help, may we reach out and respond with Your love. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone-especially to those in the family of faith. Galatians 6:9-10



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



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## 2023 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.09.23

4 37 46 48 51 19

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$99,000,000**

NEXT 1 Day 15 Hrs 30  
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.10.23

9 13 14 17 26 2

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$2,850,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 30  
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.10.23

8 9 35 37 40 14

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 38 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.10.23

3 6 9 10 13

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$55,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 30  
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.10.23

21 22 24 52 58 3

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 29  
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.10.23

21 24 33 55 69 3

Power Play: 10x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$125,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 29  
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **2 killed, 1 critically injured after South Dakota police chase at speeds over 100 mph ends in crash**

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — Two people were killed and a third person was critically injured Wednesday after a South Dakota police chase at speeds over 100 mph ended when the fleeing vehicle crashed into a semi.

Yankton County Sheriff Preston Crissey said the chase began around 10 a.m. Wednesday when a driver refused to stop after a state trooper tried to halt their vehicle on state highway 50 outside Yankton.

Crissey said the red Chevrolet drove west erratically at high speeds before approaching several vehicles from the sheriff's department and Yankton police that had set up on the highway near the Yankton city limits.

The fleeing vehicle struck a semitrailer truck and crashed. Two of the people in the vehicle died at the scene and the third person was rushed a hospital with life-threatening injuries. Their names and ages were not immediately released, the Yankton Press & Dakotan reported.

The highway was closed for several hours while authorities cleaned up the wreck.

Yankton Deputy Fire Chief Larry Nickles said it was frustrating trying to divert traffic around the crash because so many people tried to take videos of it on their phones.

"It was very frustrating. There were a lot of people who took out their cameras and started taking videos of the scene. This was nothing that needed to be out there (on social media)," Nickles said.

### **Editorial Roundup: South Dakota**

By The Associated Press undefined

Madison Daily Leader. May 7, 2023.

Editorial: Land purchase ban is better at federal level

A bill to restrict land purchases in South Dakota didn't pass in the 2023 state legislative session, but a proposed rule change at the federal level would require foreign citizens and companies to get U.S. government approval to buy property within 100 miles of eight military bases. One of those bases is Ellsworth Air Force Base in western South Dakota.

The federal rule change is probably better.

A little background: A Chinese business called Fufeng Group purchased ag land near Grand Force Air Force Base, which many Americans believe is a national security issue. The Chinese surveillance balloons crossing the United States in the last year added plenty of apprehension.

In South Dakota, Gov. Kristi Noem and some legislators worried about the same thing happening near Ellsworth AFB. Noem also adopted a rigorous anti-China campaign, banning TikTok and other Chinese programs from state computers, and ordering a review of the state's investments to determine if it has stakes in Chinese companies. She has made it a centerpiece on national television and has encouraged other states and the U.S. government to follow.

In February, a South Dakota Senate committee passed an amended version of SB185, an act to restrict foreign (specifically Chinese) ownership of South Dakota agriculture land, despite opposition from virtually every agricultural group in the state. The bill died in the Senate a few days later, recognizing the opposition by South Dakota ag groups representing corn, soybean, pork, stockgrowers, dairy and conservation groups, as well as the concern of placing unilateral authority with South Dakota's governor. Others were concerned about having a patchwork of state laws rather than a federal law.

The Treasury Department's Office of Investment Security is set to propose the rule, which would give expanded powers to the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. That agency 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.

We agree that the focus on banning foreign ownership on land should be on national security surrounding military bases and that the authority for deals should be a consistent federal agency. If the tension continues to increase between the U.S. and China, however, there is a good argument that land that produces food should also not be held by Chinese government, its companies or citizens, and the federal government should address that. For now, we encourage the federal rule change involving air force bases.  
END

## Suspect in Natalee Holloway disappearance faces extradition to US on fraud charges

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and FRANKLIN BRICENO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Peru's government that it will allow the extradition to the United States of the prime suspect in the unsolved 2005 disappearance of American student Natalee Holloway on the Dutch Caribbean Island of Aruba, bringing her family hope there will be justice in the case.

Dutch citizen Joran van der Sloot will be sent to the U.S., Peru announced Wednesday, to face trial on extortion and wire fraud charges, stemming from an accusation that he tried to extort the Holloway family after their daughter's disappearance.

Holloway, who lived in suburban Birmingham, Alabama, was 18 when she was last seen during a trip with classmates to Aruba. She vanished after a night with friends at a nightclub, leaving a mystery that sparked years of news coverage and countless true-crime podcasts. She was last seen leaving a bar with van der Sloot, then 18 years old.

Van der Sloot was identified as a suspect and detained, along with two Surinamese brothers, weeks later. Holloway's body was never found, and no charges were filed in the case. A judge later declared Holloway dead.

Years later, van der Sloot was arrested in Peru for the 2010 murder of 21-year-old Stephany Flores, who was killed five years to the day after Holloway's disappearance. Prosecutors accused van der Sloot of killing Flores, a business student from a prominent family, to rob her after learning she had won money at the casino where the two met. They said he killed her with "ferocity" and "cruelty," beating then strangling her in his hotel room. He pleaded guilty in 2012, and is serving 28 years in prison for the murder.

But his extradition to the U.S. stems from an alleged attempt to profit from his connection to the Holloway case. A grand jury in Alabama in 2010 indicted van der Sloot on wire fraud and extortion charges, accusing him of trying to extort hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Holloways.

Prosecutors in the U.S. allege van der Sloot accepted \$25,000 in cash from Holloway's family in exchange for a promise to lead them to her body in early 2010, just before he went to Peru.

An FBI agent wrote in an affidavit that van der Sloot reached out to Holloway's mother and wanted to be paid \$25,000 to disclose the location and then another \$225,000 when the remains were recovered. During a recorded sting operation, van der Sloot pointed to a house where he said Holloway was buried but in later emails admitted to lying about the location, the agent said.

Peru's Minister of Justice Daniel Maurate said in a statement Wednesday the government decided to "accept the request" from U.S. authorities "for the temporary transfer" of van der Sloot to be prosecuted on extortion and fraud charges. In Peru, all extraditions must be approved by the president.

"We will continue to collaborate on legal issues with allies such as the United States, and many others with which we have extradition treaties," said Edgar Alfredo Rebaza, director of Peru's Office of International Judicial Cooperation and Extraditions of the National Prosecutor's Office.

A 2001 treaty between Peru and the U.S. allows a suspect to be temporarily extradited to face trial in the other country. It requires that the prisoner "be returned" after judicial proceedings are concluded "against that person, in accordance with conditions to be determined by" both countries.

In a statement, the young woman's mother, Beth Holloway, said she was blessed to have Natalee in her life for 18 years.

"She would be 36 years old now. It has been a very long and painful journey, but the persistence of



many is going to pay off. Together, we are finally getting justice for Natalee," Beth Holloway said.

Attorney Maximo Altez, who represents van der Sloot, told the AP he will fight the decision once he is properly notified by the Peruvian government.

"I am going to challenge that resolution," Altez said. "I am going to oppose it since he has the right to a defense."

Van der Sloot could not immediately be reached for comment on Wednesday. More than a decade ago, he told a Peruvian judge that he would fight efforts to be extradited to the U.S.

Van der Sloot married a Peruvian woman in July 2014 in a ceremony at a maximum-security prison.

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This story has been edited to correct a misspelling of Natalee Holloway's name.

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Associated Press journalist Regina García Cano reported from Mexico City. Associated Press journalist Kimberly Chandler contributed reporting from Montgomery, Alabama.

## Real-life 'The Queen's Gambit': Custodian leads school chess teams in Maine

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

HAMPDEN, Maine (AP) — David Bishop spends the school day as a mild-mannered custodian, but before the final bell rings, he grabs his chess boards and pieces and begins his second role.

"The Queen's Gambit" is playing out in real life in Maine, where this custodian is coaching his schools' chess teams to acclaim.

Bishop, a part-time chess coach and full-time custodian, led his elementary and middle school teams to state championship titles this year, drawing comparisons to the Netflix series about a chess prodigy inspired by a janitor.

Some of his players are good enough to beat their coach, proudly declaring "checkmate!"

"Initially, it was humiliating and demoralizing, but it didn't take long for me to realize that's a good thing. They're getting stronger," the 61-year-old said.

Nationwide, chess is riding a new wave of popularity, and it's not just because of the popular Netflix mini series based on the 1983 book by Walter Tevis.

During the pandemic, a growing number of kids forced to stay at home for extended periods turned to Chess.com to relieve their boredom. The website and app allows visitors to learn the game, to play against each other or against a computer, and to get chess news.

The website had 1.5 million daily users in February 2020 — just before the pandemic hit the U.S. in full force — but it grew to 4.5 million by the end of 2020. It had hit 10 million by January of this year. The total number of registered users has nearly quadrupled to 123 million, the company said.

Chess fans are also watching videos of grandmasters teaching strategies and livestreams of high-profile chess players facing off.

"What we are seeing is an unprecedented period of boom, like nothing before," said Leon Watson, spokesperson for Chess.com. "It definitely feels like chess is having a moment."

In Hampden, Bishop's coaching success followed a happy twist of fate.

He was burned out from his job in the telecommunications industry and took an early retirement package at age 50. He was exploring new opportunities in the field — and not having much luck — when someone told him about a school custodial job. He figured it would be mean less stress.

He didn't even know there was a chess club until after he'd begun work in 2013. He began volunteering with the chess club at Reeds Brook Middle School, and later at George B. Weatherbee Elementary School, as well.

Bishop learned chess the old-fashioned way, with a family chessboard and by experimenting with the board pieces: pawns, bishops, knights, rooks, queens and kings. He played with his brothers, sometimes in the family's barn, learning the moves to checkmate his opponent's king, the object of the game. At age

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10, he followed with keen interest the match in which American grandmaster Bobby Fischer defeated the Soviet Union's Boris Spassky in 1972.

While Bishop enjoyed chess and was good at it, he didn't join his high school chess club, worrying he would be typecast as a nerd. He regrets that now.

These days, thanks to its growing appeal, those stereotypes no longer apply.

On a recent day, there was a buzz in the air at the Reeds Brook Middle School library where the chess club meets. Bishop's team had just represented Maine at the the national championships in Texas, and they came in eighth place out of 52 teams. The elementary school team competes this weekend in its national championships in Maryland.

The students quickly tossed their backpacks aside, sat down at library tables and launched into matches. Those who weren't actively playing watched others' moves intently.

Eli Marquis, 12, said the chess players are constantly learning new skills and tactics — like opening and closing moves — allowing them to improve and ensuring they don't get bored.

"You can never run out of things to learn and to practice and to do, and you can just keep on getting better as long as you practice. There's no end to it. Really," he said.

Eddie LaRochelle, 13, compared chess to other competitive team sports. A strong work ethic and practice improve individual skills, and those individuals work together to achieve victory.

"You don't need to work out every single day in the gym. To get stronger, you can exercise your brain with puzzles, chess and other things," he said.

Lessons from the chess board often carry into life.

Team members said chess has taught them to think ahead, be strategic and consider the ramifications of decisions. And it helps with keeping on task and staying organized.

"Chess is so good for them, and most of them don't know it," their coach said. "They're just playing chess, but it's like a workout for the brain."

Bishop understands comparisons to the janitor in "The Queen's Gambit" — William Shaibel, played by actor Bill Camp — and he thinks it's an entertaining series. The chess play is accurate and exciting, he said.

Camp, the actor, has heard of the team's success and hopes to pay a visit to the school to offer his congratulations. He had high praise for Bishop.

"What he's doing is about as noble as one can do — he's a teacher," Camp said from Los Angeles. "He's doing the greatest service."

Unlike the Netflix series's janitor, Bishop is helping not just one girl in an orphanage, but dozens of kids of all skill levels and socioeconomic backgrounds.

His one worry is that there aren't as many girls taking up chess.

Chess continues to be dominated by men and boys from the top level of grandmasters down to the grade school level. There's only one female on his middle school champion team right now, but he's hoping to change that by getting kids hooked at earlier ages, starting in kindergarten.

For now, Bishop looks forward to seeing how far his teams can go. As the teams get better, he's getting used to losing chess matches more frequently.

Riley Richardson, who placed 14th out of 386 competitors at the nationals, said the first time he beat his coach, he thought Bishop was letting him win. But now, he has beaten his coach a few times.

He's watching for vulnerabilities.

"A while ago, I actually beat him because I just started learning his weaknesses," Richardson said. That weakness? He smiled and said: "Sometimes, he's overthinking."

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Follow David Sharp on Twitter @David\_Sharp\_AP

## How Europe is leading the world in building guardrails around AI

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Authorities around the world are racing to draw up rules for artificial intelligence, includ-

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ing in the European Union, where draft legislation faced a pivotal moment on Thursday.

A European Parliament committee voted to strengthen the flagship legislative proposal as it heads toward passage, part of a yearslong effort by Brussels to draw up guardrails for artificial intelligence. Those efforts have taken on more urgency as the rapid advances of chatbots like ChatGPT highlight benefits the emerging technology can bring — and the new perils it poses.

Here's a look at the EU's Artificial Intelligence Act:

## HOW DO THE RULES WORK?

The AI Act, first proposed in 2021, will govern any product or service that uses an artificial intelligence system. The act will classify AI systems according to four levels of risk, from minimal to unacceptable. Riskier applications will face tougher requirements, including being more transparent and using accurate data. Think about it as a "risk management system for AI," said Johann Laux, an expert at the Oxford Internet Institute.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

One of the EU's main goals is to guard against any AI threats to health and safety and protect fundamental rights and values.

That means some AI uses are an absolute no-no, such as "social scoring" systems that judge people based on their behavior. AI that exploits vulnerable people including children or that uses subliminal manipulation that can result in harm, such as an interactive talking toy that encourages dangerous behavior, is also forbidden.

Lawmakers beefed up the proposal by voting to ban predictive policing tools, which crunch data to forecast where crimes will happen and who will commit them. They also approved a widened ban on remote facial recognition, save for a few law enforcement exceptions like preventing a specific terrorist threat. The technology scans passers-by and uses AI to match their faces to a database.

The aim is "to avoid a controlled society based on AI," Brando Benifei, the Italian lawmaker helping lead the European Parliament's AI efforts, told reporters Wednesday. "We think that these technologies could be used instead of the good also for the bad, and we consider the risks to be too high."

AI systems used in high risk categories like employment and education, which would affect the course of a person's life, face tough requirements such as being transparent with users and putting in place risk assessment and mitigation measures.

The EU's executive arm says most AI systems, such as video games or spam filters, fall into the low- or no-risk category.

## WHAT ABOUT CHATGPT?

The original 108-page proposal barely mentioned chatbots, merely requiring them to be labeled so users know they're interacting with a machine. Negotiators later added provisions to cover general purpose AI like ChatGPT, subjecting them to some of the same requirements as high-risk systems.

One key addition is a requirement to thoroughly document any copyright material used to teach AI systems how to generate text, images, video or music that resembles human work. That would let content creators know if their blog posts, digital books, scientific articles or pop songs have been used to train algorithms that power systems like ChatGPT. Then they could decide whether their work has been copied and seek redress.

## WHY ARE THE EU RULES SO IMPORTANT?

The European Union isn't a big player in cutting-edge AI development. That role is taken by the U.S. and China. But Brussels often plays a trendsetting role with regulations that tend to become de facto global standards.

"Europeans are, globally speaking, fairly wealthy and there's a lot of them," so companies and organizations often decide that the sheer size of the bloc's single market with 450 million consumers makes it easier to comply than develop different products for different regions, Laux said.

But it's not just a matter of cracking down. By laying down common rules for AI, Brussels is also trying to develop the market by instilling confidence among users, Laux said.

"The thinking behind it is if you can induce people to place trust in AI and in applications, they will also use it more," Laux said. "And when they use it more, they will unlock the economic and social potential of AI."

#### WHAT IF YOU BREAK THE RULES?

Violations will draw fines of up to 30 million euros (\$33 million) or 6% of a company's annual global revenue, which in the case of tech companies like Google and Microsoft could amount to billions.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

It could be years before the rules fully take effect. European Union lawmakers are now due to vote on the draft legislation at a plenary session in mid-June. Then it moves into three-way negotiations involving the bloc's 27 member states, the Parliament and the executive Commission, where it could face more changes as they wrangle over the details. Final approval is expected by the end of the year, or early 2024 at the latest, followed by a grace period for companies and organizations to adapt, often around two years.

## Israel kills another militant commander in Gaza as Cairo presses on with efforts to mediate truce

By FARES AKRAM and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes in the Gaza Strip killed a fourth militant commander on Thursday, raising the Palestinian death toll from the latest burst of fighting to 25. Rocket fire toward southern Israel continued even as Egypt pressed on with attempts to broker a cease-fire.

It has been the worst bout of fighting between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza in months, and among the dead were also women and children. The conflagration comes at a time of soaring tensions and spiking violence over the past year in the occupied West Bank.

Early on Thursday, the Israeli military carried out strikes against the Islamic Jihad militant group and said a senior commander in charge of the group's rocket launching force, Ali Ghali, was killed when his apartment was hit. The Health Ministry in Gaza said 25 people have been killed since the fighting erupted.

Military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari told Israeli Army Radio that two other militants were also killed in the strike, although no group immediately claimed them as members, and that the rest of the building remained intact. "The apartment was targeted in a very precise way," Hagari said. "I hope this leads to a reduction, a blow and a disruption of the Islamic Jihad rocket abilities."

The strikes targeted the top floor of a building in a residential, Qatari-built complex in southern Gaza Strip. The pre-dawn airstrike in the city of Khan Younis caused damage to three surrounding buildings. The complex, known as Hamad City, consists of several tall buildings and thousands of housing units. The strike created panic among residents, with falling debris and shattered glass littering the streets.

"My children started crying. I did not see anything because of the dust, broken glasses, and debris," said Abdullah Hemaïd, who lives across from the targeted building.

Islamic Jihad said Ghali was a commander in charge of its rocket squad and a member of its armed group's decision-making body. The group has said it will only cease fire if Israel agrees to halt targeted killings of its fighters.

Following intense fighting on Wednesday, when rockets rained down on southern and central Israel and airstrikes pounded Gaza, a state-run Egyptian TV station announced that Egypt, a frequent mediator between the sides, had brokered a cease-fire. But with the violence continuing into Thursday, it was unclear where progress on the talks stood.

The Israeli military says that in its strikes on some 150 targets, it has zeroed in on militants with what it says are precision strikes. But children, among them a 4-year-old, were also killed. Hagari, the military spokesman, told Army Radio that a quarter of the rockets launched during this round of fighting fell in Gaza, killing at least four, including a 10-year-old girl, two 16-year-olds and a 51-year-old man. That claim could not immediately be independently confirmed.

Efforts to mediate a cease-fire were still underway Thursday with top Islamic Jihad political bureau member Mohamad al-Hindi arriving to Cairo to discuss details. Israeli officials declined to comment.



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In a televised prime-time address on Wednesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that Israel had dealt a harsh blow to the militants. But he cautioned: "This round is not over."

"We say to the terrorists and those who send them: We see you everywhere. You can't hide, and we choose the place and time to strike you," he said, adding that Israel would also decide when calm is restored.

The initial Israeli airstrikes on Tuesday that set off the exchange of fire killed three senior Islamic Jihad militants in their homes and at least 10 civilians — most of them women and children. The Israeli military has said its attacks were focused on Islamic Jihad militant infrastructure in the coastal enclave and that it would investigate any civilian deaths.

Those strikes set off a burst of rocket fire on Wednesday that triggered air-raid sirens throughout southern and central Israel. Damage was reported when rockets slammed into buildings that were empty because residents had fled the area. The military said more than 500 rockets were fired toward Israel. It said most were intercepted by Israel's missile defense system or fell in open areas.

Israel says the airstrikes are a response to a barrage of rocket fire launched last week by Islamic Jihad in response to the death of one of its members from a hunger strike while in Israeli custody.

Israel has come under international criticism for the high civilian toll, which included wives of two of the militant commanders, some of their children and a dentist who lived in one of the targeted buildings along with his wife and son.

In past conflicts, rights groups have accused Israel of committing war crimes due to high civilian deaths. Israel says it does its utmost to avoid civilian casualties and holds militant groups responsible because they operate in heavily populated residential areas. It also says militants fire rockets indiscriminately at Israeli communities.

The latest outburst was the heaviest fighting between the sides in months, pushing the region closer toward a full-blown war. But in signs that both sides were trying to show restraint, Israel avoided attacks on the ruling Hamas militant group, targeting only the smaller and more militant Islamic Jihad faction. Hamas, meanwhile, appeared to remain on the sidelines.

Israel says it is trying to avoid conflict with Hamas, the more powerful militant group that rules Gaza, and limit the fighting to Islamic Jihad.

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since the Islamic militant group took control of Gaza in 2007.

Late Wednesday, Egypt's Extra News television channel, which has close ties to Egyptian security agencies, said the Egyptian intelligence had brokered a cease-fire. Israeli officials confirmed that Egypt was trying to facilitate a cease-fire. Speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss behind-the-scenes diplomacy, they said Israel would evaluate the situation based on actions on the ground, not declarations.

Islamic Jihad said Wednesday it would continue firing rockets.

As rockets streaked through the sky, Israeli TV stations showed air defense systems intercepting rockets above the skies of Tel Aviv. In the nearby suburb of Ramat Gan, people lay face-down on the ground as they took cover. Video taken early Thursday from the cockpit of an El Al plane set to land near Tel Aviv showed flashes of light from rocket interceptions in the sky over southern Israel.

The army said that schools would remain closed and restrictions on large gatherings would remain in place in southern Israel until at least Friday. Residents were instructed to stay near bomb shelters.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, where Israeli-Palestinian violence has surged over the past year, the Palestinian Health Ministry said a 30-year-old man died after he was shot by Israeli troops in a raid on Wednesday.

Goldenberg reported from Tel Aviv, Israel.

## **G7 finance ministers to vow support for Ukraine, seek ways to spur global economy as debt risks loom**

By ELAINE KURTENBACH AP Business Writer

NIIGATA, Japan (AP) — Financial leaders of the Group of Seven advanced economies are discussing ways to support Ukraine and pressure Russia to end the war as they meet in Japan starting Thursday.

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Ukraine's finance minister, Serhiy Marchenko, was participating online in the first session of the G-7 talks in Niigata, a port city on the Japan Sea coast.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the G-7 nations "will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes" to end the conflict. The leaders will be mulling ways to prevent Russia and other countries from circumventing sanctions against Moscow for its invasion, Japanese Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki told reporters.

"We have taken a wave of actions in the past few months to crack down on evasion. And my team has traveled around the world to intensify this work," Yellen said.

The war and its toll on the global economy, debt crises in developing countries and a stalemate in Washington over the national debt are topping the agenda of the three days of talks by finance ministers and central bank governors of G-7 countries and others invited to attend.

Despite the wide range of topics due for consideration, from climate change to debt relief to digital currencies, the standoff over the U.S. debt ceiling and a potential default loomed as a major potential threat to the global economy.

