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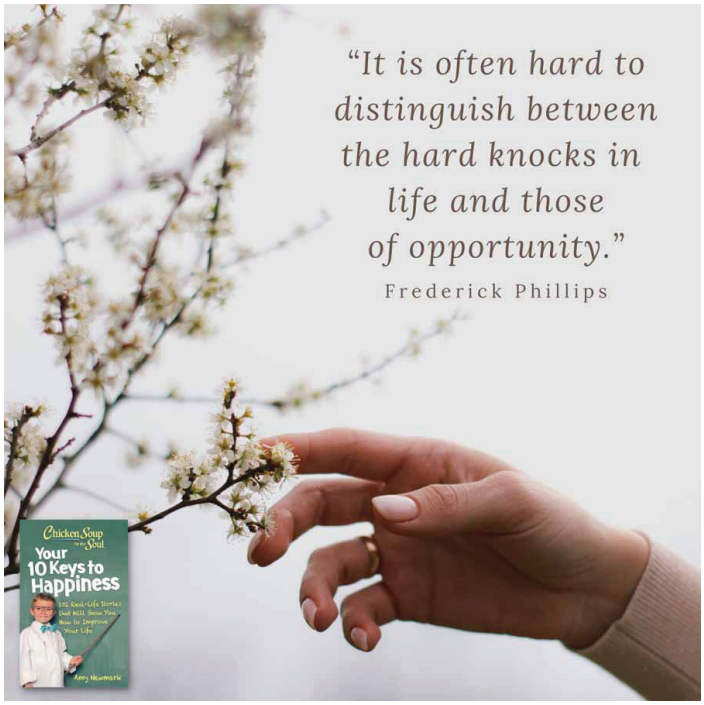

Groton Community Calendar

Wednesday, May 24

Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

DARE Graduation, 2 p.m.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Bible Study, 2:45 p.m.

Thursday, May 25

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun; lettuce, tomoato and onion; potato salad, cucumber salad, fresh fruit.

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

Girls Golf Region 1A at Lee Park, Aberdeen, 10 a.m.

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

Friday, May 26

Senior Menu: Lemon chicken breast, creamy noodles, tomato spoon salad, banana bars, whole wheat bread.

Faculty In-Service

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

Saturday, May 27

State Track Meet in Sioux Falls

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

Sunday, May 28

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.

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

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m. (Kathy Gubin leading worship)

Legion Baseball: At Clark, 1 game, noon.

Jr. Legion Baseball: at Clark, 1:30 p.m., 1 game

Tuesday, May 30

Senior Menu: Creamed chicken, buttermilk biscuit, winter blend vegetables, cookie, apricots.

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

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

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

Donald Trump will face a criminal trial in New York on March 25 next year over his alleged role in hush-money payments made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels, a date when Trump will be at a critical stage of the 2024 Republican primaries.

A 19-year-old man accused of deliberately driving a truck into a barrier near the White House has reportedly told authorities that his plan was to "seize power" and "kill the president."

Texas is suing the Biden Administration over the newly-introduced asylum rule, which recommends migrants set up appointments via a mobile app. The state claims the new process encourages illegal immigration.

A school in Miami-Dade County, Florida, has removed Amanda Gorman's poem The Hill We Climb, which she read aloud at Joe Biden's presidential inauguration, from circulation after a parent complained that it contained "hate messages."

Typhoon Mawar, the strongest storm to approach Guam in two decades, is expected to make a "significant hit" Wednesday afternoon, with residents urged to take shelter and military ships being sent away.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese met with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi in Sydney to discuss economic and security ties and signed a new migration deal to "promote the two-way mobility" of students and business people.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, nine villages in Russia's Belgorod region were evacuated following a series of attacks this week, and the governor warned civilians who fled that it's not safe to return. Meanwhile, Russia and China are set to sign bilateral agreements during Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's visit to Beijing.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

Market participants will closely watch for the minutes of the latest Federal Reserve meeting at 2 p.m. ET for the outlook of the central bank's policies, which appear cloudy amid a fight against inflation on one hand and rising risks of tipping off the economy into a recession on the other.

Nvidia, which has become a Wall Street darling and one of the best-performing names in the S&P 500 index, posts its first-quarter earnings results after the closing bell.

A vigil is scheduled to take place tonight in Uvalde, Texas, to mark one year since 19 children and two teachers were killed in the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School.

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The twilight of the idols, the birth of new stars

That's Life
by Tony Bender

You don't have to be a diehard basketball fan to appreciate that there's something special happening in the NBA finals. Not if you're a fan of excellence, of unscheduled triumph, the force of will that inspires us.

Sports, more than most facets of life, reminds us of the swiftness of time. Time defeats us all. Willie Mays in the Mets outfield in 1973. Muhammad Ali unable to turn away from the spotlight. But new stars are born just as old ones become black hole memories. It's the way of the universe.

By the time you read this, the great LeBron James' desperate Lakers may be done, bowed by the brilliance a sweet-passing, sweet-shooting Denver Nuggets team, anchored by generational greatness, Nikola Jokic, a pasty, doughy, 6-11 Serbian center who brings the ball up he court in a smooth lope and passes like Magic Johnson. Sublime, effortless passes to the right place at the right time.

He sees the court—sees everything—like a deity. Larry Bird in Charles Barkley's body with a humble demeanor that masks unrivaled competitiveness. You want to say "assassin," but you can't say that about a big lug who sweetly gestures to his daughter after the games to remind her of the song they sing together at bedtime.

He's the pivot point of a unit that exemplifies team basketball, echoing those recent vintage Steph Curry and Golden State champions, an aging, diminished team that lost a noble series to the Lakers.

Curry, who transformed the game, wrested it from plodding giants as the deadliest shooter in history, is 35. LeBron, the only player they dare mention in the same sentence with Michael Jordan, is 38. It brings to mind Nietzsche's line about The Twilight of Idols. They're lesser now but greater than most, even as they fade.

That the Lakers were able to make a run is a miracle in itself. By the trade deadline, they were lost, hopelessly buried in the standings, but they retooled with pesky unknowns, to make LeBron and Anthony Davis's team the hottest one going into the playoffs. The best defense in the league.

Meanwhile, in Denver, a team that's never even been to the finals, things have finally come together. The oft-injured Jamaal Murray—now, there's the assassin—is back and brilliantly so. It couldn't happen to a nicer guy. After an ACL injury that sidelined the 26-year-old guard, the most recent in a growing list of debilitating injuries, he was despondent and told his coach, the raspy-voiced Mike Malone, that they should consider trading him. He called himself "damaged goods." Malone responded with two beautiful words. "You're ours."

How can you not cheer for a team like that? Even when Jokic has been only great and not amazing, Murray has taken over games. With the big man on the bench in foul trouble, Murray carried the Nuggets with 30 points in the first half. In Los Angeles. Against a desperate Lakers team that fell to 3-0.

We haven't even touched on Jimmy Butler, a 6-7 force of will who has carried the unlikely Miami Heat to the precipice of the finals—almost certainly to face the vastly-more talented Nuggets. Don't count him out.

It's a hard-knock life, and Butler's been knocked around. Kicked out of the house by his mother, homeless in Houston at 13 until adopted by a family that already had seven kids, he labored in obscurity in junior college. Sat the bench in Chicago when he finally made the NBA, and bounced around—bounced out of Minnesota, a victim, perhaps, of his own intensity. And here he is. The bold, unselfish general of an unlikely team that put the favored Celtics in a 3-0 hole.

Before the NBA draft, he told an interviewer, "Please... I'm just asking you, don't write it in a way that makes people feel sorry for me. I hate that. There's nothing to feel sorry about. I love what happened to me. It made me who I am. I'm grateful for the challenges I've faced. Please, don't make them feel sorry for me."

The game's never been better, more athletic, with more compelling human drama, with more players worthy of our applause.

I lived in Denver for a few years and naturally adopted the Broncos, along with my Dolphins and Vikings; I loved Doug Moe's Nuggets, too. Dan Issel, Alex English, Kiki VanDeWeghe, Fat Lever, deadeyes, all. They'd score 140. And lose.

This incarnation plays defense. They're big and gifted. If they end up facing the Heat, it will be a pity that someone has to lose. The rest of us will win, however.

There's something special going on, something inspirational. Don't miss it.

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We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.

Presidential Power, the 14th Amendment and the Public Debt

By David Adler

The debt ceiling standoff between President Joe Biden and House Republicans has illuminated the Public Debt Clause of the 14th Amendment, one of the most obscure provisions in the Constitution and one seldom discussed since the Civil War. Its invocation may be the key to avoiding economic catastrophe.

Section 4 of the 14th Amendment provides that "The validity of the public debt, authorized by law. . . shall not be questioned." Legal scholars and historians agree that the clause was designed to ensure that the federal government would not repudiate its debts, as some former Confederate states had done.

This relatively unknown clause of the 14th Amendment aimed to place beyond doubt the obligations of the government to repay debts incurred by the Union in suppressing the southern rebellion, but its language, as the Library of Congress' analysis justly observes, "indicates a broader connotation. The validity of the public debt embraces whatever concerns the integrity of the public obligations and applies to government bonds issued after as well as before adoption of the Amendment."

Simply put, the Public Debt Clause declares to the world that America pays its bills. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has said, "America has never defaulted, and it never will."

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellin has warned Congress and President Biden that they have only until June 1 to reach a deal to raise the nation's $31.4 trillion borrowing limit or face a default. The consequences of a default—the failure of America to pay its bills—economists and government officials tell us, would be far-reaching: more than eight million people would lose their jobs; millions of social security beneficiaries, veterans, and military families could lose their monthly payments; and vital federal services including air traffic control could be disrupted if government employees are not paid. In addition, many businesses would be forced into bankruptcy, and financial markets would be gripped by panic. Economic pain in America and across the globe would be long-lasting. It is with good reason that the standoff is described as a crisis.

The looming deadline and the deep-seated difficulties in winning a compromise between President Biden and House Republicans suggest resort to the Public Debt Clause as a solution, although it has never been invoked in previous debt ceiling fights and is wrapped in controversy.

Under section four of the 14th Amendment, which guarantees that the U.S. will not default, but in fact pay its bills, it is unconstitutional for our nation not to pay its debts. President Biden, in the exercise of his duty under Article II of the Constitution—"He shall take care to faithfully execute the laws of the land"—would direct the Treasury Department to issue debts without congressional action that raises the debt ceiling.

Under this theory, since the money authorized by Congress has been spent, the federal government has an obligation to somehow find or mint the money to pay in full those whom it has promised to pay. For those wondering, President Biden, on the authority of a 1998 Supreme Court decision in the line-item veto case, has no discretionary authority to pick and choose which debts to pay. Again, the nation's debts must be paid. In full.

Those who object to this theory on grounds that such presidential action would constitute a usurpation of the congressional power "of the purse," including the authority under Article I, Section 8, Clause 2, to "borrow Money on the credit of the United States," certainly have a legitimate, textual point.

What is to be done, however, if Congress fails to exercise that power to fulfill its duty in the face of an obligation under the 14th Amendment, a scenario fully contemplated by the drafters of this pivotal

Reconstruction Amendment who were very much alive to the possibility that a post-Civil War Congress might resist payment of its debts? Mindful of that scenario, and the economic and systemic calamity that it could produce, the Framers of the 14th Amendment employed language that imposed on the federal government a direct constitutional command: "the validity of the public debt, authorized by law, shall not be questioned."

The constitutional command would be rendered toothless by an obstinate Congress unwilling to carry out its duty to pay debts that have been incurred. But the 14th Amendment is the supreme law of the land and cannot be ignored or circumvented by a legislative body unwilling to pay America's bills. And because it is a law, the president, who has a constitutional duty to execute the laws, should fulfill it by invoking the Public Debt Clause. The fact that there is no clear legal mechanism for the president to do so, other than under the authority of the Public Debt Clause through the performance of his duty in Take Care Clause, does not relieve the federal government of performing its constitutional obligation to pay the nation's debts.

While the failure of both branches—executive and legislative—to meet their constitutional responsibilities would be reprehensible, it would not begin to compare with the global financial calamity unleashed by the United States if the public debt is not paid before June 1.

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American Legion Auxiliary Unit 39 encourages the town of Groton to honor fallen warriors on National Poppy Day®

Honor our fallen warriors and contribute to the continuing needs of our veterans on National Poppy Day®, May 26, when members of American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) Unit 39 will distribute bright red poppies in exchange for a donation from 10-12 at Ken's in Groton and during the week of May 22-26, a donation poppy can and poppies will be left at the following: Groton Legion, City Hall, Ken's Food Fair, Groton Dairy Queen and Lori's Pharmacy. The Flanders Fields poppy has become an internationally known and recognized symbol of the lives sacrificed in war and the hope that none died in vain. The American Legion Family called upon Congress to proclaim the Friday before Memorial Day as National Poppy Day, which was officially designated as such in 2017.

"Wearing the poppy on National Poppy Day and throughout Memorial Day weekend is one small way to honor and remember our fallen warriors who willingly served our nation and made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom," said ALA Unit 39 President Samantha Oswald. "We must never forget."

Groton Legion Post #39 is one of the places to get your Poppy. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

The poppy also honors hospitalized and disabled veterans who handcraft many of the red, crepe paper flowers. Making the poppies provides a financial and therapeutic benefit to the veterans, as well as a benefit to thousands of other veterans.

When The American Legion Family adopted the poppy as its memorial flower in the early 1920s, the blood-red icon became an enduring symbol of honor for the sacrifices of our veterans from the battlefields of France in World War I to today's global war on terror. The American Legion Auxiliary raises about $4 million each year distributing poppies throughout the nation, with 100 percent of the funds raised going directly to help veterans, military, and their families.

The American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) is a community of volunteers serving veterans, military, and their families. Our members also support the mission of The American Legion in improving the quality of life for our nation's veterans. Proud sponsor of ALA Girls Nation, National Poppy Day® and recognized for advocating for veterans on Capitol Hill, the more than 600,000 ALA members across the country volunteer millions of hours annually and raise millions of dollars in service to veterans, military, and their families. Founded in 1919, the ALA is one of the oldest patriotic membership organizations in the U.S.A. To learn more and to volunteer, join, and donate, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT
https://southdakotasearchlight.com

Tie vote delays decision on carbon pipeline policy in Minnehaha County

Ordinance would set minimum distances from pipelines to homes, schools, cities

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 23, 2023 4:07 PM

SIOUX FALLS — Minnehaha County commissioners gridlocked Tuesday on setbacks from rural homes and postponed a vote on an ordinance with the potential to scuttle two carbon capture pipelines.

The absence of Commission Chair Jean Bender set the stage for a 2-2 vote and a return to the issue at the June 6 meeting.

Plenty of people are waiting for the county's call. Tuesday's discussion on pipeline permitting in the state's most populous county packed the commission room with supporters and opponents, with another two dozen listening in overflow areas.

The commission is considering an ordinance after months of back-and-forth and well over a year of steady public input from county residents and landowners. It would force any pipelines in the county to stay 750 feet away from rural homes, 1,000 feet from schools, and between a mile and half a mile from cities, depending on their populations.

If a pipeline route is closer to any of those properties, its backers would either need sign-off from property owners or a conditional use permit. Such permits are granted at the discretion of the county commission and require a public hearing with public comment.

Tuesday's tie vote came after more than two hours of testimony and debate. The subject of the tie was a proposed amendment to the ordinance that would shorten the allowable distances between property lines and pipelines.

The vast majority of those who've addressed the issue publicly in Minnehaha County oppose the two companies that aim to pass pipeline projects through South Dakota, Summit Carbon Solutions and Navigator CO2 Ventures. Each project has been promoted as part of an industry-saving innovation for U.S. ethanol that would sequester carbon underground.

Sequestering the carbon they emit while producing ethanol would allow ethanol companies to profit from federal tax credits. It would also grant them the opportunity to sell fuel in states with tighter climate change policies than South Dakota and most of the Midwestern states where ethanol and the corn grown to produce it come from.

Both sides of Tuesday's debate used that narrative to bolster their claims. Pipeline opponents – who supported the county's proposal as a "bare minimum" to protect the public in the event of a catastrophic rupture – told commissioners that one industry's cash flows ought not factor into zoning decisions. High concentrations of carbon can be fatal.

"The amount of money ethanol companies might make or lose should not stand in the way of intelligent development," said Chase Jensen, a Valley Springs-area landowner who spoke on behalf of several others. The pipeline ordinance on offer Tuesday "is already bent toward the companies and not the people."

Several opponents, including Rep. John Sjaarda, R-Valley Springs, said they support and benefit from the state's ethanol infrastructure, but nonetheless oppose the capture and transport of carbon via underground pipeline.

"I'm a big supporter of ethanol," Sjaarda said. "This ordinance is not about ethanol, it's about proper development."

Representatives from the two companies, ethanol boosters and a pipeline safety consultant characterized the county's proposal as one that would make it all but impossible to build their projects. Failure to capitalize on the carbon sequestration economy would amount to a death knell for an ethanol industry that's boosted corn prices and helped keep farmers afloat for the past 30 years, they said.