Speaking before the closed-door meetings began, Yellen said one of her priorities was to emphasize the importance of resolving the crisis.

"A default is frankly unthinkable," she told reporters. "America should never default. It would rank as a catastrophe."

Japan's central bank governor, Kazuo Ueda, echoed that sentiment.

If the United States defaults on its debt, "it will become a big move and a big problem, and I think that the Fed alone, for example, may not be able to counteract it," said Ueda, who took the helm of the Bank of Japan last month.

He said he trusted the U.S. government would do its best to avoid such a situation.

U.S. President Joe Biden said Wednesday that he and congressional leaders had a "productive" meeting Tuesday on trying to raise the nation's debt limit. They will meet again Friday to try to avert the risk as soon as June 1 of an unprecedented government default if lawmakers in the divided Congress don't agree to raise the debt ceiling.

Biden said he was "absolutely certain" that the country could avert a default. Yellen also said she was "very hopeful" the problem can be resolved in time.

Yellen also will be seeking to reassure her counterparts over recent bank failures that have raised worries over risks for the global financial system.

She said Biden's "historic" investments in modernizing U.S. infrastructure were a step toward improving the resilience of an economy whose reliance on global supply chains was sorely tested during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are taking a broad range of individual and joint actions to bring down inflation, sustain growth, and help mitigate the impact of external shocks, including to developing countries," she said.

But she added that, "even as we face downside risks, I believe that the global economy remains in a better place than many predicted six months ago."

The Federal Reserve said in a report this week that U.S. banks raised their lending standards for business and consumer loans in the aftermath of three large bank failures that were in part brought on by the central bank's sharp increases in interest rates to beat down inflation that surged to four-decade highs after the pandemic.

The Fed surveyed 65 U.S. banks and U.S. branches of 19 foreign banks in late March and early April, well after Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank collapsed in early March, touching off the latest round of bank turmoil. First Republic Bank failed earlier this month in the second-largest bank failure in U.S. history.

Rate increases are meant to slow lending and borrowing but can overshoot their goal, tipping the economy into recession. Moves by banks to further limit lending could further squeeze businesses and consumers.

Inflation has remained stubbornly high. Consumer prices in the United States rose 0.4% in April, up sharply from a 0.1% rise from February to March, and measures of underlying inflation stayed high, a sign that further declines in inflation are likely to be slow and bumpy even though the annual increase of 4.9% was the smallest in two years.

Other G-7 economies are contending with even higher surging prices, obliging their central banks to raise interest rates that went to record lows in the early days of the pandemic.

G-7 financial leaders met just a month ago, in Washington during the annual meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. There, they reiterated their commitment to helping economies cope with the impact of the war in Ukraine, to help heavily indebted countries resolve their financial vulnerability, fortify global health systems and help tackle climate change.

The G-7 consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Other invitees to the meetings in Niigata include the European Union, IMF and World Bank, and the finance ministers of Brazil, Comoros, India, Indonesia, South Korea and Singapore.

Associated Press journalist Haruka Nuga contributed to this report.

## Why the arrest of Pakistan's ex-PM Imran Khan could push the country into chaos

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan is witnessing a wave of violence following the arrest of popular opposition leader and former Prime Minister Imran Khan on corruption charges. The level of unrest has not been seen since 2007, when another former premier — Benazir Bhutto — was assassinated during an election campaign.

Footage of Khan being dragged from court sparked outrage among his supporters. Angry protesters torched buildings and vehicles. Authorities have deployed troops in an attempt to contain the clashes. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif vowed a tough response to the attacks. Khan is in custody at a police compound in the capital, Islamabad, undergoing questioning.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN PAKISTAN?

Since Khan's arrest on Tuesday, at least eight people have died and dozens have been wounded in clashes between his supporters and police. Protesters have burned building and vehicles to the ground. Others blocked roads and set fire to police checkpoints and military facilities. Schools and colleges remain closed in Khan's regional strongholds. More than 2,000 people have been arrested so far.

WHY DOES KHAN'S ARREST MATTER?

Pakistan has a history of military takeovers, political upheaval and social unrest. Khan is the seventh prime minister to be arrested since 1977. Military property, including the home of a top commander, has been destroyed. The current turmoil comes as the already embattled country struggles with a dire economic situation, a spike in militancy, and the impact of last year's catastrophic floods. This grimness is unlikely to be addressed or resolved soon, further straining living conditions and security for the 220-million population.

WHY IS THERE SUCH A STRONG REACTION TO KHAN'S DETENTION?

Khan was ousted in a no-confidence vote in Parliament in April 2022 but still has a massive grassroots following, with the power to quickly mobilize thousands of supporters to the streets and stir up a frenzy with his anti-establishment rhetoric. Last November, he was shot in the leg at a rally. He claims both incidents are evidence of a conspiracy against him, a compelling narrative for his followers who believe he was unjustly ousted and is being targeted by the government and the military.

WHY WAS HE ARRESTED?

Khan has at least 100 criminal cases filed against him by various government agencies. In some ways his detention was just a matter of time. He was in court on Tuesday for one set of corruption charges but was arrested for another. What's striking about his detention is how dramatic it was — the anti-graft agency whose agents detained him has not explained why he was taken so publicly, dragged out of court and shoved into an armored vehicle.

The 70-year-old Khan has repeatedly denied all allegations against him.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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The government has stepped up security, banned gatherings — and in some places shut down social media. But Khan's supporters are determined to see him freed and returned to power, saying he is their red line. A crackdown on party activists and leaders will not make them back down. Though he may ultimately be released, while he is in detention, the standoff between his supporters and authorities continues — all the while deepening Pakistan's divisions.

## **Zelenskyy: Ukraine counteroffensive needs more time, launching now would cost too many lives**

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says his country's military needs more time to prepare an anticipated counteroffensive aimed at pushing back Russian occupying forces and opening a new chapter in the war more than 14 months after the Kremlin's full-scale invasion.

Zelenskyy said in an interview broadcast Thursday by the BBC that it would be "unacceptable" to launch the assault now because too many lives would be lost.

"With (what we have) we can go forward and be successful," Zelenskyy said in the interview, according to the BBC.

"But we'd lose a lot of people. I think that's unacceptable," he was quoted as saying. The interview was reportedly carried out in Kyiv with public service broadcasters who are members of Eurovision News, including the BBC.

"So we need to wait. We still need a bit more time," Zelenskyy was quoted as saying.

A Ukrainian fightback against Russia's invasion has been expected for weeks. Ukraine is receiving advanced Western weapons, including tanks and air defenses, and Western training for its troops as it gears up for an expected assault.

While a counterpunch is possible as the weather in Ukraine improves, there has been no word on when it might happen. Zelenskyy's remarks could be a red herring to keep the Russians guessing, and ammunition supply difficulties faced by both sides have added more uncertainty.

A claim by the Ukrainian military on Wednesday that it had advanced up to two kilometers (1.2 miles) around the hotly contested eastern city of Bakhmut brought speculation that the counteroffensive was already underway.

But Serhii Cherevatyi, spokesman for Ukraine's Operational Command East, told The Associated Press that the attack was not the "grand counteroffensive, but it's a harbinger showing that there will be more such attacks in the future."

The Kremlin's forces are deeply entrenched in eastern areas of Ukraine with layered defensive lines reportedly up to 20 kilometers (12 miles) deep. Kyiv's counteroffensive would likely face minefields, anti-tank ditches and other obstacles.

Russia is "acting slow" in Ukraine because it wants to preserve infrastructure and save lives there, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov claimed in an interview with the Bosnian Serb channel ATV broadcast Wednesday night.

Moscow has repeatedly explained its lack of advances on the battlefield as an effort to protect civilians, but those claims have been proven false.

Zelenskyy said Russian President Vladimir Putin is counting on reducing the war to a so-called frozen conflict, with neither side able to dislodge the other, according to the BBC. He ruled out surrendering territory to Russia in return for a peace deal.

Military analysts have warned that Putin is hoping that the West's costly support for Kyiv will begin to fray.

Ukraine's Western allies have sent the country 65 billion euros (\$70 billion) in military aid to help thwart the Kremlin's ambitions, and with no peace negotiations on the horizon the alliance is gearing up to send more.

European Union Foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the possible need to delay a counteroffensive was a sign that the West must step up its military support for Ukraine.



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"Certainly, they need more preparation," Borrell said at a defense and security conference in Brussels. "They need more arms. They need to gather more capacity, and it is us who have to provide for that."

A senior NATO official said that in the coming months of the war, Ukraine will have the edge in quality but Russia has the upper hand in quantity.

"The Russians are now starting to use very old materiel, very old capabilities," Adm. Bob Bauer, chair of the NATO Military Committee, told reporters late Wednesday in Brussels.

"The Russians will have to focus on quantity," he said. "Larger number of conscripts and mobilized people. Not well-trained. Older materiel, but large numbers, and not as precise, not as good as the newer ones."

Over the winter, the conflict became bogged down in a war of attrition with both sides relying heavily on bombardment of each other's positions.

A counteroffensive is a major challenge, requiring the Ukrainian military to orchestrate a wide range of capabilities, including providing ammunition, food, medical supplies and spare parts, strung along potentially extended supply lines.

The front line extends more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles).

The Kremlin wants Kyiv to acknowledge Russia's sovereignty over Crimea and also recognize September's annexation of the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia.

Ukraine has rejected the demands and ruled out any talks with Russia until its troops pull back from all occupied territories.

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AP reporter Lorne Cook contributed from Brussels.

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

## Expel George Santos? GOP leaders aren't ready to take that step

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Protecting a narrow, four-vote majority, Republican leaders in the House are making clear that they intend to let the legal process play out with New York Rep. George Santos before they take steps to force his resignation or expel him.

The freshman congressman was accused Wednesday by federal prosecutors of embezzling money from his campaign, falsely receiving unemployment funds and lying to Congress about his finances and could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted. Santos pleaded not guilty.

Republican leaders, who for months have faced mounting questions about Santos after most of his campaign biography was exposed as a lie, were unmoved and brushed aside calls — including from some colleagues — that they take immediate action to push Santos out of Congress.

"In America, there's a presumption of innocence. But they're serious charges. He's going to have to go through the legal process," said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana.

Scalise was seconded by Republican Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York, the No. 3 House Republican, who sidestepped the question of whether Santos should resign.

"As I've said from the very beginning on questions on this subject, this legal process is going to play itself out," she said.

The position Republican leaders have staked out generally follows the precedent that Congress has set in similar criminal cases over the years. The House has expelled just two members in recent decades, and both votes occurred after the lawmaker had been convicted on federal charges. But many say the narrow majority that Republicans won in the House is surely another factor in the GOP leadership's thinking.

"There are a few members of the New York delegation and a few others calling for his immediate expulsion on the Republican side, which could tilt the leadership's hand. But given where we're at with the debt limit and a four-vote majority, they don't want to lose any of those votes right now," said Casey Burgat, an assistant professor who leads the legislative affairs program at George Washington University.

Santos is adamant that he will stay in Congress and seek reelection. In a press conference outside a Long

## played Bobbie Spencer, has died

By ALICIA RANCILIO Associated Press

Jacklyn Zeman, who played Bobbie Spencer for 45 years on ABC's "General Hospital" has died at 70.

Zeman died after a short battle with cancer, her family confirmed Wednesday. News of her death was first announced by the show's executive producer, Frank Valentini.

"I am heartbroken to announce the passing of our beloved Jackie Zeman," he wrote on Twitter. "Just like her character, the legendary Bobbie Spencer, she was a bright light and a true professional that brought so much positive energy with her work."

ABC Entertainment and "General Hospital" also released a statement stating, "Jacklyn Zeman has been a beloved member of the General Hospital and ABC family since she originated the iconic role of Bobbie Spencer over 45 years ago. She leaves behind a lasting legacy for her Emmy-nominated portrayal of the bad girl turned heroine and will always be remembered for her kind heart and radiant spirit. We are devastated by the news of her passing, and send our deepest condolences to Jackie's family, friends and loved ones."

Zeman first joined "General Hospital" in 1977 as Barbara Jean, who went by Bobbie, and was the feisty, younger sister of Anthony Geary's Luke Spencer. Zeman grew to regard Geary as family off camera. "I'm probably closer to him than I would be a real-life brother," she told co-star Maurice Benard last year on his YouTube series "State of Mind."

Bobbie had worked as a teen prostitute and given up a baby for adoption but had managed to turn her life around and become a nurse at General Hospital. Zeman's portrayal of Spencer was a spirited, upbeat woman who was as sweet as pie but who also had a sense of self. She didn't suffer fools and had no problem revoking the niceties if she believed it were warranted.

"Bobbie has been a fascinating person for me to play," she said in an interview in 1982. "I get to do... all the things that most women think about but wouldn't dare."

One of Zeman's most memorable scenes was in 1994 and Bobbie's daughter BJ is in a school bus accident that leaves her brain dead. Bobbie and then-husband Tony (played by Brad Maule) made the decision to donate their daughter's heart to her cousin, Maxie, who was battling Kawasaki disease.

Laura Wright, who plays Bobbie's daughter Carly Spencer, posted a series of broken heart emojis. Jon Lindstrom, who plays Kevin Collins wrote, "This is going to take me a minute to process. I can't believe such a life force as hers has left."

Born March 6, 1953 in Englewood, New Jersey, Zeman discovered a love for dance as a child and as a teen, began acting in school productions. She worked in Venezuela as a dancer after high school and was pre-med at New York University but dropped out when she was offered a contract at the ABC soap "One Life to Live" after originally being hired for just three days of work.

On "One Life," she played Lana McClain for a little more than one year and then left for "General Hospital." "I didn't even audition," she told a blogger in 2010. Zeman was nominated for four Daytime Emmy Awards for her work on the show.

Outside of soap operas, Zeman worked as a Playboy Bunny to help pay for college and also acted in commercials. She had a role in 1982's "National Lampoon's Class Reunion" appeared in a string of TV movies including the ABC Afterschool special "Montana Crossroads" in 1993. She also had a series regular role as Sofia Madison in the crime-drama series "The Bay," earning her a fifth Emmy Award nomination.

Zeman last's appearance on "General Hospital" before her death was in April for the wedding of her character's grandson. The same month she also celebrated the show's 60th anniversary by posting a video on Instagram to the fans.

"A great, big heartfelt thank you to the very special people who have been watching us and supporting us and keeping us on the air all these years. We love you."

Zeman is survived by two daughters, Cassidy and Lacey from her first marriage to Glenn Gordon. She was married and divorced two more time to Steve Gribbin and disc jockey Murray Kaufman who went by "Murray the K."

## Western weapons, growing experience harden Ukrainian air defenses against renewed Russian onslaught

By DAVID RISING and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

NEAR KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — By the time Kyiv residents hear the air-raid sirens signaling an imminent Russian attack, Ukraine's air-defense units are already on the move. From camouflaged positions, they dart out by truck to farm fields around the capital, ready to take down enemy drones or missiles.

The scramble has become an almost nightly event since Russia resumed regular air attacks on Kyiv on April 28 after a nearly two-month lull. The units have intercepted every drone and missile fired at the capital since then.

It's a vast improvement since the opening days of the war, when waves of Russian missiles and aircraft eluded many Ukrainian defenses and inflicted heavy losses on Kyiv's air force.

With the help of Western weapons and growing experience, Ukraine's air defenses have made great strides in the past 14 months, saving infrastructure and lives and preventing Russia from achieving air superiority — a critical step as Ukrainians prepare for a counteroffensive.

The bolstered defenses have deterred Russian aircraft from going deep behind the front lines and "greatly shaped the course of the war," Ian Williams wrote this month in an analysis for the Center For Strategic and International Studies, or CSIS.

Since April 28, Russia has fired a total of 67 missiles and 114 drones at Ukraine, according to Ukrainian air force reports. Only seven missiles and 11 drones got through, and none hit Kyiv.

Last week, Kyiv units reported they had shot down Russia's most advanced hypersonic missile, a weapon that was previously considered unstoppable by Ukraine. A newly acquired American-made Patriot battery made it possible.

On the first day of the invasion, Russia targeted Ukraine's ground-based air-defense systems, first with a wave of missiles, then with dozens of bomber sorties supported by electronic warfare measures that essentially blinded Ukrainian radar, wrote Justin Bronk in an April analysis for the Virginia-based Center for Naval Analyses.

But Ukraine had received intelligence from allies ahead of the Russian attacks, allowing Ukrainian defenders to move mobile units out of harm's way, although some fixed positions were destroyed.

The units were scattered, and for a brief time Russia was able to fly in waves of helicopters, supported by fighter jets, and inflict heavy losses on Ukrainian aircraft sent to intercept them.

But the Russians failed to follow up on their initial attacks, allowing Ukraine to regroup quickly, said Douglas Barrie, a defense aerospace specialist with the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

"They didn't go back and check: Did we destroy it? Disable it? Do we need to go back and do it again? Have they relocated?" he said.

The brigade commander of air defense command "Center" is a colonel who could only be identified by his callsign, "Granite," in keeping with the Ukrainian military's policy of protecting soldiers' identities. During a visit by The Associated Press to his unit this week, he said his brigade was hit on the first day of the war with 20 Russian missiles, which took out barracks and command posts and killed people.

After abandoning fixed positions, they now operate strictly as mobile teams that can quickly spring into action and just as quickly slip away — a tactic commonly referred to as "shoot and scoot."

After the initial setbacks suffered by Ukraine's air defenses, enough mobile units were back in operation by the war's third day that they were able to shoot down multiple planes, prompting Russia to pull back its attack aircraft and depriving it of a key advantage.

But many of the Russian missiles were still getting through.

Granite estimates in the early months that Ukraine was intercepting about 50% of incoming Russian missiles. The CSIS report suggested the figure might actually have been much lower.

With the arrival of new Western-made air defense systems in October and November, as well as the growing skill of the Ukrainian batteries, Ukraine reported intercepting some 80% of incoming Russian

cruise missiles by December.

Today, Granite said the figure is closer to 90%, and he said the defense systems around Kyiv have taken down 100% of missiles shot at the city since April 28.

"Kyiv is protected," he said.

Two key systems used by Ukraine since the start of the war have been the Soviet-era long-range S300 and medium-range Buk systems, also known as the SA-10s and SA-11s.

Ukraine has gradually added new systems from Western allies, including IRIS-T batteries from Germany in October and the American and Norwegian-built NASAMS in November.

It has also received European-built SAMP/T systems, and American-built HAWK missiles, and last month added two U.S.-built Patriot batteries.

The air-defense teams are set up with overlapping range rings, starting from short, almost point-blank defenses using shoulder-launched missiles and anti-air cannons to greater distances.

A single layer would not be enough to stop all strikes or even most of them, Barrie said. "But the more layers you have, the greater the chances you have."

Though all recent attacks on Kyiv have been thwarted, debris from falling missiles and drones has caused injuries and damage in the capital. But that is nothing compared with what could have happened, Granite said. In the April 28 attacks, a missile hit an apartment building in the central city of Uman, killing 23.

With so many Russian assaults, some speculate that Moscow's strategy is to try to deplete Ukraine's air-defense resources to the point where Russia will again be able to exploit its advantage with fighters and bombers. But there are also signs that Russia is running lower on missiles.

So far Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has successfully pressed allies for more air-defense supplies. The U.S. on Monday announced \$1.2 billion more in long-term military aid, including new HAWK systems, drones and air-defense munitions.

Moscow could also be banking that Western support will eventually wane and put pressure on Ukraine to make concessions, Williams wrote.

Morale seemed high among Granite's troops this week, as a short-range team clowned around despite being on duty long into the early morning hours as Kyiv's air defenses took down 35 explosive Iranian-made Shahed drones. The team then scrambled back to their posts around midday for what turned out to be a false alarm.

"Beetle," who took down a Russian helicopter over Kyiv on the first day of the war with a shoulder-launched missile, said the success gave him confidence that he still holds.

"I realized that it's not over yet, that we can fight," he said. "So they're not that scary."

"Range," a driver who joined the military on the first day of the war after seeing missiles rain down, said he could not sit on the sidelines.

"It's history," he said. "And we're currently writing it."

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

## War, natural disasters left record 71 million people internally displaced in 2022, report says

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

The war in Ukraine helped push the global total of people left internally displaced by conflict or natural disasters to a record high of 71.1 million last year, according to a report released Thursday by the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

By the end of 2022, 5.9 million people had been forced to move inside Ukraine because of Russia's invasion, bringing the global total of people internally displaced by conflict and violence to more than 62 million, an increase of 17% since 2021. Syria had 6.8 million displaced by conflict after more than a decade of civil war.



The number of people displaced inside their country at the end of the year because of disasters like floods and famine reached 8.7 million, up by 45% from 2021.

The total of 71.1 million internally displaced worldwide was a 20% increase since 2021.

Internal displacement refers to people forced to move inside their own borders and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's report didn't take into account those who left for different countries.

Following a year when conflict raged in Ukraine, Syria, Ethiopia and elsewhere, there has been no respite in 2023. The United Nations migration agency said this week that 700,000 people have already been internally displaced in a matter of weeks by the conflict in Sudan between the army and a rival paramilitary group.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre cited the La Nina weather phenomenon, which continued for a third consecutive year in 2022, as a major factor in disaster displacements. It contributed to record levels of flood displacement in Pakistan, Nigeria and Brazil and to the worst drought on record in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia, the report said.

There was a "perfect storm" of conflict and natural disasters in 2022, leading to "displacement on a scale never seen before," said Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

More AP news: <https://apnews.com/hub/world-news>

## Israeli-Palestinian fighting intensifies as Egyptian cease-fire efforts falter

By FARES AKRAM and ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinian militants fired hundreds of rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel on Wednesday, while Israel pressed ahead with a series of airstrikes that have killed 23 Palestinians, including three senior militants and at least 10 civilians.

A state-run Egyptian TV station announced that Egypt, a frequent mediator between the sides, had brokered a cease-fire. But the truce efforts appeared to falter as fighting intensified late Wednesday, with neither side showing any sign of backing down.

Early Thursday, the Israeli military said it targeted the commander of Islamic Jihad's rocket squad in an airstrike on a building in the southern Gaza Strip. The military said Ali Ghali was hiding in an apartment and that two additional militants from the group were killed alongside him in the airstrike at a Qatari-built residential complex in Khan Younis. Ghali instructed and took part in rocket attacks against Israel in recent months. There was no comment from the militant group.

In a prime-time TV address, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that Israel had dealt a harsh blow to the militants. But he cautioned: "This round is not over."

"We say to the terrorists and those who send them. We see you everywhere. You can't hide, and we choose the place and time to strike you," he said, adding that Israel would also decide when calm is restored.

Throughout the day, rocket fire set off air-raid sirens throughout southern and central Israel, some 80 kilometers (50 miles) away. Residents had been bracing for an attack since Israel launched its first airstrikes early Tuesday.

It was the heaviest fighting between the sides in months, pushing the region closer toward a full-blown war. But in signs that both sides were trying to show restraint, Israel avoided attacks on the ruling Hamas militant group, targeting only the smaller and more militant Islamic Jihad faction. Hamas, meanwhile, appeared to remain on the sidelines.

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since the Islamic militant group took control of Gaza in 2007.

Late Wednesday, Egypt's Extra News television channel, which has close ties to Egyptian security agencies, said it had brokered a cease-fire. Egyptian intelligence frequently mediates between Israel and Palestinian militants.

Israeli officials confirmed that Egypt was trying to facilitate a cease-fire. Speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss behind-the-scenes diplomacy, they said Israel would evaluate the situation based on

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actions on the ground, not declarations.

Islamic Jihad said it would continue firing rockets. Mohamad al-Hindi, an official with the group, said a sticking point in the talks was that the Palestinians wanted an Israeli commitment to stop targeted killing operations, such as the ones that killed three top Islamic Jihad commanders early Tuesday.

As rockets streaked through the sky, Israeli TV stations showed air defense systems intercepting rockets above the skies of Tel Aviv. In the nearby suburb of Ramat Gan, people lay face-down on the ground as they took cover.

The Israeli military said that for the first time, an air-defense system known as David's Sling intercepted a rocket. The system, developed with the U.S., is meant to intercept medium-range threats and is part of a multi-layered air defense that also includes the better-known Iron Dome anti-rocket system. Israeli media said a previous attempt to use the system several years ago had failed.

In a move that could further raise tensions, Israeli police said they would permit a Jewish ultranationalist parade to take place next week. The parade, meant to celebrate Israel's capture of east Jerusalem and its Jewish holy sites, marches through the heart of the Old City's Muslim Quarter and often leads to friction with local Palestinians.

Israeli officials said over 400 rockets had been fired as of Wednesday evening. Most, they said, were intercepted or fell in open areas, but Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said about one-quarter had been misfired and fallen inside Gaza. Israeli rescuers said three people were hurt running for shelter, and four homes in southern Israel were damaged by rocket strikes.

The army said that schools would remain closed and restrictions on large gatherings would remain in place in southern Israel until at least Friday. Residents were instructed to stay near bomb shelters.

Eden Avramov, a 26-year-old resident of the southern Israeli town of Sderot, described the 24 hours since Israel launched airstrikes on Gaza as terrifying. "We are all traumatized from this routine — the waiting, the booms, the alarms."

Israeli aircraft hit targets in Gaza for the second straight day, killing at least five Palestinians. The Israeli military said its warplanes targeted dozens of rocket launchers, arms warehouses and other targets across the enclave. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine said four of the dead were militants.

A 10-year-old Palestinian girl named Layan Mdoukh was killed in a blast at her home in Gaza City in unclear circumstances on Wednesday.

The initial Israeli airstrikes on Tuesday that set off the exchange of fire killed three senior Islamic Jihad militants and at least 10 civilians — most of them women and children. The Israeli military has said its attacks were focused on Islamic Jihad militant infrastructure in the coastal enclave.

Israel says the airstrikes are a response to a barrage of rocket fire launched last week by Islamic Jihad in response to the death of one of its members from a hunger strike while in Israeli custody.

Israel says it is trying to avoid conflict with Hamas, the more powerful militant group that rules Gaza, and limit the fighting to Islamic Jihad.

"Our actions are meant to prevent further escalation," said Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the Israeli military's chief spokesman. "Israel is not interested in war."

In a statement, an umbrella organization of Palestinian factions in Gaza, including Hamas, said the campaign against Israel — which it dubbed "Avenging the Free" — involved firing hundreds of rockets in retaliation for Israel's killing of the three Islamic Jihad commanders as well as several civilians.

"The resistance is ready for all options," the factions said. "If (Israel) persists in its aggression and arrogance, dark days await it."

Still, it remained unclear whether Hamas had joined the fray. If the ruling militant group enters the fighting, the risk of a full-blown conflict would increase.

Israel has come under international criticism for the high civilian toll Tuesday, which included wives of two of the militant commanders, some of their children and a dentist who lived in one of the targeted buildings along with his wife and son.

In past conflicts, rights groups have accused Israel of committing war crimes due to high civilian deaths. Israel says it does its utmost to avoid civilian casualties and holds militant groups responsible because

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Island federal courthouse, he spoke Wednesday of getting back to Washington so he could vote on a top House GOP priority, a border bill that would restrict some asylum seekers and boost border enforcement. It's expected to be a close vote.

Santos also voted last month for the House GOP bill that ties a debt limit extension to an estimated \$4.8 trillion in deficit reduction over 10 years. In a dramatic flourish, Santos was the last Republican to cast a vote in favor of that bill, helping it win passage by a paper-thin margin — 217-215.

While GOP leaders say the legal system needs to run its course, a few Republicans have seen enough. "The people of New York's 3rd district deserve a voice in congress," tweeted Rep. Tony Gonzales, R-Texas. "George Santos should be immediately expelled from Congress and a special election initiated at the soonest possible date."

The House and the Senate have the power to punish members of their chamber for misconduct, including through expulsion. To date, according to the Congressional Research Service, 20 members have been expelled, but the large majority of them occurred at the outset of the Civil War. Half of the 20 expulsions were the result of a single vote in the Senate involving senators who represented states that had seceded from the Union, but had not formally resigned.

The two most recent expulsions followed convictions on public corruption charges were:

—Rep. Michael J. "Ozzie" Myers, D-Penn., was convicted of bribery and conspiracy for taking money from FBI agents who posed as Arab sheiks. He was expelled in 1980 following his conviction and served more than a year in prison.

—Rep. James Traficant, D-Ohio, was expelled in 2002, three months after he was found guilty of 10 federal charges, including racketeering, bribery and fraud for taking bribes and kickbacks from businessmen and his own staff.

Some lawmakers have also resigned upon being convicted of a crime, pre-empting an expulsion vote.

Last year, Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., resigned from office after a California jury convicted him of lying to federal authorities about an illegal campaign donation from a foreign national.

Two years earlier, Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., submitted his resignation about a month after pleading guilty to a charge of conspiring with his wife to steal about \$250,000 in campaign funds to pay for a lavish lifestyle, from vacations to outings with friends and private school tuition. Then-President Donald Trump pardoned Hunter shortly before he left office.

Trump also pardoned former Rep. Chris Collins, R-N.Y., who resigned in 2019 ahead of admitting to helping his son and others dodge \$800,000 in stock market losses when he learned that a drug trial by a small pharmaceutical company had failed.

More than three dozen Democratic lawmakers have signed onto a bill from Rep. Robert Garcia, D-Calif., that would expel Santos from the House.

"It's pretty clear to everyone, including his constituents, that he is a complete fraud and shouldn't be in Congress," Garcia said.

Garcia said McCarthy is not pushing to expel Santos because he needs his vote. He urged the several Republicans from New York who have criticized Santos to sign on to the expulsion legislation.

"He can barely keep his caucus together on votes, so it's clear that he's using George Santos' support to keep him in leadership," Garcia said.

Republicans deny that Santos has been a distraction and say they are focused on other issues.

"This place is bigger than any one member," said Rep. Kevin Hern, R-Okla., the chairman of the powerful Republican Study Committee.

Despite the reports that Santos was facing federal charges, and a crush of media attention at his arraignment in New York, Republicans said there was no discussion of him during their weekly, closed-door caucus meeting on Wednesday morning.

"I never heard his name mentioned once," said Rep. Andrew Clyde, R-Ga.

**Jacklyn Zeman, veteran 'General Hospital' cast member who**

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they operate in heavily populated residential areas.

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank, the military said that Palestinian gunmen opened fire at troops in the Palestinian town of Qabatiya in the northern West Bank during an army raid. Troops returned fire, killing the two men, and confiscated their firearms, it said.

Islamic Jihad later claimed the two men as its members.

Israel has been conducting near-daily military raids in the occupied West Bank for over a year to detain suspected Palestinian militants, including many from Islamic Jihad.

At least 107 Palestinians, around half of them militants, have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank and east Jerusalem this year, according to an Associated Press tally. At least 20 people have been killed in Palestinian attacks targeting Israelis.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek all three territories for a future independent state.

Ben Zion reported from Jerusalem. Associated Press writers Isabel DeBre and Josef Federman in Jerusalem contributed to this report.

## Idaho triple murder trial of slain kids' mom drawing to end

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho prosecutors have spent the last four weeks painstakingly detailing their case against a woman accused of killing her two youngest children and a romantic rival in a bizarre doomsday-focused plot.

On Thursday, they are expected to present their final arguments to the jury in the triple murder trial of Lori Vallow Daybell. Vallow Daybell's defense team, meanwhile, will likely attempt to persuade jurors that there simply isn't enough evidence to justify a conviction.

Vallow Daybell and her husband, Chad Daybell, are charged with multiple counts of conspiracy, murder and grand theft in connection with the deaths of Vallow Daybell's two youngest children: 7-year-old Joshua "JJ" Vallow and his big sister Tylee Ryan, who was last seen a few days before her 17th birthday in 2019. Prosecutors also charged the couple in connection with the October 2019 death of Chad Daybell's late wife, Tammy Daybell.

Both defendants have pleaded not guilty, but are being tried separately. Vallow Daybell faces up to life in prison if she is convicted. Chad Daybell's trial is still months away.

At times, the testimony in the case has been heartbreaking — such as when Vallow Daybell's only surviving child, Colby Ryan, accused her of murdering his siblings in a recorded jailhouse phone call.

Other testimony has been strange, like when Vallow Daybell's former friend Melanie Gibb testified that Vallow Daybell believed people in her life had been taken over by evil spirits and turned into "zombies" — including her two youngest kids. Four of the people the defendant described as "zombies" were later killed or shot at, according to the testimony.

It has also been gruesome, such as when law enforcement officers testified about finding JJ and Tylee's remains buried in Chad Daybell's yard. JJ's body had been wrapped in duct tape and plastic, and Tylee's remains had been destroyed and burned with her bones showing evidence of chopping or stabbing marks, the witnesses said. Hair belonging to Vallow Daybell was found on a piece of duct tape used to wrap JJ, a DNA analyst testified.

Vallow Daybell's defense attorneys, meanwhile, did not call any witnesses, and Vallow Daybell declined to testify. Instead, defense attorney Jim Archibald asserted that they did not believe prosecutors had proven their case, suggesting that there was not enough evidence to find beyond a reasonable doubt that Vallow Daybell committed a crime.

The case began in July 2019, when Vallow Daybell's then-husband, Charles Vallow, was shot and killed by her brother, Alex Cox, at his home in a Phoenix suburb. Lori and Charles were estranged, and he had filed divorce documents claiming that she believed she was a goddess sent to usher in the Biblical apocalypse.



At the time, Cox told police he acted in self-defense, and he was never charged in connection with the death. Cox died later that year of what authorities determined were natural causes. Lori Vallow Daybell was later charged in Arizona in connection with Charles Vallow's death; she has not yet had the opportunity to enter a plea in that case.

According to prosecutors, Vallow Daybell was already in a relationship with Chad Daybell, who was still married to his wife, Tammy Daybell, at the time. She moved to eastern Idaho with her brother and kids to be closer to Chad Daybell.

The children were last seen alive in September of 2019. Police discovered they were missing a month later after an extended family member became worried that she wasn't able to get ahold of JJ. Their bodies were found the following summer.

## Figuring out Texas: From guns to immigration, here's how one state's challenges echo the country's

JUAN A. LOZANO and TIM SULLIVAN Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Thirteen people dead in two mass shootings. Eight immigrants killed when an SUV slams into a crowded bus stop. The likely approval of legislation that would let the Republican governor overturn elections in the most populous county, a Democratic stronghold. All in the past two weeks.

These issues and the forces behind them — anger and guns, immigration turmoil, deep political divisions about what democracy means — are playing out across American life in various ways. But in Texas, with its immense size and a population that grows by more than 1,000 people a day, the stage is far bigger — and often louder.

It's enough to make even the proudest Texan wrestle with how he sees the state.

"This is out of control right now," said Jay Leeson, an illustrator and cartoonist who lives in Lubbock, a city in the Texas High Plains. He describes himself as a "conservative West Texan" whose kids "know how to handle guns, know how to ride horses, know how to do all the Texas things."

The "Texas things." Texans have heard this all before. They've been hearing it for generations. That everyone is armed. That it's a wildly conservative place full of oil roughnecks and cowboys and brash braggarts. That it's nothing like the rest of the country, really.

Many Texans will tell you there's some truth to this. But Texas is also far more nuanced than a collection of clichés that consider the state through the narrowest of lenses.

Yet lately, things here have felt unrelenting. And what troubles some Texans is not how outsiders see the state, but whether those living here can navigate the divisive political climate — and overcome a complicated and sometimes violent past.

### EVEN THOSE WHO SUPPORT GUNS FRET ABOUT THEM

Leeson is furious at how immigration has become a political battleground. He's furious at how Republicans "bleed every vote they can out of West Texas" to overcome growing populations in the state's heavily Democratic urban centers, from Houston to Dallas, Austin to San Antonio. The Texas Legislature is currently debating various bills that are targeting how Democratic Harris County, the state's most populous, runs its elections.

He's especially furious that his 9-year-old son is so worried about school shootings that he checked all the windows in his classroom to see which would open in case of an attack.

"I just think the whole thing is a damn mess," Leeson said.

Mass killings have a deep history in Texas. Arguably the first modern American mass shooting happened here in 1966, when an engineering student opened fire from a building observation deck at the University of Texas. He killed 14 people and wounded dozens more.

But the state's strict gun laws didn't begin to crack until a few years after another mass shooting — this one in 1991, when a gunman drove his pickup truck through the window of a central Texas cafeteria and killed 23 people. By then, decades of Democratic control were giving way to Republicans who saw gun

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rights as a key issue.

In 1995, then-Gov. George W. Bush signed legislation that allowed Texans to carry concealed guns. Today, Texans can carry weapons openly. Some do — passionately.

Chad Hasty, a well-known conservative talk radio host based in Lubbock, mourns the latest killings — “I don’t want to get to a time where we’re not shocked by a mass shooting” — but is adamant that gun rights be protected. He rarely leaves home without his Sig Sauer P365, a small firearm designed for everyday carrying and one of the best-selling pistols in America.

He dismisses the idea that Texas is particularly prone to violence.

“I don’t view it as a uniquely Texas thing,” he said. Instead, the number of mass shootings is simply a matter of size: “We’re a huge state — millions and millions of people.”

## IT’S A STATE FAR MORE DIVERSE THAN THE CLICHES

The litany of Texas’ mass killings in just the last few years is staggering: Sutherland Springs, 26 killed in 2017; Santa Fe, 10 killed in 2018; El Paso, 23 killed in 2019; Midland-Odessa, seven killed in 2019; Uvalde, 21 killed in 2022; Cleveland, five killed on April 28; Allen, eight killed on May 6.

Guns have long been a part of Texas culture — both in the state’s mythology and in reality. But to equate the number of guns with the number of people killed by guns strikes some as a false equivalence.

“You’ll never get people to give up their guns, nor do I believe you should,” said Vanesa Brashier, the editor and publisher of Bluebonnet News, a site that covers rural areas north of Houston, including the town of Cleveland, where five immigrants were killed in a mass shooting on April 28.

She was deeply shaken by the killings, particularly by how some of the women died shielding their children from gunfire. But she considers herself pro-Second Amendment: “I want to be able to defend myself if someone comes calling that shouldn’t be at my property.”

Like so much in Texas, her politics are complex. Brashier, who calls herself a political independent, sees immigration as a good thing — “I just think we need to figure out a better way to do it.”

Just two weeks ago she created a Spanish language news site to better inform the area’s growing Latino population. She named the site “El Amanecer Texas” or Texas Sunrise, “because I wanted it to be hopeful.”

“These residents who have moved here deserve to be informed about what’s going on around them,” she said. But the influx of immigrants has faced backlash from some residents, who feel “like there’s been an invasion,” Brashier said.

This week, Texas and other border states were preparing for the end of a policy that allowed the government to quickly expel migrants to Mexico. Gov. Greg Abbott has deployed more Texas National Guard troops in response to the end of the rule. The goal, Abbott said this week: to “secure the Texas border.”

Texas’ border cities have tended to be more welcoming to immigrants than other parts of the state, since many in these areas have long seen themselves and their Mexican neighbors as a big, blended community that transcends governments’ political borders. In El Paso, for instance, more than 80 percent of nearly 700,000 residents are Latino. Many residents have family just across the border in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

This situation at the border has created a welcoming community that reacts differently to various issues, including immigration, said Richard Pineda, director of the Sam Donaldson Center for Communication Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. For Texas, he says, it’s an outlier — a “fluid culture that goes back and forth.”

## BIG CHANGES IN THE STATE CAN LEAD TO TENSION

Texas can feel like a study in contrasts. Famed for its oil industry, but the producer of a quarter of the country’s wind energy and a leader in solar power. Known for its open, undeveloped landscapes but home to some of the largest, fastest-growing cities in the land. Epitomized by the cowboy, but with some of the largest immigrant populations in America.

With more than 30 million people, Texas has long been a destination for outsiders from other U.S. states and abroad. Since 2010, it has gained nearly 4 million residents — more than any other state, according to U.S. Census figures. In 2020, Latino residents accounted for half the population growth, and many demographers believe Latinos will soon surpass whites as the state’s largest ethnic group.

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But it's not just Latinos. Texas has large populations of immigrants from India, China, the Philippines, Vietnam and elsewhere. Allen, where a gunman killed eight people at a mall on May 6, is among the Dallas-Fort Worth area's most diverse suburbs.

For nearly a century, Texas has had a one-word state motto: "Friendship." But many see that easygoing connection changing.

"I always thought of Texas as a friendly place. But to be honest, this last decade, it just feels meaner," said Chris Tomlinson, a fifth-generation Texan and a business columnist with the Houston Chronicle. He has written two best-sellers about Texas history, including "Forget the Alamo: The Rise and Fall of an American Myth."

Tomlinson notes that more than 70 percent of Texans over age 60 are non-Hispanic whites, while more than 70 percent of Texans under age 30 are people of color.

"That creates the tension that you see around voting rights and cultural issues like critical race theory and LGBTQ issues," he said. "When you have that level of demographic change, there is going to be tension."

Texas is among the states, for example, where drag shows have been targeted by right-wing activists and politicians, and Republican lawmakers have proposed restrictions on the shows.

At times, it can seem that the Texas population is shifting faster on many issues than the state's politics, which remain solidly conservative and Republican. A Democrat hasn't been elected to statewide office since 1994. Yet Tomlinson notes that polling indicates Texans aren't that different from the rest of the country when it comes to many issues, from abortion to immigration.

Then there are the guns — a reputation that, for better and worse, follows Texas everywhere. A survey last year by the University of Houston and Texas Southern University showed "overwhelming support" for at least some level of gun control. Yet few expect to see that in Texas anytime soon.

Gary Mauro, a longtime commissioner of the Texas Land Office who ran for governor in 1998, is one of those last statewide Democrats. Though he reserves most of his criticism for Republicans, he blames extremists in both parties for focusing on the political fringes — and amplifying some of the very clichés with which Texas continues to struggle.

"I keep thinking it's going to get better," he said of Texas politics. "And it keeps getting worse."

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Houston-based Associated Press journalist Juan A. Lozano has been covering Texas since 1994. Tim Sullivan, an AP national writer, reported from Minneapolis. Follow Lozano on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/juanlozano70> and Sullivan at <http://twitter.com/ByTimSullivan>

## As public health emergency ends, pandemic-era support programs have already been fading away

By ASHRAF KHALIL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The formal end of the national Public Health Emergency on Thursday is largely a symbolic and psychological step, representing the country's formal emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic.

But behind the scenes, several core aspects of America's pandemic-era emergency safety net are also coming to a close, from extra food assistance to automatic re-enrollment in Medicaid. While these measures were always designed to be temporary, their expiration is inevitably producing hardship and confusion.

"People are starting to get their jobs back, but it's still not all the way back and everything is more expensive than before the pandemic," said Radha Muthiah, president of the Capital Area Food Bank. "The people we serve always seem to be playing catch-up."

Safety net programs gave Americans a lifeline during the height of the pandemic. The child tax credit was increased, unemployment benefits and food assistance were expanded, and a federal moratorium on eviction kept people in their homes even if they were unable to pay rent.

The Census Bureau reported last year that COVID relief efforts and others sharply reduced childhood poverty. But these programs have now expired.

The impact is being felt.

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Perhaps the fastest shock to the system has come in the SNAP program, the monthly food-assistance vehicle commonly known as food stamps. During the pandemic, all SNAP recipients had their benefits boosted through an Emergency Allotment program. The duration of those extra payments was originally tied directly to the duration of the public health emergency, but that was changed in December 2022 and the final pandemic-boosted SNAP payments went out at the end of February.

The average family started receiving about \$90 less per month in March, although some households dropped by up to \$250, according to a study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

On the ground, the impact has been immediate. Muthiah said her organization distributed 13% percent more fruits, vegetables, meat and canned goods in March, the month after the extra SNAP benefits expired. In times of financial hardship, she said many families in need prioritize non-negotiable items like rent or gas while turning to charities to fill the holes in their food budgets.

"We're seeing a cumulative effect of things being rolled back," said Muthiah, who estimated that 300,000 families in her food bank's service area have been impacted.

In many cases, the end of the extra SNAP assistance has led to confusion and frustration. Allison Miles-Lee, an attorney with the D.C. charity Bread for the City, said there has been a spike in demand for legal services as SNAP recipients struggle to understand how their new — theoretically back to normal — monthly payment was decided. In many cases, the amounts are based on sometimes obsolete information on family size, income or number of dependents.

"A lot of people just didn't report or update their information for three years," Miles-Lee said. "Now they're panicked and just sort of flying blind."

Tina Robinson is one of those confused SNAP recipients. The 49-year-old D.C. resident used to receive \$100 per month through SNAP. During the pandemic that rose to \$200 per month. But starting in March, her SNAP benefits abruptly dropped to \$6 and she doesn't know why.

"What exactly can you buy with \$6," Robinson asked as she waited in line for free groceries Wednesday morning at Bread for the City's charity food pantry. "That's almost worse than sending me zero, because it probably took \$20 worth of government employee time to get that \$6 to me."

Robinson said she has tried to get some clarity by calling the D.C. Department of Human Services. "I called many times. They don't answer their phones," she said.

Robinson says she never received the letter notifying her of the impending benefits reduction. But even those who saw the drop coming are having a hard time getting by without that pandemic-era boost.

Helena Smith, a 63-year-old retiree, says she did receive her letter and knew that her benefits would drop by more than \$100. That difference in her food budget was enough to bring her back to the local food pantry.

"It really did help a lot during the pandemic and I'm grateful for it," Smith said. "I knew it couldn't last forever, but it was a lot to lose all at once."

A similar, slower moving, process is happening with Medicaid, as dozens of states begin a review process that will remove as many as 14 million people from the health care program.

Before the pandemic, people would regularly lose their Medicaid coverage if they started making too much money to qualify for the program, gained health care coverage through their employer or moved to a new state. But the federal government prohibited states from kicking people off Medicaid during the pandemic, even if they were no longer eligible. That action, known as the Continuous Enrollment Provision, was also originally tied directly to the public health emergency. But like the extra SNAP payments, that was modified in December 2022 and the deadline changed to March 31.