"You cannot support ethanol and not support this pipeline," said Walter Wendland of Ringneck Energy, an ethanol plant near Onida.

Aaron Eldridge of Summit Carbon Solutions, meanwhile, was among those to say that pipelines represent the safest way to transport hazardous materials, and to point out that more than 100 miles of hazardous pipelines are already in place beneath Minnehaha County, though none carry carbon.

He also told commissioners that the federal Pipeline Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) holds sway over carbon pipelines.

That agency requires minimum setbacks of just 50 feet from homes, he said. He pointed to a judge's comments during arguments on a pipeline-restricting county ordinance in Shelby County, Iowa, as proof that the pipelines would win in court.

"We believe this is pre-empted by PHMSA," said Eldridge.

Commissioner Joe Kippley attempted to move the zoning ordinance closer to "neutral" ground by changing the distance required between rural homes and pipelines from 750 to 330 feet, citing safety guidance from the federal pipeline authority.

The 750-foot figure, though backed by the county's planning and zoning board, is "arbitrary," Kippley said.

"It's not our role to second-guess PHMSA and the federal government," he said.

Pipeline opponents lined up to argue against his amendment, with one man suggesting that each commissioner put a plastic bag over their head and try to run 330 feet to simulate what it would feel like to be caught in a cloud of carbon dioxide after a pipeline rupture.

Pipeline supporters didn't like the setback change, either.

"We remain opposed to the ordinance as a whole," Eldridge said.

In the end, Commissioners Kippley and Dean Karsky supported the 330-foot change. Commissioners Gerald Beninga and Jen Bleyenberg voted against it.

The commission will reconvene to take up the amendment, with Bender present to break a tie, next month. A vote on the full ordinance would follow.

In the meantime, Brown County commissioners are among those locked in a federal court battle with the pipeline companies over their own restrictive pipeline ordinance, and more than 80 landowners are facing eminent domain action seeking access to their land.

The federal pipeline administration will hold two days of public meetings on the topic of carbon dioxide pipeline safety starting May 31 in Des Moines, Iowa.

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.

Backers drop plan for massive energy storage project at Missouri River site

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 23, 2023 3:31 PM

Backers of a multibillion-dollar proposal to build a giant reservoir for energy storage in rural south-central South Dakota said Tuesday they are no longer pursuing the project at that location.

"Not due to the opposition. Due to the financial risk of the project," said Tim Blodgett, vice president of member services and communications for Missouri River Energy Services in Sioux Falls.

There was considerable public opposition to the project, expressed in the media and in formal written comments and public meetings.

The plan was called the Gregory County Pumped Storage Project. It would have included the construction of a massive new reservoir above the western bluffs of the Missouri River, about 20 miles northeast of Gregory. Pumped storage projects work like colossal batteries. They pump water into a reservoir when electricity demand is low, thereby storing excess energy produced by renewable sources like wind and solar panels. Then, when demand is high, the water is released through a hydroelectric plant.

The two entities involved, MidAmerican Energy and Missouri River Energy Services, said the decision not to pursue the project was made following their evaluation process.

Missouri River Energy Services announced the decision to abandon the project in a news release Tuesday. Blodgett told South Dakota Searchlight the company remains committed to exploring all possible options for delivering reliable, affordable and resilient energy resources, including continued evaluation of pumped storage technology.

"For us, this is not the end of us pursuing pumped storage along the Missouri River," Blodgett said. "This is just the end of this project."

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

Progressives try to persuade Biden to use the 14th Amendment to resolve debt crisis

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 23, 2023 4:39 PM

WASHINGTON — Progressives are pushing hard for President Joe Biden to take the unprecedented step of invoking the 14th Amendment as a way to avoid financial calamity if the White House and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy do not strike a deal on the debt ceiling in the coming days.

The lawmakers and legal scholars argue that the Reconstruction-era amendment — to ensure debts were paid after the Civil War — trumps the debt limit statute, or the law that sets the dollar amount of how much the U.S. government can borrow to pay its bills.

Section 4 of the amendment states "the validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred … shall not be questioned."

"The text of the 14th Amendment, which says that the debt of the United States 'shall not be questioned,' … nothing questions that more than a default, or frankly, a debt limit that may make it impossible practically to pay the debt of the United States," Democratic Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island said Monday on a call with reporters hosted by the left-leaning Roosevelt Institute.

A unilateral action by the president to proceed as though the U.S. has not run out of borrowing authority would not bypass Congress, the chair of the Senate Committee on the Budget and others argue.

Rather, it would be a choice by the U.S. leader to follow the letter of the 14th Amendment and continue abiding by the numerous spending laws passed by Congress, they argue.

"It's not 'How can the Biden administration go around Congress?' The problem is Congress has legislated contradictory things. They've said you must spend this money and also, these are the taxes that you must collect. And also, here's the debt ceiling," UCLA law professor Joseph Fishkin argued on the call.

"A lot of people seem to be assuming that if the administration is kind of stuck in that dilemma where you have to violate one of those statutes, for some reason, the one that has to be violated is the one on spending money," he continued.

Biden and McCarthy met Monday to continue negotiations but still hadn't reached an agreement to raise the nation's borrowing limit.

Administration's stance

Biden said Sunday that he's "looking at the 14th Amendment, as to whether or not we have the authority."

"I think we have the authority. The question is: Could it be done and invoked in time that it could not — would not be appealed and, as a consequence, pass the date in question and still default on the debt. That's a question that I think is unresolved," he said during remarks from the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen hours later on NBC's "Meet the Press" also expressedconcern about whether the administration had time to invoke the amendment as a solution.

"It doesn't seem like something that could be appropriately used in these circumstances, given the legal uncertainty around it, and given the tight time frame we're on. So my devout hope is that Congress will raise the debt ceiling," she told host Chuck Todd.

Weeks earlier at the White House, the president said he was "considering" the amendment but "the problem is, it would have to be litigated, and in the meantime without an extension, the (situation) would still end up in the same place."

Proponents of using the amendment said they responded "quizzically" to the administration's concern about time.

"You know, really, it doesn't take any time. You actually just keep going with spending the money Congress has appropriated, and then there will be fights and litigation after that," Fishkin said, adding that the quicker a decision is made, the better chances are for any "cloud" over the market to be "lifted."

Legal questions

But a question remains over how the stock market would react to even a whiff of the courts being the ultimate decider on the 14th Amendment.

"Some people assume that the president's power to issue new debt would be resolved legally by the Supreme Court, but it would be resolved, for practical purposes, by the bond markets before the courts could even act. And the resolution would not be a happy one," Michael McConnell, director of the Constitutional Law Center at Stanford Law School, argued in a New York Times op-ed this month.

McConnell wrote that the idea that the president could preempt Congress's power of the purse as "far-fetched."

"(Section 4) does not make it unconstitutional for the United States to run out of money. Nice idea, but impossible. Section 4 prevents the only institution of government that could deny the validity of the debt — namely, Congress — from doing so," McConnell wrote. "For the United States to fail to pay interest or principal on its debt would be financially catastrophic, but it would not affect the validity of the debt."

Another question proponents of the 14th Amendment are asking: Who could challenge the president in court for continuing to pay the nation's bills?

"No one really has standing to challenge spending money that was appropriated (for) other people," Fishkin argued.

However, he predicts a flood of lawsuits would follow a default, which would have wide-ranging consequences for anyone who relies on the federal government for income, including Social Security recipients, disabled veterans, military contractors and so on.

The National Association of Government Employees, which represents 75,000 federal employees under the umbrella Service Employees International Union, has already filed suit in a Massachusetts federal court on behalf of members who will lose income and not be able to pay union dues as a result of a default.

The group filed suit, in part, on the grounds that allowing the Treasury to prioritize certain payments over others during a default violates the separation of powers. In other words, Congress makes the spending decisions, not the president.

A federal judge has scheduled a hearing for May 31.

Progressives' push

Dozens of progressive House Democrats sent a letter to Biden May 19 urging him to invoke the 14th Amendment.

"If the options are either agreeing to major cuts to domestic priorities under the Republican threat of destroying the economy and moving forward to honor America's debts, we join prominent legal scholars, economists, former budget officials, and a former president in advocating for invoking the 14th Amend-

ment of the Constitution," lawmakers wrote.

"Not only does the debt ceiling run counter to the Constitution's mandate that the validity of America's public debt shall not be questioned, it contradicts the appropriations law that requires the Treasury to issue debt for the funding you are obligated to administer at Congress's direction," the letter continued.

Independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and 10 Senate Democrats also sent a letter to the president advocating for unilateral action. Those who signed it included Whitehouse and Tina Smith of Minnesota, Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Jack Reed of Rhode Island and John Fetterman of Pennsylvania.

"Republicans' unwillingness to consider one penny in new revenue from the wealthy and large corporations, along with their diminishment of the disastrous consequences of default, have made it seemingly impossible to enact a bipartisan budget deal at this time," wrote the senators, who sent the letter May 18. "We write to urgently request that you prepare to exercise your authority under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution."

Not a new idea

Discussion of invoking the 14th Amendment has entered the national conversation in prior years as Congress and previous administrations edged toward the fiscal cliff.

Following the U.S. nearly defaulting in 2011, the idea escalated when Cornell Law professor Michael Dorf and University of Florida Levin College of Law professor Neil Buchanan argued that the president "ignoring" the debt ceiling is the "least unconstitutional" course of action.

However, previous administrations and legal scholars have rejected the idea.

Biden said on May 9 once the current debt situation is addressed, he wants to take a look "months down the road" at what a court would say on whether a president can use those provisions to address the debt ceiling without action by Congress.

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

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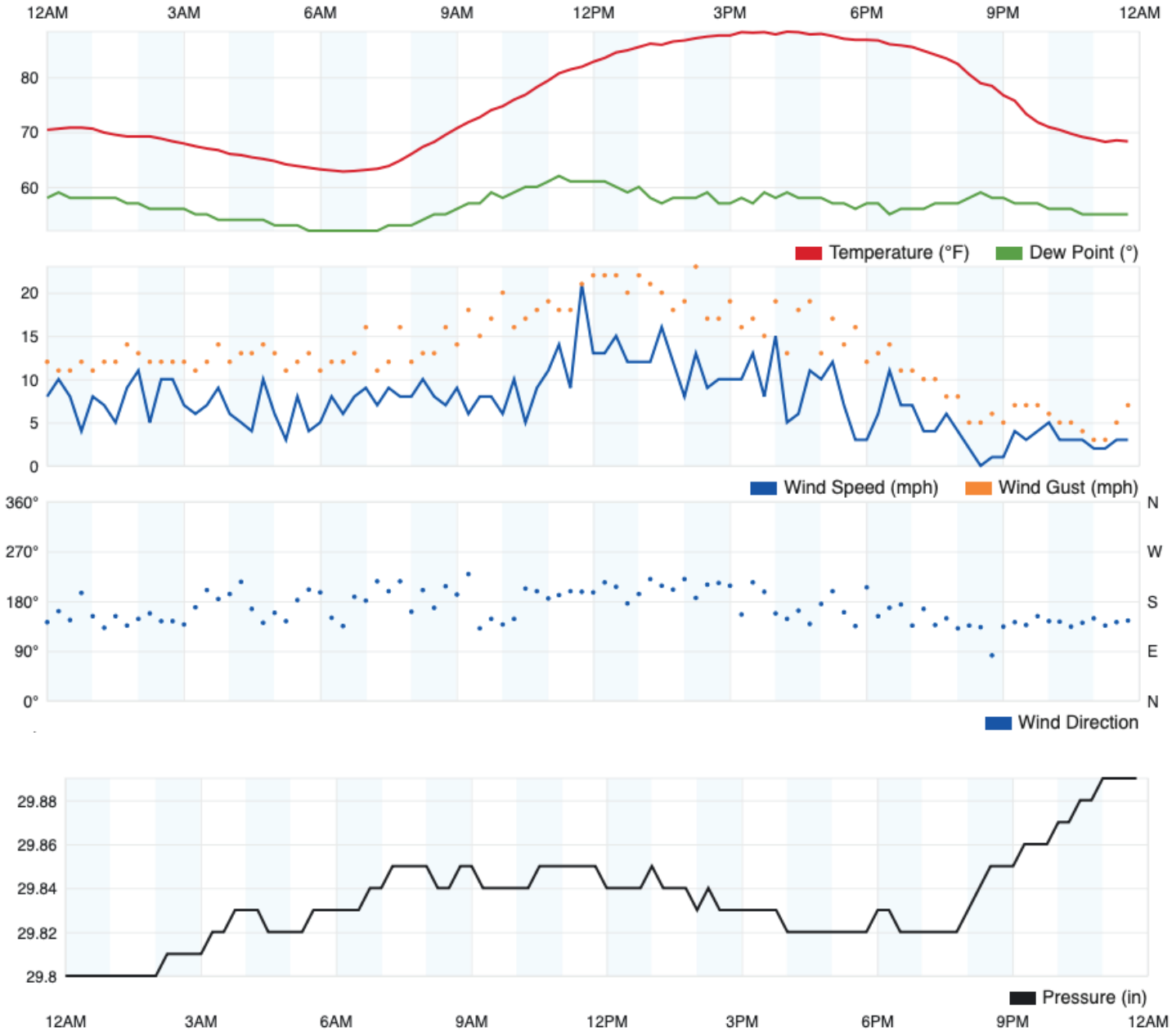
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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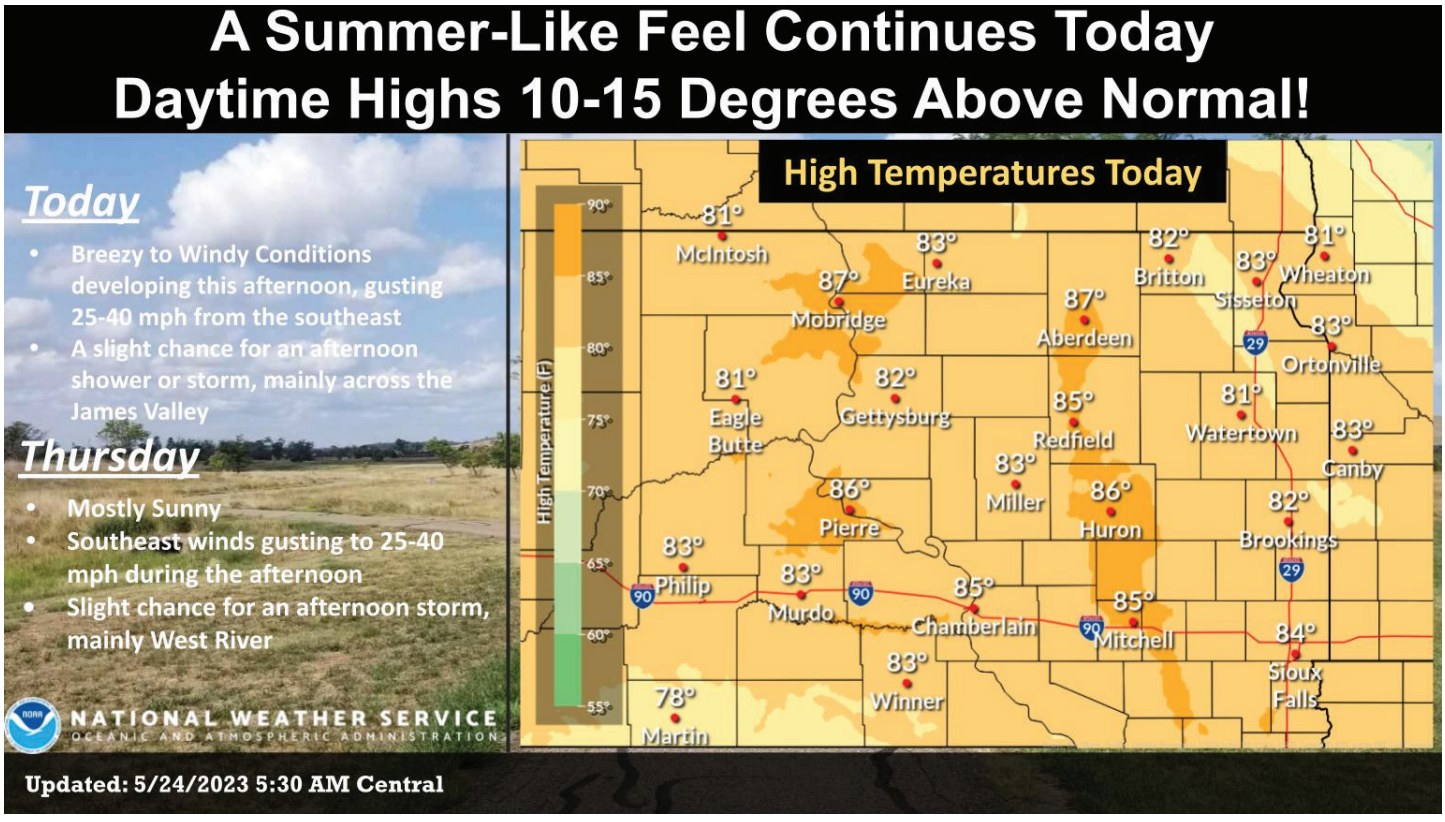
Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Sunny then Slight Chance Showers	Partly Cloudy then Mostly Clear and Breezy	Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy	Mostly Sunny and Windy	Slight Chance Showers and Windy	Breezy. Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance Showers
High: 87 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 85 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 83 °F



Well above normal temps will continue to the next couple days as gusty southeast winds develop during the afternoon hours. There will be a slight chance for an afternoon shower or storm in a couple locations, but overall dry conditions look to prevail.