Now dozens of states are launching reviews of their Medicaid recipients and removing those deemed ineligible. The process could take up to a year to complete, although some states are moving faster than others; Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma and West Virginia are among the states aiming to begin removing ineligible Medicaid recipients as early as this month.

Jennifer Wagner, director of Medicaid eligibility with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, said the process is already being marked by confusion and miscommunication. Many states are notifying recipients by mail that they need to reapply for Medicaid when other forms of communication such as text messages



are generally considered more reliable. And even when the mail messages make it into the correct hands, it doesn't necessarily clarify the situation.

"We're seeing some pretty confusing notices out there, said Wagner, who noted that one state is requiring recipients to fill out a 46-page form.

What's worse, Wagner said, is that many states are counting on the same overtaxed safety net agencies to handle both Medicaid and SNAP-related questions — creating administrative bottlenecks and massive wait times at call centers.

"Chaos at the state level is a virtual inevitability," Wagner said. "There are tremendous staffing shortages. These state agencies were already understaffed."

Associated Press writers Adriana Morga in New York City and Amanda Seitz and Collin Binkley in Washington contributed to this report.

## House GOP points to migration surge as lawmakers advance asylum restrictions, border wall

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are seeking Thursday to pass a sweeping bill to build more border wall and impose new restrictions on asylum seekers, creating a hardline counter to President Joe Biden's policies just as migrants are amassing along the border with the end of pandemic restrictions.

The bill has virtually no chance of becoming law. Democrats, who have a narrow hold on the Senate, have decried the aggressive measures in the bill as "cruel" and "anti-immigrant," and Biden has already promised he would veto it.

But the House GOP pointedly scheduled the vote for the same day as the expiration of Title 42, a public health emergency rule that allowed border authorities to quickly return many migrants who crossed the border illegally. Biden has conceded that the U.S.-Mexico border will be "chaotic for a while" as migrants weigh whether to cross and U.S. officials use a new set of policies that aim to clamp down on illegal immigration while offering more legal pathways.

Republicans have sought to slam Biden for the increase in illegal immigration during his tenure. Passing the bill would ensure House GOP lawmakers can say they did their part to deliver on a campaign promise to secure the border.

"The Republicans actually have solutions," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy told reporters late Wednesday, expressing confidence the GOP could pass it on a party-line vote through the narrowly held House.

McCarthy, R-Calif., spoke for roughly 20 minutes late Wednesday from the House floor — a perch he uses only on occasion — to further press the point.

"This is President Biden's record on the border: record crossings, record carelessness, record chaos," the speaker said during his speech before exiting to hi-fives from the handful of GOP lawmakers present, including Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene.

It's taken months, however, for Republicans to push the bill to the House floor amid sometimes public feuds between GOP lawmakers over the legislation.

The 213-page bill represents a compromise in the Republican conference between mainstream lawmakers, who wanted to focus on beefing up border enforcement, and hardline conservatives, who want to see drastic changes to U.S. asylum and immigration law.

The package would return to many of the same policies pursued by former President Donald Trump, such as building walls along the border. It would also restrict asylum by requiring migrants to cross legally, pay a \$50 fee and meet more stringent requirements to show in initial interviews that they are fleeing political, religious or racial persecution.

The bill proposes a scrap of a program that has allowed U.S. officials to accept or quickly turn away some migrants from Venezuela, Haiti and Nicaragua. The program is a cornerstone of Biden's immigration efforts, allowing migrants from those countries to apply to come to the U.S. for two years legally and work.

But even as the legislation neared final form Wednesday, it had to be amended to appease concerns from the House Freedom Caucus and other lawmakers. They worried about the implications of handing the Department of Homeland Security the power to designate cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, as well as whether agricultural businesses would be disrupted by a separate provision requiring them to verify the immigration status of employees.

McCarthy huddled with a group of far-right lawmakers in the office of Rep. Tom Emmer, the Republican whip, Wednesday afternoon to win them over to the bill.

"Members had a chance to go through, deliberate, ask questions, have conversations," said Rep. Byron Donalds, a Florida Republican who was in the meeting.

House GOP leadership amended the legislation to smooth over the objections. But in a sign of how unwieldy the Republican conference has grown, the amendment angered another key lawmaker, Rep. Tony Gonzales.

The Texas Republican told reporters he voted against the amendment because it "waters down" the bill's provision to potentially treat cartels as terrorist organizations, but said he would ultimately vote to pass the final piece of legislation.

Gonzales has been working with a number of senators, including Sens. Kyrsten Sinema, an Arizona independent, and Thom Tillis, a North Carolina Republican, on a proposal that would incorporate aggressive border enforcement with expanding legal immigration through work visas.

Meanwhile, Sen. Dick Durbin, the no. 2 Senate Democrat, said Wednesday he plans to introduce legislation that would assist border officials and speed up the asylum application process.

"It is an opportunity to show the American people that we are not ignoring the reality and we can support our frontline officials from the communities that need help," Durbin said, adding that people are "tired of partisan bickering."

Congress has not passed comprehensive immigration reform in decades, but Gonzales, who represents a large swath of border country, said he hopes the House bill could generate some momentum, even if it is wrapped in barbs for Biden.

"Until the president of the United States signs a bill into law, all of this is theater," he said. "A lot of people are good at political theater. Meanwhile, back in my district, we're dealing with a real crisis."

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

## Trump digs in on election lies, insults accuser during CNN town hall event

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

During a contentious CNN town hall Wednesday night, former President Donald Trump dug in on his lies about the 2020 election, downplayed the violence on Jan. 6, 2021, and repeatedly insulted the woman whom a civil jury this week found him liable of sexually abusing and defaming.

Trump, returning to the network after years of acrimony, also refused to say whether he wants Ukraine to win the war against Russian aggression and said the U.S. "might as well" default on its debt obligation, despite the potentially devastating economic consequences.

The live, televised event — held in early-voting New Hampshire — underscored the challenges of fact-checking Trump in real time. The former president was cheered on and applauded by an audience of Republican and unaffiliated voters who plan to vote in the GOP primary, as moderator Kaitlan Collins sometimes struggled to correct the record as Trump steamrolled with untrue statements. "You are a nasty person," he snapped at one point.

The event also highlighted what is perhaps Trump's most fundamental challenge as he emerged as the undisputed frontrunner for the Republican nomination to take on President Joe Biden again. While Trump's tone and divisive statements often thrill Republican primary crowds, he has so far done little to expand his appeal among the moderates and independents who soured on him in 2020 and will be crucial to winning

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the general election.

Indeed, Trump on Wednesday repeatedly doubled down on his lies that the 2020 election had been "rigged," even though state and federal election officials, his own campaign and White House aides, and dozens of courts, including Republican judges, have said there is no evidence to support his claims.

He also displayed no remorse for what happened on Jan. 6, when a mob of his supporters violently stormed the Capitol in a bid to halt the certification of Biden's win. He excused his delayed response that day — he was silent for more than three hours as the carnage unfolded — pulling out a printout of his tweeted timeline as a form of defense.

Instead, he lashed out at the Black police officer who shot and killed rioter Ashli Babbitt, calling him a "thug," despite a Justice Department finding that the shooting was justified. And he said he is inclined to pardon "a large portion" of the rioters charged in the attack. More than 670 people have been convicted of crimes related to that day, including some found guilty of seditious conspiracy or assaulting police officers.

Trump also rejected a suggestion that he apologize to his former vice president, Mike Pence, who was targeted by the mob after Trump wrongly insisted that Pence had the power to overturn the election results.

"I don't feel he was in any danger," he said. In fact, Trump said, Pence was the one who "did something wrong."

He would not commit to accepting the results of the next election, either, saying he would do so only if he feels "it's an honest election" — as he said before the 2020 election.

The primetime forum — the first major television event of the 2024 presidential campaign and Trump's first interview appearance on CNN since before he was elected president in 2016 — drew suspicion from both sides of the political divide as soon as it was announced.

Democrats questioned whether a man who continues to spread lies about his 2020 election loss should be given the airtime. Conservatives wondered why Trump would appear on — and potentially give a ratings bump to — a network he has continually disparaged.

The stakes were raised considerably Tuesday after jurors in New York found Trump had sexually abused and defamed advice columnist E. Jean Carroll nearly three decades ago, though they rejected her claim that he raped her. The jury awarded her \$5 million in damages.

Trump, at Wednesday's event, called the case "fake news" and insisted he didn't know Carroll, even as he attacked her in deeply personal terms. "She's a wack job," he said, drawing laughs from the crowd.

Trump has generally not reacted well when pressed onstage about his behavior toward women, most notably during the first Republican presidential debate of 2015, when he sparred with then-Fox News host Megyn Kelly and later accused her of having "blood coming out of her wherever." Carroll is one of more than a dozen women who have accused Trump of sexual assault or harassment over the years; Trump has denied the allegations.

While the civil trial verdict carried no criminal penalties, it is just one of myriad legal issues facing Trump, who was indicted in New York in March over hush money payments made to women who alleged extramarital affairs with him. Trump is also facing investigations in Georgia and Washington over his alleged interference in the 2020 election and his handling of classified documents and potential obstruction of justice.

The difficulties of interviewing Trump live on air became immediately apparent as the town hall began with questions about the 2020 election. As the evening wore on, Collins became more aggressive in trying to pin Trump down on specifics, trying half a dozen times to get him to say what he would do if a federal abortion ban were to reach his desk.

He said that he would "negotiate" so "people are happy."

During the exchange, Trump repeated the false claim that abortion rights supporters wanted to "kill a baby" in the ninth month of pregnancy or even after a birth — comments that went unchecked by Collins.

He also refused to say whether he wants Ukraine to win its war against Russia. "I don't think in terms of winning and losing," he answered. And he declined to say whether he believes Russian President Vladimir Putin is a war criminal, as the International Criminal Court has alleged.

"That's something to be discussed at a later date," Trump said, arguing that calling Putin a war criminal

would complicate efforts to make a deal to end the conflict. Trump was widely criticized during his time in office for accepting Putin's insistence that Russia had not interfered in the 2016 election to help him, even though U.S. intelligence agencies had determined otherwise.

As for the looming risk of an unprecedented government default, Trump sounded blasé.

"Well, you might as well do it now because you'll do it later because we have to save this country," he said.

A discussion about Trump's refusal to turn over classified documents kept at his Mar-a-Lago club was particularly contentious. When Collins interrupted him at one point, Trump said, "Can I finish?"

"Yeah, what's the answer?" she said.

"You are a nasty person," Trump quipped.

Biden responded to the town hall on Twitter, writing: "It's simple, folks. Do you want four more years of that? If you don't, pitch in to our campaign."

Trump has long called CNN "fake news" and sparred with Collins. Nonetheless, Trump's team saw the invitation from the network as an opportunity to connect with a broader swath of voters than those who usually tune into the conservative outlets he favors. One adviser noted that Trump found success in 2016 by stepping outside Republicans' traditional comfort zone.

The appearance served as another contrast with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is seen as a top rival to Trump for the GOP presidential nomination in 2024 and is expected to launch his campaign in the coming weeks. DeSantis has taken a sheltered media approach, largely eschewing questions from the mainstream press while embracing Fox News, which was once a loyal Trump cheerleader but is now frequently denigrated by the former president.

Trump's campaign has turned to new channels, including popular conservative podcasts and made-for-social-media videos that often rack up hundreds of thousands of views. His team has also been inviting reporters from a variety of outlets to ride aboard his plane and has been arranging unadvertised stops at local restaurants and other venues to show him interacting with supporters, in contrast to the less charismatic DeSantis.

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Associated Press writer David Bauder in New York contributed to this report.

## **What to know about Trump's CNN town hall: Lies about election and abortion, attacks on accuser**

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's primetime return to CNN Wednesday for the first time since 2016 felt like a throwback: Trump with the long, twisting answers; the interviewer at times struggling to fact-check him or return his focus to the question at hand; and then, eventually, both talking over each other as Trump flings insults her way.

Wednesday's town hall in New Hampshire was the first time in years that Trump faced prolonged questioning from an outlet outside the friendly confines of conservative media outlets of his choosing.

He had branded CNN "fake news" and never granted any of its journalists an interview while president. Trump's campaign said he was appearing on the network now to step outside a GOP comfort zone as he already starts to turn his focus to a potential 2024 general election rematch with Democrat Joe Biden.

Trump's appearance on CNN comes at a time of jarring dualities for the former president: The Republican is facing a crescendo of legal problems yet seems in a stronger position than ever to become his party's presidential nominee. He's attempting to reach mainstream media viewers despite having deepened his embrace of extremists since leaving the White House, continuing to align himself with those involved in the deadly Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and dining with a Holocaust-denying white nationalist.

Here's what to know about Trump's CNN town hall:

### **QUESTIONS ON SEXUAL ABUSE CASE**

Trump's appearance came a day after a New York jury found him liable for sexually abusing a woman



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nearly 30 years ago and defaming her when she spoke about it publicly.

Jurors awarded columnist E. Jean Carroll \$5 million in damages. The jury rejected her claim of rape and instead found Trump responsible for a lesser degree of sexual abuse. Trump denied it, saying he never encountered Carroll at a 1996 department store and did not know her and has said he plans to appeal the verdict.

Trump skipped attending the trial and did not testify in his own defense during the proceedings, with jurors instead being shown video from a pretrial deposition, making Wednesday the first time he's had to face a public questioning in the case.

Trump, when asked by CNN moderator Kaitlan Collins about the verdict, said his poll numbers went up and repeated his statements that he didn't know Carroll, though at least one photograph has surfaced of them together.

"I don't know her. I never met her. I had no idea who she is." He dismissed a question from Collins about whether it would impact his standing with female voters and in response, he launched into a recounting of Carroll's claims in a mocking voice, drawing laughs and claps from the live audience. Collins tried to interrupt but Trump continued and called it "a fake story" and referred to Carroll as "a wack job."

## TRUMP'S TREATMENT OF WOMEN

Collins asked Trump about his comments in the infamous "Access Hollywood" video in which he bragged about grabbing women's genitals without asking permission. The video was played in the trial and Collins asked him Wednesday if he stood by his remarks.

Trump defended his comments, saying he had said women let him grab their genitals without permission because he was a star.

"I can't take that back because it happens to be true," Trump said.

## REPEATING ELECTION LIES

Trump, with his first question from Collins about why he should be elected again, started almost immediately by repeating his lies about the 2020 presidential election and repeating his unfounded claims of election fraud.

Striking a more muted tone than he usually uses onstage before his cheering supporters, Trump called it a "rigged election" and a "shame" before Collins cut him off, correcting his statements and asking him to publicly acknowledge his loss to Biden.

Trump did not, immediately returning to his false claims. As Collins continued to try to fact-check Trump, he interrupted again, calling for honest elections and then pivoting to other subjects like immigration.

He came back to his claims at other points in the town hall, sprinkling the lie into answers on unrelated subjects and prompting Collins to interrupt him and correct him.

## DEFENSE OF JAN. 6 INSURRECTION

For more than two years, Trump had largely avoided sitting for any tough questioning about the lies he spread about his 2020 election loss that spurred the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. But the issue came up early Wednesday, when Collins asked Trump if he regretted his actions on that day.

The former president quickly began boasting about the size of the crowd he spoke to before some began marching on the Capitol and said the attendees believed the election was "rigged."

"They were there proud. They were there with love in their heart. That was unbelievable and it was a beautiful day," Trump said.

Collins pressed Trump on why he didn't ask his supporters to leave the Capitol or send help to disperse the protesters, and he deflected, trying to cast blame on then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi. He at one point pulled out printed copies of his Twitter posts that day in which he finally, hours after the attack on the Capitol began, asked his supporters to leave the Capitol.

He said he was inclined, if elected president again, to pardon many of those convicted for their roles in the Jan. 6 attack. More than 1,000 people have been charged and more than 600 have been convicted so far.

## FALSE ABORTION CLAIMS

Trump, responding to a question about the U.S. Supreme Court overturning abortion rights last year,

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took credit for appointing three of the justices who joined in the majority ruling, saying "it was such a great victory and people are starting to understand it now."

He repeatedly falsely claimed that abortion rights supporters wanted to "kill a baby" in the ninth month of pregnancy or even after a birth. The claim is based on a misleading interpretation of a Senate vote. Trump also dodged questions about whether, if elected president again, he would sign a national abortion ban. Trump instead spoke about the court ruling as having given anti-abortion activists "negotiating ability."

"What I will do is negotiate so people are happy," he said, when asked if he would sign a federal abortion ban. He repeatedly said he would "do what's right," without specifying what that was.

## NO ANSWERS ON UKRAINE

Trump repeated his praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin, calling him "a smart guy," but said "he made a bad mistake" to invade Ukraine. Trump claimed, without evidence or explanation, that if he was still president Putin would never have invaded Ukraine. He said he had "a great relationship" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, referencing his 2019 impeachment after pressuring Zelenskyy for "a favor" while withholding military aid.

Trump wouldn't answer a question about whether he'd continue to send U.S. aid to Ukraine to keep fighting against Russia's invasion, and he wouldn't answer a question about who he wanted to win the war, only saying, "I want everybody to stop dying."

## KEEPING CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS

Trump defended his keeping of top-secret and confidential government documents at his Florida estate Mar-a-Lago, which is now the subject of a Justice Department probe.

"I had every right to do it. I didn't make a secret of it," Trump said.

Trump gave a vague answer when Collins asked if he ever showed the classified documents to anyone.

"Not really. I would have the right to," the former president said.

"What do you mean 'Not really?'" Collins asked.

"Not that I can think of," Trump said.

Trump noted that other presidents and vice presidents had kept documents after leaving but didn't mention that he refused to turn over documents even after receiving a subpoena.

## SPARRING WITH COLLINS

Early on in the town hall, Collins gave Trump more leeway to respond to questions, allowing the president to steamroll through his answers and jump from topic to topic, sprinkling in false claims as she sometimes tried to interrupt. As the town hall went on and Collins jumped in earlier and more often to correct him or get him back on track, Trump got frustrated.

At one point, he repeated an insult he hurled at Hillary Clinton during their 2016 presidential debate, calling Collins "nasty."

In a back-and-forth about the classified documents at Mar-a-Lago, Trump and Collins were talking over each other and Trump at one point declared: "You're so wrong. You don't know the subject."

"I do know the subject," she retorted.

The audience, made up of Republicans and independents, was largely favorable to Trump and laughed and cheered as he made his points.

"I like you guys," Trump told the crowd at the end.

## Jalen Brunson scores 38 points, Knicks beat Heat 112-103 in Game 5 to cut deficit to a game

By BRIAN MAHONEY AP Basketball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Jalen Brunson never talked to his coach about how minutes he would play, or how many points he had to score.

In the situation the Knicks faced, there's no need for talk.

"Nothing was said at all," Brunson said. "Whatever it takes."

It might take the same effort again in two nights.

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Brunson had 38 points, nine rebounds and seven assists while playing all 48 minutes in a season-extending performance, and New York beat the Miami Heat 112-103 on Wednesday night in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference semifinals.

The Knicks denied the Heat's first attempt to become just the second No. 8 seed to reach the conference finals and sent the series back to Miami for Game 6 on Friday night.

RJ Barrett added 26 points and Julius Randle — his face a little swollen after getting hit by Bam Adebayo in the first quarter — had 24 for the fifth-seeded Knicks, who stayed alive in hopes of reaching the conference finals for the first time since 2000. They did that by getting by the Heat in seven games in the second round, a possibility that still exists.

The Knicks built a 19-point lead in the third quarter, then hung on when the Heat finally got their 3-pointers to start falling and cut it to two with 2 1/2 minutes remaining.

"You've got to kind of scratch and claw and do whatever you can to win the game," Barrett said.

Jimmy Butler had 19 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Heat, getting held below 25 points for the first time in this postseason. Bam Adebayo added 18 points and Duncan Robinson had 17.

Butler poured in 42 points when the Heat finished off Milwaukee in Game 5 in the first round but took only 12 shots Wednesday, even while playing the entire second half.

"It doesn't matter if I score 40 or 50 or 19 or nine, we always have enough to win," Butler said. "And if I score 10 points in that game and we win, that wouldn't be an issue, wouldn't be a question and I will continue to play the right way."

The 1999 Knicks, for now, remain the only No. 8 to get to a conference finals in the current playoff format that began in 1984. They got all the way to the NBA Finals after upsetting the top-seeded Heat in the first round.

The Knicks used a pair of huge quarter-opening runs — 18-2 to begin the second and 23-7 in the third — to build a 73-54 lead midway through the third quarter. The Heat got it all the way down to 103-101 before Isaiah Hartenstein — in the game because the Heat were intentionally fouling starting center Mitchell Robinson — slammed home a follow dunk to start New York's finishing kick.

Only once the Knicks had held on could Brunson finally get a break.

"You have to respect him as a competitor and then find a way to get the job done," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And he was able to get the job done, make those big, important plays."

Quentin Grimes also went all 48 minutes for the Knicks, finishing with eight points. Coach Tom Thibodeau didn't rule either using both his starting guards the same way in Miami.

"We'll see what Game 6 brings," he said. "If it requires them to do that, then I'm not afraid to do it."

The Heat dominated Game 3 and outworked the Knicks in the fourth quarter to hold on and take Game 4, positioning themselves to wrap up a series in five games for the second time in this postseason. They began it by knocking off Milwaukee, which had the best record in the league.

But they missed 21 of their first 25 3-pointers and were still down 13 with 9 1/2 minutes before Robinson and Kyle Lowry each made a pair in a 12-3 burst that trimmed it to 95-91 with more than half the final period remaining.

Butler had one of his typical do-everything stretches with a basket, a blocked shot and a free throw to cut it to 103-101, but the Heat couldn't come all the way back like they did in the deciding game against the Bucks, when they were down by 16 points.

They led 24-14 after one, but Butler began the second quarter on the bench and the Knicks capitalized. They pushed the pace to get rare easy shots and Barrett made two 3-pointers in an 18-2 spurt that gave them a 32-26 lead.

Randle's 3-pointer made it 50-47 at the half. Kevin Love got the first basket of the third, but Barrett and Brunson answered with consecutive 3-pointers to ignite the Knicks' next spurt. The lead was eight before an 11-0 surge, featuring back-to-back 3-pointers by Brunson and Randle, pushed it to 73-54 midway through the period.

Robinson finished 4 of 8 at the line, ending with eight points and 11 rebounds.

TIP-INS

Heat: Max Strus scored 14 points. ... Butler was voted Wednesday to the All-NBA second team. It was his highest career finish after being voted to the third team four times.

Knicks: Brunson and Grimes are the first Knicks duo to both play all 48 minutes in regulation in a playoff game since Walt Frazier and Jerry Lucas in 1972. ... The Knicks were without sixth-man Immanuel Quickley for a second straight game because of a sprained right ankle and also without guard Evan Fournier, who has not been part of the rotation, because of illness. ... Randle was voted to the All-NBA third team, adding that to his second-team selection in 2021.

AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/hub/NBA> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Google is giving its dominant search engine an artificial-intelligence makeover

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. (AP) — Google on Wednesday disclosed plans to infuse its dominant search engine with more advanced artificial-intelligence technology, a drive that's in response to one of the biggest threats to its long-established position as the internet's main gateway.