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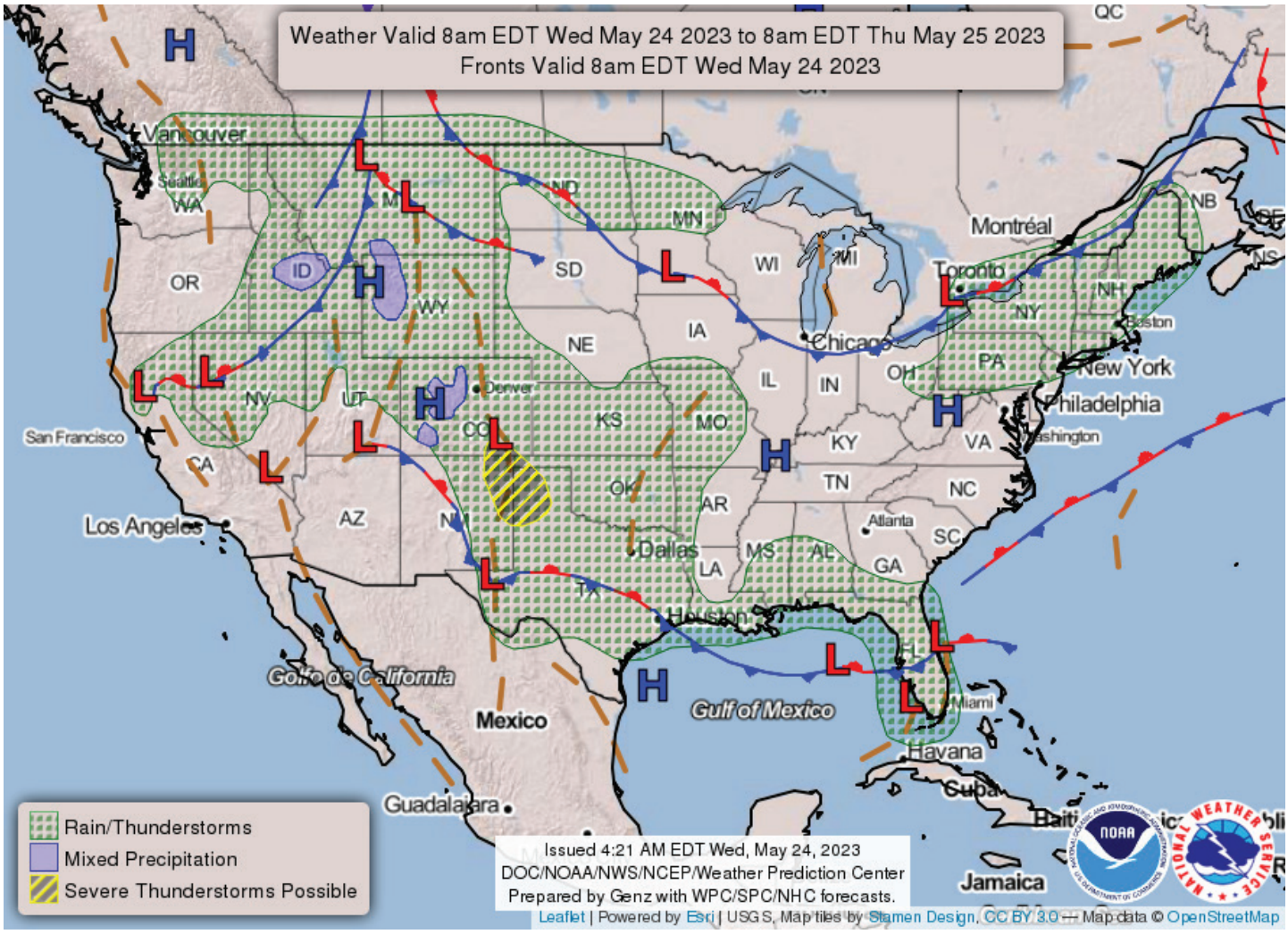
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 4:38 PM
Low Temp: 63 °F at 6:31 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 1:16 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 16 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 1926
Record Low: 25 in 1897
Average High: 73
Average Low: 48
Average Precip in May.: 2.61
Precip to date in May.: 2.15
Average Precip to date: 6.58
Precip Year to Date: 7.87
Sunset Tonight: 9:07:26 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50:13 AM



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Today in Weather History

May 24, 1960: A tornado touched down about 7 miles northwest of Roscoe and destroyed a small shed near a country schoolhouse. Funnel clouds were also observed in Hosmer area, near Eureka, and 30 miles west of Aberdeen. An unofficial report of 4 inches of rain fell at Hosmer.

May 24, 2008: A supercell thunderstorm produced seven tornadoes in Dewey County. Since these tornadoes remained in the open country, all were rated EF0.

1894 - Six inches of snow blanketed Kentucky. Just four days earlier as much as ten inches of snow had fallen across Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. Six days earlier a violent storm had wrecked nine ships on Lake Michigan. (David Ludlum)

1896: An estimated F4 tornado passed ten miles north of Des Moines, Iowa during the late evening. As many as seven members of one family, the at the north edge of Valeria, Iowa, died as they ran to the storm cellar. Five others died in a nearby home. A steel railroad rail was reportedly driven 15 feet into the ground. The death toll was at least 21.

1930 - A tornado touched down near the town of Pratt, KS, and traveled at the incredibly slow speed of just 5 mph. (The Weather Channel)

1940 - Hail fell near Ada OK to a depth of six to eight inches, and rainfall runoff left drifts of hail up to five feet high. (The Weather Channel)

1973: An F4 tornado tore through the small town of Union City, Oklahoma, killing two and injuring four others. This tornado was the first storm to be studied in detail by the National Severe Storms Laboratory Doppler Radar Unit at Norman, OK and an armada of researchers in the field. Research of the radar data from the storm would lead to the discovery of a "TVS," or Tornado Vortex Signature. The presence of a TVS on Doppler radar data is a very strong indication of tornadic potential in a severe thunderstorm.

1987 - Severe thunderstorms in southwest Texas spawned a couple of tornadoes near Silverton, and produced golf ball size hail east of the town of Happy. Thunderstorms also produced large hail and damaging winds in Louisiana and Texas. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the southeastern U.S. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 88 mph at Columbia, NC. Baseball size hail was reported near Tifton GA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced severe weather across the Upper Midwest through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned 30 tornadoes, and there were 158 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-3) tornado caused five million dollars damage at Corning, IA, and a powerful (F-4) tornado caused five million dollars damage at Traer, IA. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 88 mph killed one person and injured five others at Stephensville, WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Severe thunderstorms spawned two dozen tornadoes from Montana to Oklahoma. Four tornadoes carved a 109-mile path across central Kansas. The third of the four tornadoes blew 88 cars of an 125-car train off the track, stacking them three to four cars high in some cases, and the fourth tornado caused 3.9 million dollars damage. The third tornado injured six persons who were trying to escape in vehicles. A woman was "sucked out" of a truck and said that at one time she was "airborne, trying to run but my feet wouldn't touch the ground". She also saw a live deer "flying through theair". (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002: The last measurable snow of the season fell in Marquette, Michigan. This snowfall brought the city's seasonal snowfall to 319.8 inches, by far the city's snowiest winter ever.

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DON'T STOP NOW!

Some time ago it was my privilege to be the commencement speaker at a high school graduation. At the end of the service, the students came forward and walked up to the headmaster to receive their diplomas. As he shook their hands, he looked into their eyes and said softly to each one of them, "Don't stop now, keep moving forward!"

Great advice - not only for the graduates but for everyone, every day. Whatever we do, wherever we go, we must keep on keeping on. We must keep forgiving! Keep growing! Keep helping! Keep loving! Keep witnessing! Keep serving! Keep worshipping! Keep working! Keep laughing! Keep moving forward! We must never stop doing good, but keep on keeping on!

If this is important for life in general, it is even more important in the life of a Christian. Paul said that "I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be." "Keep working" means "Keep on keeping on doing good!"

What great advice Paul offers us. Nothing must ever interfere with, nor cause us, to take our eyes off of knowing and serving Christ. We must focus on Him, and His will for our lives, as Paul did, to win the race and receive the prize He will award us by being faithful to Him.