The gradual shift in how Google's search engine runs is rolling out three months after Microsoft's Bing search engine started to tap into technology similar to that which powers the artificially intelligent chatbot ChatGPT, which has created one of Silicon Valley's biggest buzzes since Apple released the first iPhone 16 years ago.

Google, which is owned by Alphabet Inc., already has been testing its own conversational chatbot called Bard. That product, powered by technology called generative AI that also fuels ChatGPT, has only been available to people accepted from a waitlist. But Google announced Wednesday that Bard will be available to all comers in more than 180 countries and more languages beyond English.

Bard's multilingual expansion will begin with Japanese and Korean before adding about 40 more languages.

Now Google is ready to test the AI waters with its search engine, which has been synonymous with finding things on the internet for the past 20 years and serves as the pillar of a digital advertising empire that generated more than \$220 billion in revenue last year.

"We are at an exciting inflection point," Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai told a packed developers conference in a speech peppered with one AI reference after another. "We are reimagining all our products, including search."

More AI technology will be coming to Google's Gmail with a "Help Me Write" option that will produce lengthy replies to emails in seconds, and a tool for photos called "Magic Editor" that will automatically doctor pictures.

The AI transition will begin cautiously with the search engine that serves as Google's crown jewel.

The deliberate approach reflects the balancing act that Google must negotiate as it tries to remain on the cutting edge while also preserving its reputation for delivering reliable search results — a mantle that could be undercut by artificial intelligence's penchant for fabricating information that sounds authoritative.

The tendency to produce deceptively convincing answers to questions — a phenomenon euphemistically described as "hallucinations" — has already been cropping up during the early testing of Bard, which like ChatGPT, relies on still-evolving generative AI technology.

Google will take its next AI steps through a newly formed search lab where people in the U.S. can join a waitlist to test how generative AI will be incorporated in search results. The tests also include the more traditional links to external websites where users can read more extensive information about queried topics. It may take several weeks before Google starts sending invitations to those accepted from the waitlist to test the AI-injected search engine.

The AI results will be clearly tagged as an experimental form of technology and Google is pledging the AI-generated summaries will sound more factual than conversational — a distinct contrast from Bard and



ChatGPT, which are programmed to convey more human-like personas. Google is building in guardrails that will prevent the AI baked into the search engine from responding to sensitive questions about health — such as, “Should I give Tylenol to a 3-year-old?” — and finance matters. In those instances, Google will continue to steer people to authoritative websites.

Google isn’t predicting how long it will be before its search engine will include generative AI results for all comers. The Mountain View, California, company has been under intensifying pressure to demonstrate how its search engine will maintain its leadership since Microsoft began to load AI into Bing, which remains a distant second to Google.

The potential threat caused Alphabet’s stock price to initially plunge, although it has recently bounced back to where it stood when Bing announced its AI plans to great fanfare. More recently, The New York Times reported Samsung is considering dropping Google as the default search engine on its widely used smartphones, raising the specter that Apple might adopt a similar tactic with the iPhone unless Google can show its search engine can evolve with what appears to be a forthcoming AI-driven revolution.

Alphabet’s shares surged 4% Wednesday after Google’s wave of AI announcements to finish at \$111.75, the highest closing price since Bing began melding with ChatGPT in early February.

As it begins to ingrain AI in its search engine, Google is aiming to make Bard smarter by connecting with the next generation of a massive data set known as a “large language model,” or LLM, that fuels it. The LLM that Bard relies on is dubbed Pathways Language Model, or PaLM. The AI in Google’s search engine will draw upon the next-generation PaLM2 and another technology known as a Multitask Unified Model, or MUM.

Although people will have to wait to see how Google’s search engine will deploy generative AI to find answers, a new tool soon be more broadly available to all users. Google is going to add a new filter called “Perspectives” that will focus on what people are saying online about whatever topic is entered into the search engine. The new feature will be placed along existing search filters for news, images and video.

Besides using its annual tech showcase to tout its prowess in AI, Google also unveiled the first foldable smartphone in its Pixel line-up of gadgets. Google’s entry into a new type of smartphone design that allows users to deploy the device as a mini-tablet too comes nearly three years after Samsung — the leading maker of smartphones powered by Google’s Android software — introduced its first bendable model.

Foldable phones so far have remained a niche market, largely because of prices ranging between \$1,500 and \$2,000. Last year, about 14 million foldable phones were sold worldwide, accounting for just 1% of overall smartphone shipments, according to the research firm International Data Corp.

Google’s foldable Pixel phone will sell for \$1,800 and begin shipping next month. It will unfold with a hinge and, of course, be packed with AI.

## **George Santos pleads not guilty to federal indictment and says he won’t resign**

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

CENTRAL ISLIP, N.Y. (AP) — U.S. Rep. George Santos, infamous for fabricating his life story, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to charges he duped donors, stole from his campaign and lied to Congress about being a millionaire, all while cheating to collect unemployment benefits he didn’t deserve.

Afterward, he said he wouldn’t drop his reelection bid and defied calls to resign.

Santos’ 13-count federal indictment was a reckoning for a web of fraud and deceit that prosecutors say overlapped with the New York Republican’s fantastical public image as a wealthy businessman — a fictional biography that began to unravel after he won election last fall.

Santos, 34, was released on \$500,000 bond following his arraignment, about five hours after turning himself in to face charges of wire fraud, money laundering, theft of public funds and making false statements to Congress. He surrendered his passport and could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

“This is the beginning of the ability for me to address and defend myself,” a cheerfully combative Santos told reporters swarming him outside a Long Island federal courthouse. He said he’s been cooperating with

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the investigation and vowed to fight the prosecution, which he labeled a "witch hunt."

His lawyer, Joseph Murray, was more circumspect, saying: "Any time the federal government comes after you it's a serious case. We have to take this serious."

Santos said he planned to return to Washington, where the indictment is amplifying doubts about the freshman's ability to serve. House Republican leaders are taking a wait-and-see approach, saying Santos is innocent until proven guilty. Others are reiterating previous calls for Santos to step aside.

"I think we're seeing that the wheels of justice grind slow, but they grind fine," said Sen. Mitt Romney, a Utah Republican who confronted Santos on the House floor at President Joe Biden's State of the Union address in February.

Asked about Santos on Wednesday, Biden said, "I'm not commenting," adding that anything he said would be construed by some as interfering in the investigation. Asked if Congress should expel Santos, Biden said, "That's for Congress to decide."

Among the allegations, prosecutors say Santos created a company and then induced supporters to donate to it under the false pretense that the money would be used to support his campaign. Instead, they say, he used the money for personal expenses, including designer clothes and credit card and car payments.

Santos also is accused of lying about his finances on congressional disclosure forms and obtaining unemployment benefits while he was making \$120,000 as regional director of an investment firm that the government shut down in 2021 over allegations that it was a Ponzi scheme.

The indictment "seeks to hold Santos accountable for various alleged fraudulent schemes and brazen misrepresentations," U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said. "Taken together, the allegations in the indictment charge Santos with relying on repeated dishonesty and deception to ascend to the halls of Congress and enrich himself."

Santos didn't directly address the specifics of the charges to reporters, but when asked why he received unemployment benefits while employed, Santos cited a job change and confusion during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Santos, sporting his usual crewneck sweater, blazer and khakis, said little during the arraignment, which lasted about 15 minutes. Reporters spilled from the gallery to the jury box, joined by a handful of constituents.

"He should be thrown out of Congress and put in prison," declared Jeff Herzberg, a Long Island resident who spent hours waiting to see Santos' arraignment. "I hope that day comes soon."

Santos was elected to Congress last fall after a campaign built partly on falsehoods. He told people he was a wealthy Wall Street dealmaker with a substantial real estate portfolio who had been a star volleyball player in college, among other things.

In reality, Santos didn't work at the big financial firms he said employed him, didn't go to college and struggled financially before entering politics. He claimed he fueled his run largely with self-made riches earned from brokering deals on expensive toys for wealthy clients, but the indictment alleges those boasts were also exaggerated.

In a House financial disclosure form, Santos reported making \$750,000 a year from a family company, the Devolder Organization, but the charges unsealed Wednesday allege that Santos never received that sum, nor the \$1 million and \$5 million in dividends he listed as coming from the firm.

Santos has described the Devolder Organization as a broker for sales of luxury items like yachts and aircraft. The business was incorporated in Florida shortly after Santos stopped working for Harbor City Capital, the company accused by federal authorities of operating an illegal Ponzi scheme.

In November 2021, Santos formed Redstone Strategies, a Florida company that federal prosecutors say he used to dupe donors into financing his lifestyle. According to the indictment, Santos told an associate to solicit contributions to the company and gave the person contact information for potential donors.

Emails to prospective donors falsely claimed the company was formed "exclusively" to aid Santos' election bid and that there would be no limits on how much they could contribute, the indictment said. Santos falsely claimed the money would be spent on television ads and other campaign expenses, it said.

But a month before his election, Santos transferred about \$74,000 from the company to bank accounts he maintained, the indictment said. He also transferred money to some of his associates, it said.

Santos' legal troubles date to his late teens, when he was investigated in Brazil for allegedly using stolen checks to buy clothes — a case that authorities say they've since reopened.

In 2017, Santos was charged with theft in Pennsylvania for allegedly using thousands of dollars in bogus checks to buy puppies from breeders. That case was dismissed after Santos claimed his checkbook was stolen and someone else took the dogs.

Federal authorities have separately been looking into complaints about Santos' fundraising for a group that purported to help abused pets. A New Jersey veteran accused Santos of failing to deliver \$3,000 he raised to help his dog get needed surgery.

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Associated Press writers Seung Min Kim in White Plains, New York, Farnoush Amiri in Washington and Alanna Durkin Richer in Boston contributed to this report.

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Follow the AP's coverage of U.S. Rep. George Santos at <https://apnews.com/hub/george-santos>.

## **Army sergeant who fatally shot BLM protester in Texas sentenced to 25 years as governor seeks pardon**

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A U.S. Army sergeant who fatally shot an armed protester at a Black Lives Matter march in Texas was sentenced to 25 years in prison Wednesday, after prosecutors used his social media history and text messages to portray him as a racist who may commit violence again.

Daniel Perry's sentence now pushes the case toward a potentially thorny decision for Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, who has said he wants to issue a swift pardon.

Abbott requested the state Board of Pardons and Paroles to send him a pardon recommendation for Perry shortly after he was convicted in April of killing Garrett Foster at the Austin march in July 2020.

Abbott lauded Texas' tough Stand Your Ground self-defense laws and said Perry was railroaded by a liberal prosecutor. Since then, Perry's trail of texts and online posts, including shockingly racist images, have been made public and the governor has stayed silent on the matter.

Abbott's office did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment on the sentence or whether he still intends to issue a pardon. Perry, 36, could have received up to life in prison.

Rice University political science professor Mark Jones said Abbott moved too soon on the call for a pardon.

"Abbott clearly boxed himself into a corner," when he appeared to respond to criticism from conservative former Fox News star Tucker Carlson, who demanded the governor act, Jones said.

"I suspect if Gov. Abbott had known all that he knows now, he would not have jumped the gun on pledging to pardon him," Jones said.

The Pardons and Parole board, which is appointed by Abbott, has already started reviewing Perry's case. State law requires the board to recommend a pardon before the governor can act.

The case has been embroiled in politics as it came amid widespread demonstrations against police killings and racial injustice, following the killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by a white Minneapolis police officer.

Perry's attorneys on Wednesday called the case a "political prosecution" and the release of the texts and social media posts "character assassination."

Attorney Clinton Broden said the defense team would pursue both a pardon and a standard appeal in the court system.

"Those who claim that Governor Abbott's expressed intent is based on politics simply choose to ignore the fact that it was only the political machinations of a rogue district attorney which led to Sgt. Perry's

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prosecution," he said.

Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza said it was Abbott "who decided to insert politics in this case." Garza said he's been assured by the parole board that he and Foster's family will be given a chance to address the board in Perry's case.

In a statement, the board confirmed the investigation is ongoing and declined further comment.

"The entire history of the board, the board has been a careful steward of the power of clemency in this state," Garza said. "Our criminal justice system is not perfect, but in this case it worked exactly as it should. The Travis County District Attorney's office is not done fighting for Garrett and the integrity of that process here."

In a brief statement before sentencing, state District Judge Clifford Brown said Perry received a fair trial. The jury's verdict "deserves our honor and it deserves to be respected," Brown said, without mentioning the potential pardon.

Jones predicted the board will let Perry's legal appeals happen first, and that it would be years, if ever, before the board makes a recommendation in the case.

"The majority (of conservatives) will want to put it in the rearview mirror," Jones said. "Conservatives have far better causes and individuals to support, far better than Daniel Perry."

In a brief statement before sentencing, state District Judge Clifford Brown said Perry received a fair trial. The jury's verdict "deserves our honor and it deserves to be respected," Brown said, without mentioning the potential pardon.

Perry, who is white, was stationed at Fort Hood, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) north of Austin, when the shooting happened. He was working as a ride-share driver and had just dropped off a customer when he turned onto a street filled with protesters. Foster, a 28-year-old Air Force veteran who was also white, was legally carrying an AK-47 rifle.

Perry said he acted in self defense, claiming that he was trying to drive past the crowd and fired his pistol when Foster pointed a rifle at him. Witnesses testified that they did not see Foster raise his weapon, and prosecutors argued that Perry could have driven away without shooting.

Army spokesman Bryce Dubea has said Perry is classified as in "civilian confinement" pending separation from the military.

Among Perry's statements introduced Tuesday, he wrote on Facebook a month before the shooting: "It is official I am a racist because I do not agree with people acting like animals at the zoo."

Floyd was killed on May 25, 2020. A few days later as protests erupted, Perry sent a text message to an acquaintance: "I might go to Dallas to shoot looters."

Foster was with his girlfriend, Whitney Mitchell, who is Black and uses a wheelchair, when Perry gunned him down. Mitchell and several members of Foster's family were in the courtroom for sentencing Wednesday.

Foster's mother, Sheila Foster, was allowed to address Perry after he was sentenced and still in the courtroom.

"After three long years we're finally getting justice for Garrett," she said. "Mr. Perry, I pray to God that one day he will get rid of all this hate that is in your heart."

## Why Ryan Reynolds, Snoop Dogg, other celebrities want to buy the Ottawa Senators

OTTAWA, Ontario (AP) — While some hockey fans may be surprised by multiple celebrities facing off for a minority ownership stake in the NHL's Ottawa Senators, experts who study the business of sport say the prospect stands to lift the team's profile to new heights. It is also seen as a safe way for stars to park their money.

Vancouver-born actor Ryan Reynolds and rapper Snoop Dogg have both confirmed their interest, while Toronto recording artist The Weeknd has reportedly also thrown his hat into the ring.

For film or music stars interested in owning a professional sports team, the opportunity simply doesn't come around often, said Michael Naraine, associate professor of sport management at Brock University.



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"When you think about professional sport, it is a cartel-like system. There are only 32 teams, only 32 seats," he told The Canadian Press. "Teams like the Ottawa Senators, even though they've never won the Stanley Cup and they are not doing so hot momentum-wise on the ice, they're still highly coveted. That's the kind of impetus for why celebrities are now wanting to get into sports ownership."

The board of directors of Senators Sports & Entertainment initiated the process to sell the team last November after the death of owner Eugene Melnyk earlier that year. Melnyk left the franchise to his daughters, Anna and Olivia.

Reynolds is attached to a bid worth more than \$1 billion led by real estate developer Remington Group, while Snoop Dogg announced he is part of a bid spearheaded by Los Angeles-based businessman Neko Sparks. The Weeknd has agreed to be a partner in a bid led by Toronto billionaires Jeffrey and Michael Kimel, according to the Ottawa Sun.

A recent valuation by Forbes listed the Senators at \$800 million, 24th out of the NHL's 30 teams.

Concordia University sports economist Moshe Lander said owning a sports franchise is a safe way for celebrities to invest, often with exponential returns. He noted Melnyk purchased the Senators — who play in what Lander called "a middling NHL market" — for \$92 million two decades ago.

"It's a cast of otherwise forgettable players. It's the epitome of average. Yet the value of the franchise has gone up 10 times in 20 years," Lander said. "When you bring celebrity into the story, then celebrity has the ability to monetize that ownership stake beyond just the appreciation of the value of the team."

Reynolds has expressed interest in creating a television series about the team through his production company, Maximum Effort, similar to its hit reality show, "Welcome to Wrexham," about the Welsh soccer team the actor co-owns.

Lander said the Reynolds bid "checks off all the boxes" for the NHL, as he brings experience "getting eyes onto a sport that goes beyond just watching the event itself."

"He's done that for that fifth-division, (British) soccer team that nobody outside of that market would have ever heard of. All of a sudden, people are caught up in the real-life 'Ted Lasso,'" said the economist, referring to the television show of an American who helps coach a U.K. soccer team looking for a comeback. "From the NHL's standpoint, they're going to say, all right, we bring on an owner who is going to create content for us, who's shown proof of concept in being able to create content in an area where people would otherwise not care, and somehow get them to care."

Snoop Dogg, a longtime hockey fan, has said he would use his stake in the Senators to help grow the sport in the U.S., especially among Black children.

The deadline for interested groups to submit final non-binding offers is May 15.

AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nhl> and [https://twitter.com/AP\\_Sports](https://twitter.com/AP_Sports)

## Beyoncé dazzles fans in 'Renaissance' world tour opening concert

STOCKHOLM (AP) — Tens of thousands of fans descended upon the Swedish capital of Stockholm to celebrate the opening show of Beyoncé's new world tour on Wednesday.

"Renaissance" is the superstar's first solo tour since 2016 and shares the namesake of her 2022 dance-centric album, the success of which landed Beyoncé at the top of the Grammy throne as the ceremony's most decorated artist in history.

Fans who had complained in recent months about the lack of music videos for "Renaissance" hits were in for a treat Wednesday as video projections and animations took center stage. The rapid succession of costume changes and decor shifts was baffling. The singer played on interactions between a digital and physical world where robotic devices make space for weird silver moon rovers or an inflatable horse. Even Queen Bey herself morphs into a cybernetic character. Seems confusing? It was.

Yet despite the impressive scale of the stage set, some moments still felt intimate. Beyoncé expressed heartfelt gratitude to fans for traveling from afar to witness her perform. She reached for songs spanning across her two-decade career, kicking off the show with "Dangerously in Love," the title track of her 2003

first solo album, moving through 2011 female empowerment anthem "Run the World (Girls)" and dishing up a good selection of hits from "Renaissance" itself.

Wednesday's show sold out the 46,000 tickets available; and if the audience's reaction was anything to go on, the rest of the tour will be a hit. Beyoncé will make stops at more than 40 cities including London, Paris, Barcelona and Toronto before wrapping up the tour Sept. 27 in New Orleans.

## **Idaho man who dangled from Senate balcony during Capitol riot receives 15-month prison sentence**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

An Idaho man who traveled to Washington in a car loaded with weapons and was photographed dangling from the Senate balcony during the Capitol riot was sentenced Wednesday to 15 months in prison.

Josiah Colt, one of the first rioters to reach the Senate floor on Jan. 6, 2021, later pleaded guilty that year to obstructing Congress' certification of Joe Biden's White House victory.

Also Wednesday, a man who accompanied Colt to the District of Columbia in a rental car with two pistols, knives, a stun gun, body armor and other gear was sentenced to about three years in prison, according to court records. Las Vegas resident Nathaniel DeGrave, who also entered the Senate gallery, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and assault charges last year.

Both men had agreed to cooperate with investigators as part of their plea deals.

Prosecutors say Colt, DeGrave and a third man, Ronald Sandlin, came to Washington prepared for violence and were intent on stopping lawmakers from certifying the results of the 2020 election as they joined the angry mob of then-President Donald Trump supporters in storming the Capitol.

On Dec. 31, 2020, the men had discussed in a Facebook chat a plan for "shipping guns" to Sandlin's home in Tennessee. Days later, Sandlin posted on social media a photo of Colt, who was lying in bed with his eyes closed and holding a handgun, with the caption: "My fellow patriot Josiah Colt sleeping ready for the boogaloo Jan 6th." Boogaloo is a term some extremists use to refer to a second civil war. Colt replied to the post, "Ready for any battle," followed by a laughing emoji.

Colt, a 34-year-old from Meridian, Idaho, brought his pistol to a rally the day before the riot, but decided to leave it at a hotel on the morning of Jan. 6, authorities said. The three men watched on TV as Trump told his supporters in a speech before the riot to "fight like hell" or they were "not going to have a country anymore."

After the riot erupted, the men entered the Capitol through the Upper West Terrace doors. They went to a hallway outside the Senate gallery, where Sandlin led a charge against police officers as Colt entered, according to prosecutors.

Colt shouted, "This is our House! This is our country! This is for the people!" before he jumped to the Senate floor. Sitting in a chair reserved for then-Vice President Mike Pence, as president of the Senate, Colt raised his fist as rioters cheered him on, prosecutors said. Colt opened a door and allowed dozens of other rioters to join him.

DeGrave, who carried a can of bear spray in his pocket, called on others on the Senate floor to "take laptops, paperwork, take everything," according to court papers.

Sandlin, of Millington, Tennessee, was sentenced in December to five years and three months in prison after he pleaded guilty to conspiracy and assault charges.

Colt's lawyers said in a court filing that Colt "is a good person who made a series of very bad choices based on misinformation and the emotional oratory of a demagogue."

Prosecutors accused DeGrave of trying to capitalize on his participation in the attack by selling video footage of the riot to media outlets.

"He has even profited off of his unlawful conduct on January 6 since being incarcerated — to the tune of over \$120,000 — by seeking donations on crowd-funding websites claiming that he is a 'political prisoner' of a 'corrupt Biden regime,'" prosecutors wrote.

DeGrave's lawyer said in court papers that DeGrave regrets "allowing himself to be drawn into the world

of those claiming 'political persecution' as a result of their actions on January 6."

"Nathaniel recognizes the intellectual dishonesty of admitting the criminality of his own conduct on January 6 on the one hand, and complaining about unfair treatment by the criminal justice system on the other," defense lawyer William Shipley added.

More than 1,000 people have been charged with Capitol riot-related federal crimes. Nearly 500 of them have been sentenced, with more than half receiving terms of imprisonment ranging from seven days to 14 years and two months.

## **Biden goes after Republicans on debt limit in campaign-style speech**

By SEUNG MIN KIM and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

VALHALLA, N.Y. (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday blasted Republican-demanded spending cuts as "devastating," making his case in a campaign-style speech to voters as lawmakers met in Washington on raising the government's borrowing limit to avoid a potentially catastrophic U.S. default.

The president is showing an increased willingness to discuss possible budget restraints, yet he insisted anew that any talks on that should occur without the risk of the federal government being unable to pay its bills. As he spoke, negotiators from the White House and Congress met for two hours privately at the Capitol to discuss a path forward.

"America is the strongest economy in the world, but we should be cutting spending and lowering the deficit without a needless crisis," Biden said Wednesday.