Prayer: Help us, Heavenly Father, to focus on "the prize" You have for each of us, as we run life's race. Help us to keep focused on You as we grow into Your likeness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Philippians 3:8-14

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

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2023 Community Events

01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
06/17/2023 Groton Triathalon
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

The Groton Independent
Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.23.23

3 10 22 65 66 **19**

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$169,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 12 Mins 34 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.22.23

5 8 23 32 43 **10**

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$3,100,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 12 Mins 34 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.23.23

16 22 24 26 27 **8**

TOP PRIZE:
$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 42 Mins 34 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.20.23

1 14 22 24 27

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$67,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 12 Mins 34 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.22.23

14 17 38 39 40 **14**

TOP PRIZE:
$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 11 Mins 35 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.22.23

9 38 48 52 68 **25**

Power Play: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$190,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 11 Mins 35 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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News from the Associated Press

Rain, winds lash Guam as Typhoon Mawar closes in and residents shelter

By GRACE GARCES BORDALLO and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HAGATNA, Guam (AP) — Typhoon Mawar aimed its fury at the tiny U.S. territory of Guam on Wednesday as residents with nowhere to go hunkered down to face the devastating winds and torrential rains from what was expected to be the worst storm to hit the Pacific island in decades.

The U.S. military sent away ships, residents stockpiled supplies and anyone not living in a concrete house was urged to seek safety elsewhere ahead of the typhoon, which was forecast to arrive as a Category 4 storm with winds of 140 mph (225 kph) but could possibly strengthen to a Category 5, the most powerful. The last time a Category 5 directly hit Guam was 1962.

Forecasters at the National Weather Service office in Guam said they were seeing "almost whiteout conditions" at their office and hearing low rumblings and shaking shutters and doors as the storm intensified Wednesday afternoon.

Lightning had become an increasing threat as conditions continued to deteriorate into the evening, the weather service reported. And an extreme wind warning was in effect for northern Guam for extremely dangerous hurricane winds.

"Stay inside. Trees are coming down; power lines are coming down," said Brandon Aydlett, a meteorologist with the service. "Everything is changing — it is too dangerous to be outside."

Many communities on the 212-square-mile (549-square-kilometer) island had lost power by the afternoon and some to the south had lost water service. A flash flood warning was issued for the entire island as forecasters predicted as much as 25 inches (64 centimeters) of rain in addition to a life-threatening storm surge of 4 to 6 feet (1.2 to 2 meters).

Ahead of the storm, Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero ordered residents of coastal, low-lying and flood-prone areas of the territory of over 150,000 people to evacuate to higher elevations. The highest point on the island is Mt. Lamlam in the southwest at 1,334 feet (406 meters). But much of the beachfront tourist district of Tamuning, where many resort hotels are located, is close to sea level.

In low-lying Agat along the southern coast, resident Reuel Drilon began preparing Friday and spent the weekend tying down patio furniture and trash containers. Nearly every home in the village, he said, has a mango tree — which officials warned could be ripped from the ground and become roadblocks and deadly flying projectiles.

"A lot of folks are keeping their eyes on trees," he told The Associated Press before the storm hit. "Down south, we have a lot of coconut trees and mango trees."

Guam is a crucial hub for U.S. forces in the Pacific, and the Department of Defense controls about a third of the island. Rear Adm. Benjamin Nicholson, Joint Region Marianas commander, authorized the evacuation of defense personnel, dependents and employees in areas expected to be affected.

The military said it moved its ships out to sea as a standard precaution. It sent its aircraft off the island or placed them in protective hangars. Any personnel remaining on the island were sheltering in place. About 6,800 U.S. service members are assigned to Guam, according to the Pentagon.

With rain from the storm fell over the island and as of Wednesday evening the typhoon had maximum sustained winds of 140 mph (225 kph), according to the National Weather Service, and wind gusts earlier were peaking at 170 mph (274 kph). Its center was about 15 miles (24 kilometers) north-northeast of the island.

The weather service warned of "considerable damage" from a "triple threat" of winds, torrential rains and life-threatening storm surge of 4 to 6 feet (1.2 to 2 meters), with dangerous surf of 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 meters). It said the storm could hit Wednesday afternoon in the southern part of Guam, which lies west of the International Date Line and is a day ahead of the U.S. mainland and Hawaii.

If Guam doesn't take a direct hit, it will be very close, said Patrick Doll, the lead weather service meteorologist in Guam. Mawar is a Malaysian word that means "rose," he noted.

School buses picked up residents at island community centers and transported them to 11 elementary schools outfitted as shelters. Civic workers in various villages warned residents to secure loose objects in their yards and seek shelter immediately. Some spread the word by megaphone, while others turned to social media. Power flickered off and on as the rain and wind intensified, and officials said nearly 900 people were in shelters.

Leon Guerrero urged residents in a YouTube message to remain calm and ordered the National Guard to help those in low-lying areas evacuate, saying, "We are at the crosshairs of Typhoon Mawar. Take action now."

Guerrero said an emergency declaration approved by President Joe Biden will support the mobilization of resources into Guam, which is "especially crucial given our distance from the continental U.S."

Joshua Paulino, a client manager at Xerox Guam, was sheltering at home in the central village of Chalan Pago with his wife, two sons and mother after the family closed the shutters and secured outdoor objects. He worried that the storm could dump rain on the island for a long time, since it was forecast to pass by gradually.

"This storm is moving very slowly so that is making me really uneasy," Paulino said by text message.

And an ocean away in Los Angeles, Marichelle Tanag was fretting from afar after her parents, who are in their 70s and have survived many typhoons in their decades on the island. They boarded up windows, stocked up on a couple of weeks of food, prepared the generator and filled bathtubs with water. Their home in Tamuning, also in central Guam, is made of concrete, but she worried about it nevertheless.

"Will the house stand? ... If not, will they be able to go to another place of safety if needed, as fast as possible, and not get in the way of any of the flying debris?" Tanag said by phone.

Rota, an island in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, was also under a typhoon warning, Doll said. Tinian and Saipan, in the Northern Marianas, were under tropical storm warnings. Some people in those areas are still in temporary shelters or tents after Category 5 Super Typhoon Yutu in 2018, Doll noted.

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Kelleher reported from Honolulu. AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein and Associated Press writers Audrey McAvoy in Honolulu, Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles and Sarah Brumfield in Washington contributed.

Uvalde victim's mother perseveres through teaching, connecting with daughter's memory

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas (AP) — The first thing Veronica Mata sees when she wakes up each day is her 10-year-old daughter, Tess, smiling down at her from a photo perched on her bedside table.

Speaking to the silent image of the child she lost in one of the United States' most notorious mass shootings, Mata asks for the fortitude to go on and to be a good teacher.

"I just look at it and I just tell her, 'Tess, give me the strength, baby girl. Help me get up.'"

Throughout the day, every day, Mata carries her daughter with her: "Tess 10" is written on her license plate. Dangling from the silver bracelet she wears on her left wrist is a charm that reads, "Uvalde Strong." The slogan, adopted by other U.S. cities after mass killings, became the mantra of her town after Tess, 18 other fourth-grade students and their two teachers were gunned down at Robb Elementary School on May 24, 2022.

In a decade replete with mass killings, many of them involving shootings, Uvalde stands out — both for the young age of most of its victims and the abysmal law enforcement response. Nearly 400 heavily armed officials rushed to the school but waited more than an hour before one of them confronted and killed the shooter. Outraged families of children slain have demanded answers and accountability. One year after the killings, they haven't gotten much of either.

Yet, like the survivors and relatives of victims struck down in previous mass shootings, the people of Uvalde must find ways to keep going, even as they stop to commemorate the tragedy's first anniversary.

Mata finds it helps to have a daily routine: During her short commute to her job at Dalton Elementary School, she listens to Olivia Rodrigo, Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift, artists featured in a playlist that Tess put together just weeks before her death.

Mata drives through the middle of town: past the Civic Center where she found out Tess had been killed, and through the town square, where crosses memorialize all 21 lives lost. Then a couple of blocks behind the square to visit a colorful mural honoring her daughter's life.

The lifelike painted portrait — one of numerous murals gracing the sides of buildings throughout Uvalde in honor of each of the victims — shows a smiling Tess making the peace sign with her right hand. Just behind her is the image of one of the players from her beloved Houston Astros baseball team and of herself in uniform, holding a bat. "I can't, I have softball," proclaims a large emblem pasted next to it. A painted version of her beloved cat Oliver ambles along the wall toward her. A TikTok logo on the mural is a reminder of how Tess loved to imitate viral dances — her renditions still exist on her mother's phone.

Mata parks, says good morning, and then drives away.

TEACHING THROUGH GRIEF

Mata, a kindergarten teacher at Dalton Elementary School, returned to the classroom at the start of the 2022-2023 school year for her 12th year.

She wonders how she would keep her students safe if a shooter were to enter her classroom at a time when mass killings across the country are surpassing record levels.

"Where am I going to hide 20 students?" she remembers asking her husband when she cleaned out the room last summer.

She has since reorganized her cabinets so that they can be hidden behind and cleaned out closets to create potential hiding places.

THE DAY OF THE SHOOTING

It was late on the morning of May 24, 2022, when Mata was told that both Tess' school, Robb Elementary, and then her own were on lockdown. In and of itself, that wasn't terribly alarming; schools often took such action, she said, in response to frequent police chases involving people trying to illegally cross the Texas-Mexico border just an hour away.

But when other teachers began receiving calls that there was a shooter inside Robb, her heart began to hammer in her chest. She called her husband, Jerry, who was already driving toward the school, and stayed on the phone with him as he moved onto streets overflowing with police and first responders.

Then, she heard gunfire. The shots, her husband told her, had come from the side of the building housing their daughter's fourth-grade wing. He said he had to go and hung up. Mata tried contacting Tess' teachers, who were usually quick to respond to texts and emails. No answer.

After getting permission from her own principal to leave, Mata raced to the town's Civic Center, where buses were dropping off Robb students, and anxiously eyed a list of classrooms that had been safely evacuated. Tess' was not one of them.

She and her husband were rerouted to the hospital, but were told nobody matching Tess' description had been admitted. An official told her she could get more information by returning to the Civic Center. There, at 11:30 p.m., she said she and her husband experienced "what no mother and father should have to go through:" the news that Tess had been killed.

IT'S NOT THE SAME TOWN ANYMORE

Uvalde — its landscape and its aura — have been forever changed by the killings. Visitors who once passed through on their way to the Frio River now slow down to view crosses set up at the entrance to the small town; the "Uvalde Strong" written in chipped paint on storefronts; and the abandoned Robb Elementary School building, which remains shuttered and guarded daily by state troopers.

School lockdowns and drills are commonplace as tensions rise along the nearby international border.

"Kids who I know that were in Tess' classroom … they are scared to death every day," Mata said. "No

amount of drills, no amount of training can ever prepare you for a type of war like that."

On Tuesdays, Mata and other victims' families make the three-hour trek to the capital of Austin to advocate for gun safety legislation in the nation's largest red state. Attempts to raise the minimum buying age for semi-automatic rifles from 18 to 21 were shut down in both GOP-led legislative chambers, despite a few Republican votes in support.

AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING GRIEF

Memories of May 24 haunt Mata and her husband. There are days, she says, when she needs to step outside her classroom to collect herself or talk out her grief.

That's when she turns to a fellow teacher who she says was "the last one to ever give my baby a hug," following an awards ceremony at Robb Elementary.

The friend told her: "She picked up her glasses, like she always does, and runs, and I give her the biggest hug ever and she says, 'Tell my mom I say hi and I love her.'"

TRYING TO SAY GOODBYE

Recently, Veronica and Jerry celebrated their eldest daughter, Faith's, graduation from Texas State University. Tess had been learning to swim so that she could join her sister in the tradition of jumping in the nearby river after commencement.

This summer, the family plans to put everything in Tess' bedroom back to the way she left it before flooding forced them to move some of her belongings. Gifts they have received from people in her memory — preserved roses, knickknacks, art, a signed Astros jersey — cover every spot in the room except one, on the bed, where Oliver the cat patiently awaits her return.

A DAILY VISIT

When the school day is over, Mata goes home, has dinner with her husband, then takes a trip to the cemetery.

She carefully cleans her daughter's grave, a polished gray granite headstone embellished with Tess' photo, then sits in front of it on a black marble bench decorated with butterflies in Tess' favorite lavender and teal colors. She tells Tess about her day, of her conversations with Faith, and how things went in Austin that week. And she asks her daughter for advice on the best path forward, for strength to carry on another day.

"All right, baby, I will see you later. I love you," Mata says, walking away.

She'll be back tomorrow.

Trump's freewheeling, stream-of-consciousness speaking style draws legal attention amid probes

By TRENTON DANIEL and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump speaks about his legal woes in a way that would make most defense attorneys wince.

A recent sampling: In a March interview on Fox News Channel, the Republican former president said he had "the right to take" classified documents with him to his Florida resort and wouldn't say he hadn't looked at the records since leaving office. During a CNN town hall this month, he said he told a Georgia elections official "you owe me" votes in the 2020 election.

At the same town hall on May 10 he insulted a female writer as a "wack job" — only a day after that same woman, E. Jean Carroll, won a $5 million judgment against him in a civil suit alleging defamation and sexual assault. On Monday, Carroll amended a lawsuit to hold him liable for the town hall remarks.

Trump, the leading contender for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, has never hesitated to offer his opinion or joust with his antagonists. The problem, legal experts say, is that the former president is under intensifying scrutiny from state and federal prosecutors, and those same prosecutors can use the former president's statements against him in a variety of ways.

"Any utterances by a defendant, whether they are confessions, denials, observations, nonsensical gibberish, or just plain goofy are nothing but pure gold for prosecutors," said Julieanne Himelstein, a former assistant U.S. attorney in Washington.

Trump has found himself under investigation by prosecutors stretching from New York to Georgia.

He was indicted in March by a Manhattan grand jury on charges related to hush-money payments made on his behalf during the 2016 presidential campaign. On Tuesday, a New York judge set the trial to begin on March 25, in the midst of the primary contests. Trump, appearing via video conference, threw his hands up in frustration at the timing of the trial and glowered at the camera.

A local prosecutor in Georgia is investigating whether the former president and his allies broke the law in seeking to overturn his 2020 election loss. Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis suggested last week that indictments could come in August. Meanwhile, a Justice Department special counsel is probing the former president's role in the Jan. 6., 2021, insurrection and the discovery of classified documents at Mar-a-Largo, Trump's Florida home and resort.

In recent media appearances and during rallies, Trump has made comments that could be seen as incriminating or, at the very least, complicate his legal team's ability to beat back charges. He seemed to get into particular trouble during a May 10 town hall hosted by CNN.

The former president spent nearly an hour discussing a range of issues while also commenting on the investigations in ways that run counter to generally accepted legal advice. Not only did he re-insult Carroll and provide Fulton County's prosecutor more fodder for her probe but he also gave the Justice Department an opening by claiming he couldn't recall whether he had shown classified documents to anyone.

Joyce Vance, a law professor who served as a U.S. attorney in Alabama under President Barack Obama, opined on Twitter: "There were prosecutors and agents taking notes tonight."

Trump also suggested that he was personally involved in taking records to Mar-a-Lago — "I was there and I took what I took and it gets declassified," he said. That statement is at odds with arguments made by his own lawyers, who as recently as last month suggested in a letter to Congress that the document removal was the "result of haphazard records-keeping and packing" rather than an intentional decision by Trump.

The statements are being made as the documents investigation shows signs of winding down and as Justice Department Special Counsel Jack Smith zeroes in on the question of potential obstruction, drilling into the failure by Trump and his representatives to return the classified records in his possession despite being issued a subpoena to do so.

Trump's penchant for public statements was on display in the last special counsel investigation he faced. He famously told an interviewer in 2017 that he was thinking of "this Russia thing" when he fired former FBI director James Comey. His lawyers sought to explain away that statement by noting that he had also said that he knew that firing Comey would prolong, rather than shorten, the Russia probe.

Legal scholars said that prosecutors might not be able to use some of Trump's comments if they are not relevant to the charges or might be deemed prejudicial by a judge.

They also may not need to play them to jurors because other evidence is much stronger. While Trump said on CNN that he told Brad Raffensperger "you owe me" votes, he was also tape recorded asking the Georgia elections official to "find" him more votes. The call came in January 2021 as Trump was desperately trying to overturn Georgia's election result.

"It's not inculpatory any more than the fact that we already have a recorded phone call," said Anthony Michael Kreis, a law professor at Georgia State University. "It might be more damning had we not had the actual recording of the phone call."

Former prosecutors and defense attorneys say a client's public comments can hamstring how they present their cases to a jury. It can reveal their strategy and lock them into certain lines of attacking the prosecution's case. Such comments might also encourage them to do everything they can to keep their client from taking the witness stand.

For example, they said, Trump may have admitted to taking classified documents from the White House but his lawyers wrote, "The purpose of this letter is not to opine about whether these documents are actually classified or have been declassified."

If Trump were to ever testify, prosecutors could use such contradictory statements to poke holes in his

story, making it harder for his defense team to tell the jury a coherent narrative.

"It could well be that what Trump is doing is making it impossible for him to testify because he'd be so damaged were he to testify," said Richard Klein, a criminal law professor at Touro University in New York.