His words were a challenge to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who met Tuesday with Biden at the White House, declaring afterward that sharp spending cuts were required for House Republicans to increase the debt limit and stave off the risk of default.

Biden laid into that GOP proposal on Wednesday in Valhalla, New York, saying spending cuts recently passed by the Republican House could hurt schools and the country's "sacred" obligations to military veterans.

The faceoff comes as the government is rapidly bumping up against its legal borrowing authority, meaning that it may not be able to pay its bills as early as the start of next month unless lawmakers agree to lift the limit. Negotiations between the White House and Congress are expected to resume Thursday.

Wednesday's events marked a preview of what the coming 18 months will look like for Biden as he performs his presidential duties while also trying to campaign in the 2024 election. He went to a region represented by first-term Republican Rep. Mike Lawler, whose district Biden won in 2020. Yet the president was gracious to the congressman, saying that Lawler is "the kind of Republican I was used to dealing with."

Biden used the trip to trumpet recent economic progress — pointing to the 12.7 million jobs created during his term and a fresh focus on domestic manufacturing — while warning that an unprecedented debt default would threaten millions of jobs and raise the prospect of a recession. Yet GOP lawmakers blame his coronavirus relief spending for the high inflation that has many voters already worrying about the U.S. economy.

Back in Washington, senior White House officials and congressional aides were starting to discuss a path to avert a painful debt default that could come as soon as June 1. Negotiators are racing to strike a budget deal that could unlock a vote on separate debt ceiling legislation. Biden and Capitol Hill leaders are to meet again on Friday.

But McCarthy has shown few signs that he and other House Republicans were willing to budge from their debt limit proposal, leaving Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to warn the speaker is being "reckless."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, who has stepped aside as McCarthy tries to negotiate with the White House, has assured, "America is not going to default."

McConnell has said that the past several times the debt ceiling has been raised, Congress has attached priorities that were agreed to with the White House, including a deal negotiated between then-President Donald Trump and former Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"There has to be an agreement between the speaker and the president -- and there will be," McConnell

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said.

In his remarks Tuesday, Biden raised the specter of cuts to veterans' care, an issue that has become particularly sensitive in the back-and-forth rhetoric between the White House and congressional Republicans. When the president suggested during the meeting on Tuesday that the House GOP plan could end up cutting benefits to veterans, McCarthy told reporters that he shot back that was a "lie." But Biden disputed that it was a lie, saying that the across-the-board cuts would affect veterans' care and other vital domestic programs.

The president has countered the GOP plan with his own budget proposal, which could save \$800 billion through changes to government programs. Of that sum, Biden said that \$200 billion over 10 years would come from expanding Medicare's ability to negotiate on prescription drug prices. He said by contrast that the House Republican bill could jeopardize medical care for U.S. families, while his deficit savings would lower costs.

"Would you rather cut Big Pharma or cut health care for Americans?" Biden asked. "These are real world choices."

After his speech, Biden told reporters he was still holding out hope for a long term debt limit increase. He said he hadn't been briefed yet on what lawmakers were discussing on the budget. But when he meets with them on Friday, he said he wants specifics of what spending cuts Republicans hope to make. "What are they going to cut?" he asked.

Biden is also scheduled to spend a week abroad on a trip to Japan, Australia and Papua New Guinea later this month. He said postponing his travel is "possible but not likely."

With debt talks showing minimal progress, the White House hopes that Biden's public outreach — starting in a congressional district that will be key for Democrats seeking to wrest House control back from Republicans next year — increases pressure on GOP lawmakers who can't afford politically to alienate moderate voters.

Rep. Lawler, as one of 18 House Republicans hailing from a congressional district won by Biden, is a prime target for the White House.

Still, Lawler accepted the invitation from the White House, "maybe to their surprise," the lawmaker said in an interview Tuesday. He said it was a "little disappointing" that Biden was spending his time traveling to his district rather than negotiating with other leaders in Washington.

"He told me he wasn't here to put any pressure on me," Lawler told reporters after the president spoke. "Look, I showed up because I believe very strongly that we all have an obligation to work together."

House Republicans, in their debt measure that passed in April, are aiming for \$4.5 trillion in deficit savings through cuts in spending, eliminating tax breaks for investing in clean energy, and undoing the Biden administration's proposal that would forgive student loan debt. The White House has made it clear that Biden would veto that legislation.

Democrats, who control the Senate by 51-49, are calling for a "clean" debt limit hike without any conditions such as spending cuts, but any such measure would require the support of at least nine Republican senators, and most of them say they will oppose doing so.

While in New York on Wednesday, Biden, who formalized his reelection campaign on April 25, also held a pair of fundraisers.

The president told donors at the Manhattan home of Nitzia and George Logothetis, the executive chairman of the privately held international conglomerate Libra Group, that "freedom is at stake" in next year's election. Biden was joined by Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg for a separate fundraiser hosted by Amabel and Hamilton "Tony" James, a former executive at the private equity firm Blackstone.

AP Writer Josh Boak reported from Washington. AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro and White House Correspondent Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

**As Mexicans observe Mother's Day, parents of disappeared**



## demand answers

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The last time Sonia Cruz saw her 14-year-old son, it was just a few days after Christmas. He walked out onto the street at 8 p.m. in their small town in northern Mexico going to meet his girlfriend, but he was dragged into a black truck that sped away.

Five months later, Jose Luis Martinez Cruz is among more than 112,000 names on Mexico's list of disappeared people.

"Not knowing where your child is, it's like this horrible hopelessness — knowing that someone took him and you can't do anything about it," Cruz said Wednesday. "You make yourself sick, you get up, you cry, you don't eat. The pain never stops."

With hope of finding her son dwindling, Cruz joined with hundreds of other parents whose children are missing to march through Mexico City demanding answers as the country observed Dia de la Madre — Mother's Day.

As violence deepens and disappearances grow more common in Mexico, the day brings little more than anguish for mothers like Cruz.

So far this year, 4,145 people have been reported as disappeared, according to government figures. While researchers and activists say the real number is likely far larger, the figure represents a more than 20% increase from the same period last year.

It underscores the rising levels of violence in Mexico amid increasingly violent power struggles among warring drug cartels and other criminal groups.

Shortly before the march, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador sent out a message of "affectionate congratulations to all the mothers in our country."

He listed teachers, journalists, grandparents, Indigenous women, laborers, businesswomen and more. But the president, who has repeatedly played down rates of violence in Mexico, did not once mention the mothers of the disappeared, who have gained a spotlight in recent years amid their calls for justice.

During the demonstration, Cruz carried a photo of her smiling son in a clean white button-down shirt. Underneath his photo a sign read: "We miss you love. Together until we find them."

He had dreams, she said quietly. He wanted to study engineering.

Hundreds of others walked past rows of similar photos and signs. "Where are our children?" they chanted.

"I'm not scared anymore. If (the cartels) want to do something to me, they can do it," Cruz said. "They completely strip our fear away. Nothing matters to us anymore. The only thing that matters is finding our children."

Compounding the bloodshed is a lack of punishment for those responsible as the government does little to investigate such disappearances, said Janice Gallagher, a professor at Rutgers University-Newark who is writing a book about the families of Mexico's disappeared.

Mothers like Cruz are often the ones who take authorities to task, and even take up investigating their children's disappearances, and likely slayings.

"The cost to people who commit disappearances is basically close to zero," Gallagher said. "These mothers know that if they don't do anything, then the state won't do anything. ... They are the only ones moving things forward."

Cruz said she reported her son's disappearance to local police, even working with them to try to track his location on his phone, but she complained authorities have done little to nothing.

Raising one's voice in Mexico can be a dangerous endeavor. Some mothers have been slain themselves while searching for their children. Others have received death threats and been forced to flee their homes.

Just last week, another mother searching for her disappeared child was killed in violence-wracked city of Celaya, in the north-central state of Guanajuato.

It was the sixth killing of a volunteer search activist in Mexico since the start of 2021, and the second such killing in Guanajuato in less than six months.

For another of the marchers, María del Carmen Volante, fear has become as present in her life as her

own shadow.

Volante is among those who have vocally fought to get to the bottom of the disappearance of her 23-year-old daughter, Pamela Gallardo, who went missing after a concert in Mexico City five years ago.

"How do I feel? Hurt. Angry. Furious. Because I haven't hugged my child in five years," she said.

During her search for answers, Volante said, she has survived four attempts on her life and now travels with a bodyguard. She still has no clue who was behind her daughter's death, though she said she worries that her daughter was targeted for being a woman and that she may have been sexually abused.

Volante walked in the march carrying a white rose and wearing the same shirt with her daughter's face that she has worn every year for five years on the streets of Mexico City.

It reads: "Where is Pamela?"

Until Volante gets an answer, she'll continue to wear it.

"I'm not going to shut up. I'm going to keep fighting. And I'm going to scream for all (our children)," she said.

## 2nd Michigan school district bans backpacks after loaded gun found

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — A second Michigan school district is banning backpacks on school premises due to concerns about gun violence, this time because a third-grade student was found with a loaded gun.

Grand Rapids Public Schools said in a statement Wednesday that the weapon was discovered this morning at Stocking Elementary School and that it was the fourth time this year that the district has uncovered a student with a handgun — three of them in backpacks.

District Superintendent Leadriane Roby said at a news conference Wednesday that the ban was "a drastic step" that was necessary.

"We have averted at least two tragedies in the last two weeks. We don't want to stand before you again," said Larry Johnson, executive director of public safety and school security.

Flint Community Schools banned backpacks beginning May 1, citing a nationwide "increase in threatening behavior and contraband, including weapons, being brought into schools at all levels."

Flint students are allowed to carry belongings in small purses or clear plastic bags that are subject to being searched. Grand Rapids has not yet announced how its students will carry their books and belongings.

There's an increased concern over guns in schools in Michigan following a mass shooting by a 15-year-old student at Oxford High School in 2021 that left four students dead and seven others injured.

Ethan Crumbley has pleaded guilty to the shootings. He has said he used a gun that had been purchased for him by his father that had not been secured at home. Investigators believe the gun was stashed in his backpack on the day of the shooting.

A 6-year-old student shot his teacher in Virginia this year using his mother's 9mm handgun.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed safe storage legislation last month that will require gun owners to keep unloaded firearms in a locked storage box or container when it is "reasonably known that a minor is or is likely to be present on the premises." The law goes into effect next year.

## NYC Mayor Adams calls fatal subway chokehold 'tragedy that never should have happened'

By KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams said Wednesday that the death of Jordan Neely at the hands of a fellow subway rider was "a tragedy that never should have happened" and pledged to do more to help people experiencing mental health crises.

"My heart goes out to Jordan's family, who is suffering great pain and uncertainty about the circumstances of his death," said Adams, a former police officer who was criticized for his initial muted response

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to Neely's death.

Neely died on May 1 when U.S. Marine veteran Daniel Penny put him in a chokehold aboard a subway train in Manhattan.

The 30-year-old Neely was a former Michael Jackson impersonator who was well-known to city outreach workers who try to help unhoused people experiencing mental illness.

A freelance journalist who recorded video of Neely's final minutes said Neely had been screaming at other passengers but hadn't attacked anyone when Penny pulled him to the floor and pinned him. The video shows two other subway riders helping to hold Neely down.

Neely lost consciousness during the struggle and was pronounced dead at a hospital.

The medical examiner's office ruled that Neely died in a homicide caused by compression of the neck but said the question of criminal culpability would be up to the legal system. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg has promised a thorough investigation.

Penny, 24, said through his lawyers last week 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.

Protests have erupted in the days since Neely's death, with demonstrators demanding Penny's arrest.

Because Neely was Black and Penny is white, some see echoes of the nearly 40-year-old case of Bernhard Goetz, a white gunman who was convicted of a weapons offense after he shot four Black men on a subway train in 1984.

Adams' first response to the fatal encounter was to decline to condemn Penny and to reference the rights of subway riders to take action in certain situations.

"I was a former transit police officer, and I responded to many jobs where you had a passenger assisting someone," Adams said after Neely's death was first reported.

Neely's family issued a statement earlier this week criticizing the mayor's response.

"The mayor has chosen a side," said Donte Mills, an attorney hired by Neely's aunt and father. "For him to put that forward as an excuse for Mr. Penny is very irresponsible, it's not acting in good faith as a mayor and it's disrespectful to the family, who is suffering a loss."

Speaking in a livestream address from City Hall on Wednesday, Adams sought to counter the charge that he did not care about Neely. He noted that Neely shared a name with his own son, Jordan Coleman, and said all New Yorkers "must work together to do more for our brothers and sisters struggling with serious mental illness."

A message seeking comment on Adams' speech was left with Mills, Neely's family's attorney.

Trying to steer mentally ill homeless people into shelter and treatment has been a priority for Adams, a Democrat, since he took office at the beginning of 2022.

Adams announced a plan in November to hospitalize some severely mentally ill people involuntarily, citing the city's "moral obligation to act."

That approach was criticized by some civil liberties advocates as too invasive, but Adams said Wednesday that the city has "managed to bring many people in crisis to the hospital who desperately needed care" in recent months.

In a statement responding to Adams' comments, the New York Civil Liberties Union said, "We know that forcing anyone into treatment is a recipe for failure."

The organization added, "The mayor is right that there are more Jordan Neelys in our city. They deserve to get back on their feet, not be controlled, criminalized, or killed."

Adams urged New York state lawmakers to pass legislation that would smooth the path for getting homeless mentally ill people into treatment.

Neely was not the first member of his family to die violently. His mother, Christie Neely, disappeared in 2007 and her body was found stuffed in a suitcase in the Bronx.

Christie Neely's boyfriend was charged with strangling her, and Jordan Neely testified at the boyfriend's

murder trial.

Neely's mental health began deteriorating at some point after that, and Adams said the young man "interacted with many city agencies and community-based organizations and providers" over the years. "Those efforts were not enough, and we must find ways to strengthen our system starting with investigation and accountability," Adams said.

Adams said he would bring together the leaders of the five organizations that contract with the city to provide homeless outreach services for a summit next week on improving outcomes for people with serious mental illness.

## **A skin patch to treat peanut allergies? Study in toddlers shows promise**

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — An experimental skin patch is showing promise to treat toddlers who are highly allergic to peanuts — training their bodies to handle an accidental bite.

Peanut allergy is one of the most common and dangerous food allergies. Parents of allergic tots are constantly on guard against exposures that can turn birthday parties and play dates into emergency room visits.

There is no cure. The only treatment is for children 4 and older who can consume a special peanut powder to protect against a severe reaction.

The patch, named Viaskin, aims to deliver that kind of treatment through the skin instead. In a major test with youngsters ages 1 to 3, it helped those who couldn't tolerate even a small fraction of a peanut to eventually safely eat a few, researchers reported Wednesday.

If additional testing pans out, "this would fill a huge unmet need," said Dr. Matthew Greenhawt, an allergist at Children's Hospital Colorado who helped lead the study.

About 2% of U.S. children are allergic to peanuts, some so severely than even a tiny amount can cause a life-threatening reaction. Their immune system overreacts to peanut-containing foods, triggering an inflammatory cascade that causes hives, wheezing or worse. Some youngsters outgrow the allergy but most must avoid peanuts for life and carry rescue medicine to stave off a severe reaction if they accidentally ingest some.

In 2020, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first treatment to induce tolerance to peanuts — an "oral immunotherapy" named Palforzia that children ages 4 to 17 consume daily to keep up the protection. Aimmune Therapeutics' Palforzia also is being tested in toddlers.

France's DBV Technologies is pursuing skin-based immunotherapy as an alternative way to desensitize the body to allergens.

The Viaskin patch is coated with a small amount of peanut protein that is absorbed into the skin. A daily patch is worn between the shoulder blades, where toddlers can't pull it off.

In the new study, 362 toddlers with peanut allergy first were tested to see how high a dose of peanut protein they could tolerate. Then they were randomly assigned to use the Viaskin patch or a lookalike dummy patch every day.

After a year of treatment, they were tested again and about two-thirds of the toddlers who used the real patch could safely ingest more peanuts, the equivalent of three to four, researchers concluded.

That compares to about a third of youngsters given the dummy patches. Greenhawt said they likely include children who are outgrowing the allergy.

As for safety, four Viaskin recipients experienced an allergic reaction called anaphylaxis that was deemed related to the patch. Three were treated with epinephrine to calm the reaction, and one dropped out of the study.

Some youngsters also accidentally ate peanut-containing foods during the study, and researchers said allergic reactions were less frequent among the Viaskin users than those wearing the dummy patches. The most common side effect was skin irritation at the patch site.



The findings were published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

The results “are very good news for toddlers and their families as the next step toward a future with more treatments for food allergies,” Dr. Alkis Togias of the National Institutes of Health, which wasn’t involved with the study, wrote in an accompanying editorial.

Togias cautioned that it’s too early to compare oral and skin treatments, but pointed to data suggesting each might have different pros and cons — raising the possibility that oral therapy might be stronger but also cause more side effects.

DBV Technologies has struggled for several years to bring the peanut patch to market. Last month the company announced the FDA wants some additional safety data for toddlers, and a separate study already is tracking longer treatment. A study of 4- to 7-year-olds also is underway.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## **Mommy blogger Heather Armstrong, known as Dooce to fans, dead at 47**

By LEANNE ITALIE AP Entertainment Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The pioneering mommy blogger Heather Armstrong, who laid bare her struggles as a parent and her battles with depression and alcoholism on her site Dooce.com and on social media, has died at 47.

Armstrong’s boyfriend, Pete Ashdown, told The Associated Press that he found her Tuesday night at their Salt Lake City home.

She had two children with her former husband and business partner, Jon Armstrong, began Dooce in 2001 and built it into a lucrative career. She was one of the first and most popular mommy bloggers, writing frankly about her children, relationships and other challenges at a time that personal blogs were on the rise.

She parlayed her successes with the blog, on Instagram and elsewhere into book deals, putting out a memoir in 2009, “It Sucked and then I Cried: How I Had a Baby, a Breakdown and a Much Needed Margarita.”

That year, Armstrong appeared on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and was on the Forbes list of the most influential women in media.

In 2012, the Armstrongs announced they were separating. They divorced later that year. She began dating Ashdown, a former U.S. senate candidate, nearly six years ago. They lived together with Armstrong’s children, 19-year-old Leta and 13-year-old Marlo. He has three children from a previous marriage who spent time in their home as well.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

Ashdown said Armstrong died by suicide. He told the AP that she had been sober for more than 18 months, and recently had a relapse. He did not provide further details.

Armstrong didn’t hold back on Instagram and Dooce, the latter a name that arose from her inability to quickly spell “dude” during online chats. Her raw, unapologetic posts on everything from pregnancy and breastfeeding to homework and carpooling were often infused with curses. As her popularity grew, so too did the barbs of critics, who accused her of bad parenting and worse.

One of her posts on Dooce spoke of a previous victory over drinking.

“On October 8th, 2021 I celebrated six months of sobriety by myself on the floor next to my bed feeling as if I were a wounded animal who wanted to be left alone to die,” Armstrong wrote. “There was no one in my life who could possibly comprehend how symbolic a victory it was for me, albeit ... one fraught with

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tears and sobbing so violent that at one point I thought my body would split in two. The grief submerged me in tidal waves of pain. For a few hours I found it hard to breathe.”

She went on: “Sobriety was not some mystery I had to solve. It was simply looking at all my wounds and learning how to live with them.”

In her memoir, she described how her blog began as a way to share her thoughts on pop culture with faraway friends. Within a year, her audience grew from a few friends to thousands of strangers around the world, she wrote.

More and more, Armstrong said, she found herself writing about her personal life and, eventually, an office job for a tech start-up, and “how much I wanted to strangle my boss, often using words and phrases that would embarrass a sailor.”

Her employer found the site and fired her, she wrote. She took it down but started back up again six months later, writing about her new husband, Armstrong, and how unemployment had forced them to move from Los Angeles to her mother’s basement in Utah.

She was soon pregnant. The pregnancy offered “an endless trove” of content, she wrote, “but I truly believed that I would give it all up once I had the baby.”

She didn’t, going on to chronicle her highs and lows as a new mother.

“I don’t think I would have survived it had I not offered up my story and reached out to bridge the loneliness,” she wrote.

At its peak, Dooce had more than 8 million monthly readers, a healthy following that allowed her to monetize her online presence.

Armstrong was raised in Memphis, Tennessee, in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but left the faith after graduating from Brigham Young University and moving to Los Angeles. She suffered chronic depression for much of her life but wasn’t diagnosed and treated until college, according to her book.

In 2017, after the unraveling of her marriage, the internet star dubbed “the queen of the mommy bloggers” by The New York Times Magazine took a tumble in popularity as social media came into its own.

Her depression grew worse, leading her to enroll in a clinical trial at the University of Utah’s Neuropsychiatric Institute. She was put in a chemically induced coma for 15 minutes at a time for 10 sessions.

“I was feeling like life was not meant to be lived,” Armstrong told Vox. “When you are that desperate, you will try anything. I thought my kids deserved to have a happy, healthy mother, and I needed to know that I had tried all options to be that for them.”

In 2019, she wrote her third book, “The Valedictorian of Being Dead: The True Story of Dying Ten Times to Live,” about her experiences with the treatment.

“I want people with depression to feel like they are seen,” she told Vox.

Armstrong attributed, in part, some of her past emotional spirals to sharing her life online for so long.

“The hate was very, very scary and very, very hard to live through,” she said in the interview. “It gets inside your head and eats away at your brain. It became untenable.”

## California’s Feinstein returns to Senate after monthslong absence

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — California Sen. Dianne Feinstein returned to the Senate on Wednesday after a two-and-a-half-month absence due to illness, giving majority Democrats a much-needed final vote as they seek to confirm President Joe Biden’s nominees and raise the nation’s debt ceiling in the coming weeks.

Looking noticeably thinner and frail, Feinstein is using a wheelchair to get around the Capitol as she continues to recover from a case of shingles. She missed the Senate’s first votes on Wednesday morning but arrived outside the Senate in a car for an afternoon vote, helped into the wheelchair by aides and greeted by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer with a handshake and affectionate pat on the back.

In a statement, Feinstein, 89, said she was continuing to recover from side effects of the shingles virus and would work a reduced schedule. While she had returned to Washington on Tuesday, she missed a vote on Tuesday evening and two votes on Wednesday morning before returning for the afternoon vote

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to confirm a Department of Education nominee.

"My doctors have advised me to work a lighter schedule as I return to the Senate," Feinstein said in the statement. "I'm hopeful those issues will subside as I continue to recover."

Feinstein's return after 10 weeks away from the Senate gives Democrats a better cushion as they navigate their narrow 51-49 majority. She had asked Schumer to temporarily replace her on the Senate Judiciary Committee, where some of Biden's judicial nominations have stalled without her tie-breaking vote. But Republicans blocked that request last month, giving Democrats few options to move those nominees – and important bills, like a potential debt package – unless she returned or resigned.

Still, it is unclear if Feinstein will be able to be present for every crucial vote. Her office said that while she was initially diagnosed with shingles on Feb. 26 and briefly hospitalized, she is still experiencing side effects like vision and balance impairments.

The illness came after Feinstein already had grown more frail in recent years, and has at times appeared confused or disoriented when talking to reporters in the Capitol. But she has defended her effectiveness.

In her statement, Feinstein said that the "most pressing" issue facing the Senate is to raise the debt ceiling and avoid default. "I also look forward to resuming my work on the Judiciary Committee considering the president's judicial nominees," she said.

Feinstein made the unusual request to be temporarily replaced on the panel after pressure from Democrats who are concerned about the judicial nominees and amid some calls for her resignation. Her office had not given a date for her return, creating a headache for Democrats who are hoping to use their majority to confirm as many of Biden's judicial nominees as possible.

Republicans balked, saying they would not help Democrats confirm nominees who could not move without bipartisan support. Schumer declined to hold a vote on Feinstein's request after it became clear it would not pass.

She had asked for the replacement after Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., called on her to resign from the Senate, saying it was "unacceptable" for her to miss votes to confirm judges who could be weighing in on abortion rights, a key Democratic priority.

Feinstein has gradually stepped back from several senior positions in recent years. In 2020, she said she would not serve as the top Democrat on the judiciary panel after criticism from liberals about her handling of Justice Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation. Earlier this year, she said she would not serve as the Senate president pro tempore, or the most senior member of the majority party, even though she was in line to do so. The president pro tempore opens the Senate every day and holds other ceremonial duties.

The long-serving California senator has had a trailblazing political career and shattered gender barriers. She was the first woman to serve as president of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in the 1970s and the first female mayor of San Francisco. She ascended to that post after the November 1978 assassinations of then-Mayor George Moscone and City Supervisor Harvey Milk by a former supervisor, Dan White. Feinstein found Milk's body.

In the Senate, she was the first woman to head the Senate Intelligence Committee and the first woman to serve as the Judiciary Committee's top Democrat.

## DeSantis signs immigration overhaul ahead of expected White House run

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on Wednesday signed into law a sweeping immigration bill that bolsters his migrant relocation program and limits social services for immigrants lacking permanent legal status — key political priorities of the Republican as he prepares to launch a presidential campaign.

The signing came a day before the expiration of coronavirus restrictions on asylum that have allowed the U.S. to quickly expel migrants at the southern border for the last three years, a policy known as Title 42.

DeSantis, who is expected to announce his presidential candidacy in the coming weeks, has made hard-

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ening Florida's immigration laws a top priority as he heaves criticism on federal border policy and takes a hard-right stance geared toward Republican primary voters.

"We're bracing for some turbulent times ahead," DeSantis said at a bill signing ceremony in Jacksonville, adding, "You're likely to see it get a lot worse."

The law provides \$12 million for DeSantis' migrant relocation initiative, which drew national attention last year when the governor flew a group of South American migrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, a move intended to protest federal immigration policy.

It also expands requirements for businesses with more than 25 staffers to use E-Verify, a federal system that determines if employees can legally work in the U.S. And it prohibits local governments from providing money to organizations that issue identification cards to immigrants lacking permanent legal status in the country and invalidates out-of-state driver's licenses held by people living in the country illegally.

Another provision requires hospitals that accept Medicaid to include a citizenship question on intake forms, which critics have said is intended to dissuade immigrants living in the U.S. illegally from seeking medical care.

DeSantis has made illegal immigration a key priority of his administration as he heaves heavy criticism on Democratic President Joe Biden's border policy. At the governor's Wednesday bill-signing ceremony, DeSantis and others spoke from behind a lectern that read "Biden's Border Crisis." Multiple speakers at the event detailed crimes committed by immigrants lacking legal status.

This week, the DeSantis administration made public that it had selected three vendors it intends to use for the governor's migrant relocation program, suggesting that additional flights or relocations are likely. One of the vendors is the same aviation company DeSantis' office used for the flight to Martha's Vineyard. A spokeswoman for the governor's division of emergency management, where the migrant relocation program is housed, said contracts with the vendors are still being negotiated.

"Instead of using people as political pawns, he should be focused on the job in Florida," Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book said in a statement after the signing. "This bill is a misguided, dysfunctional and disingenuous way to deal with a problem the federal government should be in charge of fixing."

## FDA panel backs over-the-counter sales of birth control pill

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health advisers said Wednesday that a decades-old birth control pill should be sold without a prescription, paving the way for a likely U.S. approval of the first over-the-counter contraceptive medication.

The panel of FDA advisers voted unanimously in favor of drugmaker Perrigo's request to sell its once-a-day medication on store shelves alongside eye drops and allergy pills. The recommendation came at the close of a two-day meeting focused on whether women could safely and effectively take the pill without professional supervision. A final FDA decision is expected this summer.

If the agency follows the nonbinding recommendation, Perrigo's drug, Opill, would become the first contraceptive pill to be moved out from behind the pharmacy counter. The company said sales could begin late this year if OK'd.

The outside experts said they were mostly confident that women of all ages could use the drug appropriately without seeing a health provider first.

"In the balance between benefit and risk, we'd have a hard time justifying not taking this action," said Maria Coyle, an Ohio State University pharmacist, who chaired the panel. "The drug is incredibly effective, and I think it will be effective in the over-the-counter realm just as it is in the prescription realm."

The positive vote came despite numerous criticisms from FDA scientists about how Perrigo studied the drug, including questions about whether study participants were able to understand and follow labeling instructions.

"We have an application with many complicated issues and uncertainties, including questionable reliability," FDA's Dr. Pamela Horn told panelists on Tuesday.



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But the panel largely set those concerns aside, emphasizing the benefits of providing more effective birth control — particularly to young people and lower-income groups — than what's available over the counter now, like condoms and gels.

Most birth control pills used in the U.S. today contain a combination of progestin and estrogen. Opill is part of an older class of contraceptives that only contain progestin. They generally have fewer side effects and health risks but can be less effective if they're not taken around the same time daily.

FDA's decision won't apply to other birth control pills although advocates hope that an approval decision might push other drugmakers to seek over-the-counter sales. Birth control pills are available without a prescription across much of South America, Asia and Africa.

Opill was first approved in the U.S. five decades ago based on data showing it was more than 90% effective in preventing pregnancy when taken daily. Even if the pill is approved for over the counter, it's unclear how popular it might be. Opill has not been marketed in the U.S. since 2005.

Some women should not take it, particularly those with breast cancer, because of the risk that it could accelerate tumor growth. Women who have unusual vaginal bleeding are instructed to speak with a doctor before using it, because bleeding could indicate a serious health issue.

But in reading comprehension studies conducted by Perrigo, 68% of women with unexplained bleeding incorrectly answered they could take the drug. And a few women with breast cancer also told researchers they could use Opill.

Panel members said almost all women with a history of breast cancer would be under the care of a cancer specialist, who would advise them not to take hormonal drugs that could make their condition worse.

"I would think any woman who had a breast cancer diagnosis in the past would be highly aware of that, so I don't think that's going to be a concern," said Dr. Deborah Armstrong of Johns Hopkins University.

Perrigo said its 880-patient study of the drug showed that women will consistently take the pill daily if it's made available over-the-counter. But the FDA found several problems in the study, including more than 30% of participants who erroneously reported taking more pills than they were actually supplied. FDA reviewers said the problem called into question the company's overall conclusions about the drug's use and effectiveness.

FDA regulators also suggested changes in U.S. demographics since the pill was first tested — including increased obesity and other chronic conditions— could reduce the drug's effectiveness.

Despite those concerns, Opill has the support of dozens of reproductive rights and medical groups that have long pushed for expanded access to birth control.

"Opill over the counter would give us one more option for access and the more options that are available the better," said Clare Coleman, president of the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association

Coleman was one of more than 25 speakers who supported Perrigo's application during a public comment session Tuesday.

Catholic groups, including the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, oppose the move, saying women should be evaluated by a doctor before getting it.

Perrigo has not publicly discussed pricing for the drug, if approved. Nonprescription medicines are usually cheaper, but generally not covered by insurance. Requiring insurers to cover over-the-counter birth control would require a regulatory change by the federal government.

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## **GOP says Biden family financial records a smoking gun. White House calls it a 'political stunt'**

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Facing growing pressure to show progress in their investigations, House Repub-

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licans on Wednesday detailed what they say are concerning new findings about President Joe Biden's family and their finances.

The smoking gun, according to the GOP, is recently obtained financial records connected to the president's son Hunter Biden, brother James Biden and a growing number of associates who received millions of dollars in payments from foreign entities in China and Romania. They suggest, without evidence, that the payments were part of a wide-ranging scheme to enrich themselves off the family name.

To help them get here, Congressional Republicans relied on more than 150 suspicious activity reports as a roadmap to follow what they call the Bidens' complicated financial money trail.

The confidential reports, called SARs for short, are often routine, with larger financial transactions automatically flagged to the government. The filing of a SARs report is not evidence on its own of misconduct.

But Rep. James Comer, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee leading the probe, said Wednesday that other types of financial records obtained through congressional subpoenas and lawsuits have now become the focus of their investigation.

The White House dismissed the whole investigation as "yet another political stunt."

"Congressman Comer has a history of playing fast and loose with the facts and spreading baseless innuendo while refusing to conduct his so-called 'investigations' with legitimacy," White House spokesperson Ian Sams said in a statement.

Here's a deeper look at suspicious activity reports and how Republicans are using them as a roadmap to investigate the Biden family:

## WHAT IS A SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORT?

Financial institutions are required to file a suspicious activity report to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) no later than 30 calendar days from when it detects a suspicious transaction that could have links to money laundering or terrorism financing.

First originated as a "criminal referral form," suspicious activity reports were established through the 1970 Bank Secrecy Act. In 1996, according to FinCEN, the form became the standard way to report suspicious activity in the financial system.

The rules around the reports were later amended under the U.S. Patriot Act. Today, banks and credit unions routinely submit SARs.

## WHAT TRIGGERS A SARs?

Industries that deal in large sums of money are required to file SARs to the government when they detect a transaction with possible links to money laundering, counterfeiting, fraud or illicit finance — this includes banks, casinos, loan companies and depository firms.

Signs of insider trading and individual transactions of \$5,000 or more often trigger an institution to file a report, but the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation states that entities "are encouraged to file nonetheless in appropriate situations involving these matters, based on the potential harm that such crimes can produce."

Large transactions involving foreign payers — like the kind that Hunter and James Biden are known to have engaged in through their work — are the kinds of transactions often flagged to federal authorities.

SARs can also be filed by individuals or entities outside the financial sector, including law enforcement, public safety workers, city or state officials, business owners, and even the general public.

Law enforcement agencies use the reports to uncover and prosecute illegal activity, as well as help identify and counteract fraudulent and criminal behavior before it becomes a larger issue.

In recent years, electronic SARs reporting has increased through FinCEN's Bank Secrecy Act e-filing system. Nearly 42,000 reports were filed by the loan and financial services industry in 2021, according to data compiled by FinCEN, a huge jump from the more than 1,500 reports filed in 2015.

## HISTORY OF SARs AGAINST POLITICAL ACTORS

The filing of suspicious activity reports against elected officials is not uncommon. During the Trump

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administration, Deutsche Bank's anti-money laundering division recommended filing suspicious activity reports on transactions conducted by Trump companies, including the Trump Foundation, and firms owned by his son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Michael Cohen, a one-time attorney for former President Donald Trump, had several suspicious activity reports filed against him, including one that recorded a \$500,000 deposit from a company connected to a Russian oligarch who donated money to Trump's inauguration fund.

Most SARs are never made public. The records connected to Trump and Cohen were revealed through leaks to the media and as part of federal investigations.

## CONFIDENTIALITY IN THE REPORTING PROCESS

Suspicious activity reports are cloaked in secrecy to make them useful for law enforcement. The person suspected of triggering a SARs is not routinely informed about the pending report.

Any discussion or disclosure about SARs to outside groups such as news outlets would be considered an unauthorized disclosure and is punishable as a federal criminal offense.

In the case involving Cohen, Trump's former personal lawyer, an IRS employee was charged by federal prosecutors in 2019 with leaking banking records that had been flagged as suspicious activity.

The confidentiality rules have come up again as Comer conducts his probe into supposed suspicious activity reports by Biden family members. The Kentucky lawmaker and some committee members and staff were recently able to view some of the thousands of pages of the Biden family's financial records through subpoenas made to the Treasury Department and various financial institutions since January.

A handful of lawmakers immediately began talking on social media and cable news about what they had seen in the reports, asserting evidence of misconduct.

House Democrats have accused Comer and other Republicans on the committee of potentially violating the Bank Secrecy Act.

## WHAT ARE REPUBLICANS INVESTIGATING?

Republicans vowed after winning the House majority last year that they would use their subpoena power to investigate foreign entities that did business with the family during Biden's time as vice president and during the Trump administration, including a specific focus on his son Hunter.

This all comes as Hunter Biden's taxes and foreign business work are already under federal investigation, with a grand jury in Delaware reportedly making a charging decision in the next few months. And while Hunter Biden never held a position on the presidential campaign or in the White House, his membership on the board of a Ukrainian energy company and his efforts to strike deals in China have long raised questions about whether he traded on his father's public service, including reported references in his emails to the "big guy."

Joe Biden has said he's never spoken to his son about his foreign business. And there are no indications that the federal investigation involves the president in any way.

An attorney for Hunter Biden on Wednesday slammed years of Republicans' investigations as "chasing conspiracies."

"Today's so-called 'revelations' are retread, repackaged misstatements of perfectly proper meetings and business by private citizens," Abbe Lowell, a lawyer for the president's son, said.

## WHAT EVIDENCE HAVE THEY GATHERED?

Up until now, Comer and Republicans have not publicly revealed evidence to substantiate their claims of wrongdoing by the Biden family. But Comer said their investigation into the Biden family is widening.

"This is not just about the president's son. This is about the entire Biden family, including the president of the United States," Comer said during an appearance Sunday on Fox News. "So we believe there are a whole lot of accounts that the IRS and the DOJ don't know about because we don't believe they have done a whole lot of digging in this. And we have."

Associated Press writer Lindsay Whitehurst contributed to this report.

## Daughters without moms find support in each other's grief

By TRACEE M. HERBAUGH Associated Press

When my mother died suddenly 30 years ago, I was 13. I'd spend the next 20 years attempting to understand what it means not to have a mother.

And I did this basically alone.

Mostly, this was because my mother's parents, who raised me, were old-fashioned folks who lived through the Dust Bowl. They didn't discuss feelings, good or bad. I never once saw my grandfather shed a tear after his daughter died. Plus, our town was in the rural plains of Colorado, hours away from any city with services like a grief therapist, even if my grandparents had been open to that.

But the silence around grief also was a product of the times. I am encouraged to see that now a mom's death is generally not handled the same way it was in 1993.

There are many kinds of support today, from the organized to the grassroots. Grief can be talked about and shared more publicly, experts say, and is acknowledged to last a long time.

Motherless children can attend special summer camps, for instance, or Mother's Day retreats like those hosted by the Massachusetts-based non-profit EmpowerHer, which works with girls whose mothers have died. They also link girls with mentors so they can see an older version of themselves. The group recently started working with boys and nonbinary children, too, who have lost either parent.

"There isn't a perfect ending," said Cara Belvin, who founded EmpowerHer. "You can cry and scream but you can't give up, and we hold space for a kid who is grieving."

Podcasts on the topic of parent loss, and support groups both virtual and in-person, have proliferated.

"It really grew exponentially over COVID," said Hope Edelman, author of several grief books, including the bestseller "Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss," published in 1994.

Edelman has led motherless daughters' groups, and her books have helped usher in a new way to live with loss. "The death of a mother affects a daughter profoundly, but what comes after can affect her as much or more," she said.

Edelman was 17 when her mother died in 1981, a time she has called the "dark ages" of grief, when mourning often wasn't discussed much outside the stale office of a therapist.

The prevailing wisdom today tends to be the "continuing bonds" theory, which says grief is to be carried, and relationships continue and change with a loved one, even after their death.

This more engaged approach to grief has been furthered by the internet and social media.

Ontario native Janet Gwilliam-Wright, 46, started "The Motherlove Project," a blog and corresponding Instagram account, in 2020 to honor the 25th anniversary of her mother's death. It has since become a place where women from around the world share stories about their late mothers; nearly 300 people have shared so far.

"I didn't have anywhere to grieve her — she didn't have a grave — so I decided to make a place on the internet," Gwilliam-Wright explained.

"I have enormous gratitude for every woman who reaches out to me. It helps me in my grieving and has brought me a community of people I feel so connected to."

Mother's Day can feel particularly isolating, said Julia Morin, 36, of Nashua, New Hampshire, who created her Instagram account "Girl\_meets\_grief" on Mother's Day 2021 to connect with others who felt the same way.

Before the internet, even though the prevailing attitude toward grief might have been less supportive, still there was often more community and family around than there is now, when many Americans lack built-in support networks.

"And so the widespread online support gives people a broader space to share in that grief and meet people with similar experiences," said Megan Kelleher, a historian who has studied grief and bereavement practices.



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Writing is another way motherless daughters are connecting.

Sasha Brown-Worsham of Acton, Massachusetts, has written about losing her mom as a teenager. She penned a viral essay and followed it up with a memoir, "Namaste the Hard Way." When Brown-Worsham turned 45, the same age her mother was when she died of breast cancer, she sought out a virtual support group of mothers without moms.

"My daughter turned 16 at the same time, and that's how old I was when my mom died," she said.

The group is a collaboration between Edelman's Motherless Daughters and the Twin Cities-based non-profit She Climbs Mountains.

"There's this sense of being seen for possibly the first time in my whole life," Brown-Worsham said.

Life's milestones — such as getting married or having a baby — can trigger grief. By the time I was 30, I had tricked myself into believing I was adept at ignoring my mother's loss. That was, of course, far from true.

It was when I had my first baby that I felt grief rise to the surface. Jealousy cropped up in unexpected ways, particularly when I saw my new mom friends with their mothers.

It turns out, this is normal.

"Having kids ripped me open" emotionally, said Katie Paradis, 42, of Rockport, Massachusetts, who has two girls and no mother.

Susanna Gilbertson's mom died a year before her daughter was born.

"I looked around and didn't see any support I could access," said Gilbertson, 47, of Philadelphia.

Along with another motherless mom, she posted fliers for a book group, reading Edelman's "Motherless Daughters." After the initial meeting, the women in the group wanted to keep going. They ended up meeting for seven years.

"You get to experience, rather than be told, that you're not alone," said Gilbertson, now a full-time grief coach.

## DNA project gives scientists diverse genome for comparison

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

For two decades, scientists have been comparing every person's full set of DNA they study to a template that relies mostly on genetic material from one man affectionately known as "the guy from Buffalo."

But they've long known that this template for comparison, or "reference genome," has serious limits because it doesn't reflect the spectrum of human diversity.

"We need a really good understanding of the variations, the differences between human beings," said genomics expert Benedict Paten of the University of California, Santa Cruz. "We're missing out."

Now, scientists are building a much more diverse reference that they call a "pangenome," which so far includes the genetic material of 47 people from various places around the world. It's the subject of four studies published Wednesday in the journals Nature and Nature Biotechnology. Scientists say it's already teaching them new things about health and disease and should help patients down the road.

Paten said the new reference should help scientists understand more about what's normal and what's not. "It is only by understanding what common variation looks like that we'll be able to say, 'Oh, this big structural variation that affects this gene? Don't worry about it,'" he said.

A human genome is the set of instructions to build and sustain a human being, and experts define a pangenome as a collection of whole genome sequences from many people that is designed to represent the genetic diversity of the human species. The pangenome is not a composite but a collection; scientists depict it as a rainbow of stacked genomes, compared with one line representing the older, single reference genome.

The Human Pangenome Project builds upon the first sequencing of a complete human genome, which was nearly completed more than two decades ago and finally finished last year. Paten, a pangenome study author and project leader, said 70% of that first reference genome came from an African American man with mixed African and European ancestry who answered an ad for volunteers in a Buffalo newspaper in

1997. About 30% came from a mix of around 20 people.

The pangenome contains material from 24 people of African ancestry, 16 from the Americas and the Caribbean, six from Asia and one from Europe.

Although any two people's genomes are more than 99% identical, Paten said "it's those differences that are the things that genetics and genomics is concerned with studying and understanding."

It may take a while for patients to see concrete benefits from the research. But scientists said new insights should eventually make genetic testing more accurate, improve drug discovery and bolster personalized medicine, which uses someone's unique genetic profile to guide decisions for preventing, diagnosing and treating disease.

"The Pangenome Project gives a more accurate representation of the genome of people from around the world," and should help doctors better diagnose genetic conditions, said clinical genetics expert Dr. Wendy Chung at Columbia University, who was not involved in the research.

If someone has a variation in a certain gene, it could be compared to the rainbow of references.

Study author Evan Eichler of the University of Washington said researchers will also learn more about genes already linked to problems, such as one tied to cardiovascular disease in African Americans.

"Now that we can actually sequence that gene in its entirety and we can understand the variation in that gene, we can start to go back to unexplained cases of patients with coronary heart disease" and look at them in light of the new knowledge, he said. Eichler is paid by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which also supports The Associated Press's health and science department.

University of Minnesota plant genetics expert Candice Hirsch, who wasn't involved in the research but has closely followed the effort, said she expects many discoveries to flow from it. Until now, "we really have only been able to scratch the surface of understanding the genetics that underlies disease," she said.

The consortium leading the research is part of the Human Genome Reference Program, which is funded by an arm of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

The team is in the process of adding to the collection of reference genomes, with the goal of having sequences from 350 people by the middle of next year. Scientists are also hoping to work more with international partners, including those focusing on Indigenous populations.

"We're in it for the long game," Paten said.

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## **'BlackBerry' film hails the must-have gadget that the iPhone turned into a forgotten relic**

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

Almost everyone knows Steve Jobs' uncanny vision, relentless drive and technological wizardry hatched the iPhone, a breakthrough that continues to reshape culture 16 years after the late Apple co-founder introduced the device to the world.

But when Jobs unveiled the first iPhone in 2007, another smartphone was the must-have gadget. It was the BlackBerry, a device so addictive that it became known as the "CrackBerry" among tech nerds and power brokers hunched over a tiny keyboard that was best operated with both thumbs clickety-clacking.

Now the BlackBerry is "that phone people had before they bought an iPhone," a relic so irrelevant that the Canadian company that made it is now valued at \$3 billion — down from \$85 billion at its 2008 peak when it still controlled nearly half of the smartphone market.

But its legacy is worth remembering — and audiences will get a chance to learn more about its origins in the new film, "BlackBerry." The film out Friday in theaters is the latest movie or TV series to delve into technology's penchant for groundbreaking innovation, blind ambition, ego clashes and power struggles that turn into morality tales.

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That formula has already spawned two Academy Award-nominated movies written by Aaron Sorkin, 2010's "The Social Network" delving into Facebook's founding and 2015's "Steve Jobs," dissecting the Silicon Valley icon. Then came last year's flurry of TV series examining the scandals enveloping WeWork ("WeCrashed"), Uber ("Super Pumped") and disgraced Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes ("The Dropout"), which won Amanda Seyfried an Emmy for her turn in the starring role.

Unlike any of those biopics, "BlackBerry" is told as a dark comedy revolving around two amiable but bumbling nerds, Mike Lazaridis and Doug Fregin, who can't seem to execute their plan to create a "computer in a phone" until they bring in a hard-nosed, foul-mouthed businessman, Jim Balsillie.

Although "BlackBerry" is based on a meticulously researched book called "The Lost Signal," director and co-star Matt Johnson acknowledged taking more liberties in the movie during an interview with The Associated Press. Among other changes, Johnson cited shifting some timelines, shaping the company culture through his view of the 1990s and infusing the key characters with "our own personalities and our own ideas.

"But our lawyers wouldn't let us put anything in the film that was an outright fabrication," Johnson stressed.

Johnson had to do a lot of guesswork in his role as the enigmatic Fregin, who sold all his stock in BlackBerry's holding company — then known as Research In Motion, RIM — around the same time Apple released the first iPhone and has kept a low profile ever since.

"Doug is true cipher, he has never done a taped interview," said Johnson, which led him to portray Fregin as a "kind of mascot figure who is tying the culture of the office together."

Ironically, Johnson got a lot of his idea on how to depict Fregin from one of RIM's early employees, Matthias Wandel, who posted a YouTube video critiquing inaccuracies that he saw in the "BlackBerry" trailer. Before that, Wandel talked extensively to Johnson about RIM's history and even provided diaries that he kept while during the BlackBerry's development.

"I think when he sees the film he is going to be quite charmed by how much of his original notes are in the film," Johnson said of Wandel. "It's so funny that he has released that video (because) so much of my character is based on him. I stole everything from that dude. I owe him huge."

Balsillie, RIM's co-CEO with Lazaridis, emerges as the film's most intriguing character. Actor Glenn Howerton (best known for his role in the TV series, "It's Always Sunny In Philadelphia") portrays Balsillie in a way that casts him as both the story's chief antagonist and protagonist dropping f-bombs in tyrannical temper tantrums at the same time he is making savvy moves that turned the BlackBerry into a cultural sensation.

"It always felt like this was a guy who weirdly felt a little outside of sort of what people would consider to be sort of a titan of technology or business," Howerton said of Balsillie during an AP interview. "I played him as someone who had something to prove at almost all times, that he could play with the big boys."

Balsillie eventually became entangled in legal problems tied to improper changes to the pricing of stock options — a tactic known as "backdating" that also ensnared Apple's former general counsel and former chief financial officer in 2007 for their handling of compensation packages awarded Jobs. Both Balsillie and Lazaridis left RIM in 2012.

Now that BlackBerry has faded from the public consciousness, Balsillie seems to be welcoming the renewed attention from the new film even though he quibbled with some aspects of his character during a recent interview with The Canadian Press.

Unlike Lazaridis and Fregin, Balsillie attended a recent showing of the film in Toronto and even walked the red carpet with Johnson and Howerton.

"In many ways, (Jim) was the hero, he was the character who changed for the better (in the film)," Johnson said. "The audience was just with him. It was almost a psychedelic experience to be in theater watching the movie with Jim, with Jim being the person who was laughing the loudest."

Balsillie, who is mocked in one of the film's scenes for having never seen "Star Wars," confided to Howerton that he enjoyed watching "BlackBerry" so much that it was the first movie he had ever seen twice in his life.

## US prices stay high, showing inflation pressures persist

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Consumer prices in the United States rose again in April, and measures of underlying inflation stayed high, a sign that further declines in inflation are likely to be slow and bumpy.

Prices increased 0.4% from March to April, the government said Wednesday, up sharply from a 0.1% rise from February to March. Compared with a year earlier, prices climbed 4.9%, down slightly from March's year-over-year increase. It was the smallest annual increase in two years.

Even with price pressures rising in April, the latest data did provide some evidence of cooling inflation. Grocery prices fell for a second straight month. And the cost of many services, including airline fares and hotel rooms, plunged. Though apartment rents rose in April, they did so more slowly than in previous months.

The Federal Reserve's policymakers have been closely watching services prices, and April's figures could lead them to do what they had signaled after their meeting last week: Pause their rate hikes, after 10 straight increases, while they assess the economic impact the higher borrowing costs have had.

Measured year over year, last month's decline in inflation was much less than in previous months, underscoring that consumer price increases might not fall back to the Fed's 2% target until at least well into next year.

Excluding volatile energy and food costs, so-called core prices rose 0.4% from March to April, the same as from February to March. It was the fifth straight month that they have risen at least 0.4%. Core prices are regarded as a reliable gauge of longer-term inflation trends. Compared with a year ago, core inflation rose 5.5%, just below a year-over-year increase of 5.6% in March.

"This is a story of still-sticky core inflation at an elevated level," said Blerina Uruci, chief U.S. economist for fixed income at T. Rowe Price. "This report puts the Fed on track to keep rates high this year."

For everyday consumer items, Wednesday's inflation report was mixed. Gasoline prices jumped 3% just in April. By contrast, grocery prices dropped for a second straight month. Used car prices surged 4.4% after nine months of declines.

Airline fares, though, dropped 2.6% in April, and hotel prices plunged 3% after four straight monthly increases.

The Fed is paying particular attention to a measure of services inflation that covers such items as dining out, hotel stays and entertainment and that has remained chronically high for much of the past year. This measure, which excludes energy services and housing, rose just 0.1% from March to April, the smallest increase since last July.

Consumers and businesses continue to struggle with higher costs, and there are signs that some are responding by reining in their spending.

Donald Minerva, who owns the Scottadito Osteria Toscana, an Italian restaurant in Brooklyn, says he has had to raise his prices several times since the pandemic struck to keep pace with rising costs for raw ingredients, all kinds of insurance and higher wages.

Minerva has tried to find ways to save on costs. He has stopped serving lunch during the week and is closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. Even with the reduction in hours, though, his labor costs are about 10% higher than before the pandemic.

With consumers starting to resist higher prices, Minerva said, he's been forced to drop expensive menus for such holidays as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day. He introduced a more costly prix fixe menu for New Year's, only to see some customers cancel.

"People are not spending as much money," he said. For New Year's Eve dinner, "we did what we normally did, and we lost the holiday."

"Consumers don't have unlimited capacity to keep spending at these price levels," said Thomas Simons, an economist at Jefferies, the investment bank. "That is going to lead to some re-budgeting and lower consumption in the future."



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A slowdown in consumer spending, which drives most of the U.S. economy, could help ease inflation in the coming months. At the same time, average paychecks are still rising rapidly. Though beneficial for workers, that trend likely means that many companies will keep raising prices to offset their higher labor costs.

And some companies are still experiencing strong consumer spending. Delaware North, which runs food and hotel services at resorts, sports stadiums and national parks in the United States and abroad, is still enjoying healthy demand at destination resorts at places like the Grand Canyon.

"They're demonstrating this incredible resilience," said Frank Mendicino, the company's executive vice president. "People are traveling to these bucket-list destinations like the Grand Canyon."

Mendicino acknowledged that the company has raised prices for some of its hotel rooms mostly in response to higher demand, not because of its higher labor costs.

For more than two years, high inflation has been a significant burden for America's consumers, a threat to the economy and a frustrating challenge for the Fed. The central bank has raised its key interest rate by a substantial 5 percentage points since March 2022 to try to drive inflation back down to its 2% target.

Besides making borrowing far more expensive for consumers and businesses, those higher rates have contributed to the collapse of three large banks in the past two months and to a likely pullback in bank lending. The result could be a further weakening of the economy.

Even more ominously, the government's debt ceiling may be breached by early June, and Republicans in Congress are refusing to raise the cap unless President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats agree to sharp spending cuts. If the debt ceiling isn't raised in time, the nation would default on its debt, a scenario that could ignite a global economic crisis.

## **AP source: Vice President Kamala Harris postpones MTV event due to Hollywood writers' strike**

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Hollywood writers' strike that's snarling the television and movie industries has now scrambled the White House schedule.

An MTV special on mental health that was expected to feature Vice President Kamala Harris next week has been postponed, according to her office.

A person familiar with the decision said Harris chose not to travel to the Los Angeles-area event because that would have been seen as crossing the picket line. That's a political nonstarter for Democrats who rely on union support.

The person was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity about the decision to postpone MTV's Mental Health Action Day Conversation.

President Joe Biden called for a "fair deal" for writers at a White House movie screening this week.

"Nights like these are a reminder of stories and the importance of treating storytellers with the dignity, respect and the value they deserve," Biden said. "I sincerely hope the writers strike in Hollywood gets resolved and the writers are given a fair deal they deserve as soon as possible."

## **1st babies born in Britain using DNA from 3 people**

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — Britain's fertility regulator on Wednesday confirmed the births of the U.K.'s first babies created using an experimental technique combining DNA from three people, an effort to prevent the children from inheriting rare genetic diseases.

The Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority said fewer than five babies have been born this way in the U.K. but did not provide further details to protect the families' identities. The news was first reported by the Guardian newspaper.

In 2015, the U.K. became the first country to adopt legislation regulating methods to help prevent women with faulty mitochondria — the energy source in a cell — from passing defects on to their babies. The

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world's first baby born using the technique was reported in the U.S. in 2016.

The genetic defects can result in diseases such as muscular dystrophy, epilepsy, heart problems and intellectual disabilities. About one in 200 children in Britain is born with a mitochondrial disorder. To date, 32 patients have been authorized to receive such treatment.

For a woman with faulty mitochondria, scientists take genetic material from her egg or embryo, which is then transferred into a donor egg or embryo that still has healthy mitochondria but had the rest of its key DNA removed.

The fertilized embryo is then transferred into the womb of the mother. The genetic material from the donated egg comprises less than 1% of the child created from this technique.

"Mitochondrial donation treatment offers families with severe inherited mitochondrial illness the possibility of a healthy child," the U.K. fertility regulator said in a statement Wednesday. The agency said it was still "early days" but it hoped the scientists involved, at Newcastle University, would soon publish details of the treatment.

Britain requires every woman undergoing the treatment to receive approval from the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority. The regulator says that to be eligible, families must have no other available options for avoiding passing on genetic disease.

Many critics oppose the artificial reproduction techniques, arguing there are other ways for people to avoid passing on diseases to their children, such as egg donation or screening tests, and that the experimental methods have not yet been proven safe.

Others warn that tweaking the genetic code this way could be a slippery slope that eventually leads to designer babies for parents who not only want to avoid inherited diseases but to have taller, stronger, smarter or better-looking children.

Robin Lovell-Badge, a stem cell expert at the Francis Crick Institute, a biomedical research center in London, said it would be critical to monitor the babies' future development.

"It will be interesting to know how well the (mitochondrial donation) technique worked at a practical level, whether the babies are free of mitochondrial disease and whether there is any risk of them developing problems later in life," he said in a statement.

Scientists in Europe published research earlier this year that showed in some cases, the small number of abnormal mitochondria that are inevitably carried over from the mother's egg to the donor's can reproduce when the baby is in the uterus, which could ultimately lead to a genetic disease.

Lovell-Badge said the reasons for such problems were not yet understood and that researchers would need to develop methods to reduce the risk.

Previous research assessing another technique to create babies from three people, including an egg donor, found that years later the children were doing well as teenagers, with no signs of unusual health problems and good grades in school.

Doctors in the U.S. were the first to announce the world's first baby using the mitochondria donation technique, after the treatment was conducted in Mexico.

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## Mass event will let hackers test limits of AI technology

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

No sooner did ChatGPT get unleashed than hackers started "jailbreaking" the artificial intelligence chatbot — trying to override its safeguards so it could blurt out something unhinged or obscene.

But now its maker, OpenAI, and other major AI providers such as Google and Microsoft, are coordinating with the Biden administration to let thousands of hackers take a shot at testing the limits of their technology.

Some of the things they'll be looking to find: How can chatbots be manipulated to cause harm? Will they share the private information we confide in them to other users? And why do they assume a doctor is a

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man and a nurse is a woman?

"This is why we need thousands of people," said Rumman Chowdhury, a coordinator of the mass hacking event planned for this summer's DEF CON hacker convention in Las Vegas that's expected to draw several thousand people. "We need a lot of people with a wide range of lived experiences, subject matter expertise and backgrounds hacking at these models and trying to find problems that can then go be fixed."

Anyone who's tried ChatGPT, Microsoft's Bing chatbot or Google's Bard will have quickly learned that they have a tendency to fabricate information and confidently present it as fact. These systems, built on what's known as large language models, also emulate the cultural biases they've learned from being trained upon huge troves of what people have written online.

The idea of a mass hack caught the attention of U.S. government officials in March at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, where Sven Cattell, founder of DEF CON's long-running AI Village, and Austin Carson, president of responsible AI nonprofit SeedAI, helped lead a workshop inviting community college students to hack an AI model.

Carson said those conversations eventually blossomed into a proposal to test AI language models following the guidelines of the White House's Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights — a set of principles to limit the impacts of algorithmic bias, give users control over their data and ensure that automated systems are used safely and transparently.

There's already a community of users trying their best to trick chatbots and highlight their flaws. Some are official "red teams" authorized by the companies to "prompt attack" the AI models to discover their vulnerabilities. Many others are hobbyists showing off humorous or disturbing outputs on social media until they get banned for violating a product's terms of service.

"What happens now is kind of a scattershot approach where people find stuff, it goes viral on Twitter," and then it may or may not get fixed if it's egregious enough or the person calling attention to it is influential, Chowdhury said.

In one example, known as the "grandma exploit," users were able to get chatbots to tell them how to make a bomb — a request a commercial chatbot would normally decline — by asking it to pretend it was a grandmother telling a bedtime story about how to make a bomb.

In another example, searching for Chowdhury using an early version of Microsoft's Bing search engine chatbot — which is based on the same technology as ChatGPT but can pull real-time information from the internet — led to a profile that speculated Chowdhury "loves to buy new shoes every month" and made strange and gendered assertions about her physical appearance.

Chowdhury helped introduce a method for rewarding the discovery of algorithmic bias to DEF CON's AI Village in 2021 when she was the head of Twitter's AI ethics team — a job that has since been eliminated upon Elon Musk's October takeover of the company. Paying hackers a "bounty" if they uncover a security bug is commonplace in the cybersecurity industry — but it was a newer concept to researchers studying harmful AI bias.

This year's event will be at a much greater scale, and is the first to tackle the large language models that have attracted a surge of public interest and commercial investment since the release of ChatGPT late last year.

Chowdhury, now the co-founder of AI accountability nonprofit Humane Intelligence, said it's not just about finding flaws but about figuring out ways to fix them.

"This is a direct pipeline to give feedback to companies," she said. "It's not like we're just doing this hackathon and everybody's going home. We're going to be spending months after the exercise compiling a report, explaining common vulnerabilities, things that came up, patterns we saw."

Some of the details are still being negotiated, but companies that have agreed to provide their models for testing include OpenAI, Google, chipmaker Nvidia and startups Anthropic, Hugging Face and Stability AI. Building the platform for the testing is another startup called Scale AI, known for its work in assigning humans to help train AI models by labeling data.

"As these foundation models become more and more widespread, it's really critical that we do everything

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we can to ensure their safety," said Scale CEO Alexandr Wang. "You can imagine somebody on one side of the world asking it some very sensitive or detailed questions, including some of their personal information. You don't want any of that information leaking to any other user."

Other dangers Wang worries about are chatbots that give out "unbelievably bad medical advice" or other misinformation that can cause serious harm.

Anthropic co-founder Jack Clark said the DEF CON event will hopefully be the start of a deeper commitment from AI developers to measure and evaluate the safety of the systems they are building.

"Our basic view is that AI systems will need third-party assessments, both before deployment and after deployment. Red-teaming is one way that you can do that," Clark said. "We need to get practice at figuring out how to do this. It hasn't really been done before."

## AP sources: US Rep. George Santos facing federal charges

By MICHAEL BALSAMO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. Rep. George Santos, who faced outrage and mockery over a litany of fabrications about his heritage, education and professional pedigree, has been charged with federal criminal offenses, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The charges against Santos, filed in the Eastern District of New York, remain under seal.

The people could not publicly discuss specific details of the case until it is unsealed and spoke to The AP on condition of anonymity. The unsealing would happen when Santos appears in court, which could come as soon as Wednesday.

Reached on Tuesday, Santos said, "This is news to me."

"You're the first to call me about this," he said in a brief phone interview.

A spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office declined to comment. The charges were first reported by CNN.

The New York Republican has admitted to lying about having Jewish ancestry, a Wall Street background, college degrees and a history as a star volleyball player. Serious questions about his finances also surfaced — including the source of what he claimed was a quickly amassed fortune despite recent financial problems, including evictions and owing thousands of dollars in back rent.

Santos has resisted calls to resign and recently announced he was running for reelection. He said his lies about his life story, which included telling people he had jobs at several global financial firms and a lavish real estate portfolio, were harmless embellishments of his resume.

Pressure on him to quit, though, has been intense. Reporters and members of the public hounded him. He was mocked on social media and late-night television. Fellow New York Republicans demanded he resign, saying he had betrayed voters and his own party with his lies.

Nassau County prosecutors and the New York attorney general's office had previously said they were looking into possible violations of the law.

Besides questions about his life story, Santos' campaign spending stoked scrutiny because of unusual payments for travel, lodging and other items.

The nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center lodged a complaint with the Federal Election Commission and urged regulators to investigate Santos. The "mountain of lies" Santos propagated during the campaign about his life story and qualifications, the center said, should prompt the commission to "thoroughly investigate what appear to be equally brazen lies about how his campaign raised and spent money."

In his filings with the FEC, Santos initially said he loaned his campaign and related political action committees more than \$750,000 — money he claimed came from a family company.

Yet, the wealth necessary to make those loans seems to have emerged from nowhere. In a financial disclosure statement filed with the clerk of the U.S. House in 2020, Santos said he had no assets and an annual income of \$55,000.

His company, the Devolder Organization, wasn't incorporated until spring 2021. Yet last September, Santos filed another financial disclosure form reporting that this new company, incorporated in Florida, had paid him a \$750,000 salary in each of the last two years, plus another \$1 million to \$5 million in dividends.



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In one interview, Santos described the Devolder Organization as a business that helped rich people buy things like yachts and aircraft.

Court records indicate Santos was the subject of three eviction proceedings in Queens between 2014 and 2017 because of unpaid rent.

Some Republicans, including those in his district, have sharply castigated Santos for his dishonesty. The Nassau County Republican Committee, which had supported his candidacy, said it would not support Santos for reelection.

Santos lost his first race for Congress in 2020 but ran again in 2022 and won in a district that is in the suburbs of Long Island and a sliver of Queens.

A local newspaper, the North Shore Leader, had raised issues about Santos' background before the election but it was not until a few weeks after the election that the depth of his duplicity became public.

The New York Times reported that companies where Santos claimed to have worked, Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, had no record of him having been an employee. Baruch College, where Santos claimed to have gotten a degree in finance and economics, said he hadn't been a student.

Beyond his resume, Santos invented a life story that has also come under question, including claims that his grandparents "fled Jewish persecution in Ukraine, settled in Belgium, and again fled persecution during WWII."

During his campaign, he referred to himself as "a proud American Jew."

Confronted with questions about that story, Santos, a Roman Catholic, said he never intended to claim Jewish heritage.

The Times also uncovered records in Brazil that show Santos, when he was 19, was the subject of a criminal investigation there in 2008 over allegations he used stolen checks to buy items at a clothing shop in the city of Niteroi, which is near Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian authorities said they have reopened the case.

Amiri reported from Washington. Associated Press writers Michael R. Sisak in New York and Lindsay Whitehurst in Washington contributed to this report.

## Today in History: May 11, Adolf Eichmann captured

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 11, the 131st day of 2023. There are 234 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 11, 2010, Conservative leader David Cameron, at age 43, became Britain's youngest prime minister in almost 200 years after Gordon Brown stepped down and ended 13 years of Labour government.

On this date:

In 1647, Peter Stuyvesant (STY'-veh-sunt) arrived in New Amsterdam to become governor of New Netherland.

In 1858, Minnesota became the 32nd state of the Union.

In 1927, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded during a banquet at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles.

In 1935, the Rural Electrification Administration was created as one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs.

In 1946, the first CARE packages, sent by a consortium of American charities to provide relief to the hungry of postwar Europe, arrived at Le Havre, France.

In 1953, a tornado devastated Waco, Texas, claiming 114 lives.

In 1960, Israeli agents captured Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In 1973, the espionage trial of Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo in the "Pentagon Papers" case came to an end as Judge William M. Byrne dismissed all charges, citing government misconduct.

In 1981, legendary reggae artist Bob Marley died in a Miami hospital at age 36.

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In 1996, an Atlanta-bound ValuJet DC-9 caught fire shortly after takeoff from Miami and crashed into the Florida Everglades, killing all 110 people on board.

In 2020, Twitter announced that it would add a warning label to tweets containing disputed or misleading information about the coronavirus.

Ten years ago: Former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (nah-WAHZ' shah-REEF') declared victory following a historic election marred by violence. A pair of car bomb attacks in Turkey killed 52 people near the Syrian border. A strong 6.2 magnitude earthquake jolted the Arabian Sea port town of Jask in the south of Iran, injuring at least 15 people.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump unveiled his long-promised plan to bring down drug prices; the plan mostly spared the pharmaceutical industry and didn't include his campaign pledge to use the Medicare program's buying power to directly negotiate lower prices for seniors. R&B singer R. Kelly went ahead with a concert in Greensboro, North Carolina, despite calls for a boycott stemming from longstanding allegations of sexual misconduct.

One year ago: The Senate fell far short in a rushed effort toward enshrining Roe v. Wade abortion access as federal law, blocked by a Republican filibuster. The move came after a draft report from the Supreme Court overturning the 50-year-old ruling. (The 6-3 decision would be issued essentially as drafted the following month.) Veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh was shot and killed while covering an Israeli military raid in the occupied West Bank. Christie's auction house said "The Rock," an egg-sized white diamond billed as the largest of its kind to go up for auction, sold for more than 21.6 million Swiss francs (\$21.75 million),

Today's Birthdays: Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan is 90. Jazz keyboardist Carla Bley is 87. Rock singer Eric Burdon (The Animals; War) is 82. Actor Pam Ferris is 75. Former White House chief of staff John F. Kelly is 73. Actor Shohreh Aghdashloo (SHOH'-reh ahg-DAHSH'-loo) is 71. Actor Frances Fisher is 71. Sports columnist Mike Lupica is 71. Actor Boyd Gaines is 70. Actor and former MTV VJ Martha Quinn is 64. Actor Tim Blake Nelson is 59. Actor Jeffrey Donovan is 55. Actor Nicky Katt is 53. Actor Coby Bell is 48. Cellist Perttu Kivilaakso (PER'-tuh KEE'-wee-lahk-soh) is 45. Actor Austin O'Brien is 42. Actor-singer Jonathan Jackson is 41. Rapper Ace Hood is 35. Latin singer Prince Royce is 34. Actor Annabelle Attanasio (TV: "Bull") is 30. Musician Howard Lawrence (Disclosure) is 29.