Half of US public approves of Washington's arms deliveries to Ukraine in 2nd year of Russia's war

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Like the blue and yellow flags that popped up around the U.S. when Russia invaded Ukraine 15 months ago, U.S. popular support for Washington's backing of Ukraine has faded a little but remains widespread, a survey by the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy and NORC shows.

It found that half of the people in the U.S. support the Pentagon's ongoing supply of weapons to Ukraine for its defense against Russian forces. That level is nearly unchanged in the past year, while about a quarter are opposed to sustaining the military lifeline that has now topped $37 billion.

Big majorities among both Democrats and Republicans believe Russia's attack on Ukraine was unjustified, according to the poll, taken last month.

And about three out of four people in the U.S. support the United States playing at least some role in the conflict, the survey found.

The findings are in line with what Ukraine's ambassador says she sees when she makes appearances at think tanks, fancy dinners, embassy parties and other events to rally vital U.S. backing for her country.

"I feel the support is still strong," Ambassador Oksana Markarova said, even as tensions with China, domestic politics, mass shootings and other news often top Ukraine's war in U.S. news coverage these days.

"There are other things happening at the same time," she said. "But I feel the very strong bipartisan support."

When it comes to specific kinds of U.S. backing for Ukraine, popular support for U.S. sanctions against Russia has experienced the most significant drop, falling from 71% a year ago to 58% this spring, although that's still a majority.

The decline in support for the sanctions may reflect people's concern that the efforts to isolate Russia economically have contributed to inflation, analysts said.

Overall, however, the findings show that a couple of early concerns U.S. policymakers had about the strong material assistance for Ukraine have yet to be realized: that public support would crater if the war dragged on, and that the heavy assistance to Ukraine would become a partisan wedge issue, splitting Democrats and Republicans.

"There's no ground-swelling of American Ukraine fatigue here, and that has always been the fear," said Samuel Charap, a senior political scientist at the RAND Corp. research center.

For Cameron Hill, a 27-year-old state employee and Republican in Anadarko, Oklahoma, there was much to dislike about Russia's war and its leader, Vladimir Putin: the statements from Putin that Hill took as misleading propaganda, his heavy-handed rule, and Russian fighters' attacks on civilians and other abuses.

From the start of the Ukraine war, "there was killing of civilians, raping," Hill said. "It didn't seem like a moral-run military in the first place."

By contrast, video showing the courage of a Ukrainian fighter as he appeared to be executed by Russian fighters stood out to Hill. "His last words were something along the lines of 'Slava Ukraini,'" or Glory to Ukraine, Hill said.

The vast majority of U.S. adults believe that Russia has committed war crimes during the conflict, including 54% who say Russia is the only side that has done so. The International Criminal Court at the Hague in the Netherlands in March issued arrest warrants for Putin over Russia's mass deportation of Ukrainian children.

Older adults are more likely to view Russia's invasion as an unjustified attempt to overthrow Ukraine's government — 79% among people 45 and older, compared with 59% for those 44 and under.

In all, 62% regard Russia as an enemy — or top enemy — of the United States. And 48% are very wor-

ried about Russia's influence around the world. At the same time, 50% say they have a favorable opinion of the Russian people, compared with 17% who have an unfavorable view.

Only 8% of people in the U.S. say they have a favorable view of Putin.

Americans' view of Russia and its leader has already been a flashpoint in U.S. politics, as when Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis drew criticism this spring for dismissing Ukraine's fight against Russian forces as a "territorial dispute." The remark was associated with a drop in support for DeSantis, a prospective Republican presidential candidate.

When it comes to the war itself, "it's unfortunate that it's going on as long as it is. And I can't imagine, you know, living there, and that would be my life everyday, with bombs going off," said Laura Salley, 60, a college mental-health counselor in Easton, Pennsylvania, and a Democrat.

"But if we pull back, I'm pretty sure that Russia would find that as an opportunity to encroach again," Salley said.

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The poll of 1,180 adults was conducted April 13-17 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Sustainable till death do us part, and 45 days beyond; mushroom coffin a last best wish for some

By RAF CASERT and ALEKSANDAR FURTULA Associated Press

DELFT, Netherlands (AP) — For those seeking to live in the most sustainable way, there now is an afterlife too.

A Dutch intrepid inventor is now "growing" coffins by putting mycelium, the root structure of mushrooms, together with hemp fiber in a special mold that, in a week, turns into what could basically be compared to the looks of an unpainted Egyptian sarcophagus.

And while traditional wooden coffins come from trees that can take decades to grow and years to break down in the soil, the mushroom versions biodegrades and delivers the remains to nature in barely a month and a half.

In our 21st century, when the individual spirit can increasingly thrive way beyond the strictures of yore, death and funerals are all so often still hemmed in by tradition that may fall far short of the vision of the deceased or their loved ones.

"We all have different cultures and different ways of wanting to be buried in the world. But I do think there's a lot of us, a huge percentage of us, that would like it differently. And it's been very old school the same way for 50 or 100 years," said Shawn Harris, a U.S. investor in the Loop Biotech company that produces the coffins.

With climate consciousness and a special care of nature a focal point in ever more lives, Loop Biotech says it has the answer for those wanting to live the full circle of life — and then some — as close to what they always believed in.

Bob Hendrikx, the 29-year-old founder bedecked in a "I am compost" T-shirt at a recent presentation, said that he had researched nature a great deal "especially mushrooms. And I learned that they are the biggest recyclers on the planet. So I thought, hey, why can we not be part of the cycle of life? And then decided to grow a mushroom-based coffin." Moss can be draped within the coffins for the burial ceremonies.

And for those preferring cremation, there is also an urn they grow which can be buried with a sapling sticking out. So when the urn is broken down, the ashes can help give life to the tree.

"Instead of: 'we die, we end up in the soil and that's it,' Now there is a new story : we can enrich life after death and you can continue to thrive as a new plant or tree," Hendrikx said in an interview. "It brings a new narrative in which we can be part of something bigger than ourselves."

To put nature at the heart of such funerals, Loop Biotech is partnering with Natuurbegraven Nederland — Nature Burials Netherlands — which uses six special habitats were remains can be embedded in

protected parks.

Currently, Loop Biotech has a capacity to "grow" 500 coffins or urns a month, and are shipping across Europe. Hendrikx said they have caught on in the Nordics.

"It's the Northern European countries where there is more consciousness about the environment and also where there's autumn," he said. "So they know and understand the mushroom, how it works, how it's part of the ecosystem."

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Raf Casert reported from Brussels.

Russia says it shot down drones in border region after raid from Ukraine territory

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces shot down "a large number" of drones in Russia's southern Belgorod region, a local official said Wednesday, a day after Moscow announced that its forces crushed a cross-border raid in the area from Ukraine.

The drones were intercepted overnight over the province, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said in a Telegram post. He said that no one had been hurt, but unspecified administrative buildings, residential buildings and cars were damaged.

Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment.

Russia said the previous day that it beat back one of war's most serious cross-border attacks, with the Defense Ministry saying that more than 70 attackers were killed in a battle in Belgorod that lasted around 24 hours. It made no mention of any Russian casualties.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said that local troops, airstrikes and artillery routed the attackers.

Twelve local civilians were wounded in the attack, officials said, and an older woman died during an evacuation.

Details of the incident in the rural region, lying about 80 kilometers (45 miles) north of the city of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine and far from the front lines of the almost 15-month war, are unclear.

Moscow blamed the incursion that began Monday on Ukrainian military saboteurs. Kyiv described it as an uprising against the Kremlin by Russian partisans. It was impossible to reconcile the two versions, to say with certainty who was behind the attack or to ascertain its aims.

The region is a Russian military hub holding fuel and ammunition depots. Moscow officials declined to say how many attackers were involved in the assault or comment on why efforts to put down the attackers took so long.

The Belgorod region, like the neighboring Bryansk region and other border areas, has witnessed sporadic spillover from the war, which Russia started by invading Ukraine in February 2022.

Elsewhere, the Ukrainian General Staff said Wednesday that "heavy fighting" is continuing inside Bakhmut, days after Russia said that it completely captured the devastated city.

Bakhmut lies in Donetsk province, one of four provinces Russia illegally annexed last fall. The nine-month battle for Bakhmut has killed tens of thousands of people as Ukraine pursues its strategy of grinding down the Kremlin's invasion forces.

The head of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskyi, said that Kyiv's forces "are continuing their defensive operation" in Bakhmut, and have attained unspecified "successes" on the city's outskirts. He gave no further details.

Ukrainian officials have insisted the battle for Bakhmut isn't over.

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

Vinícius Júnior soccer racism dispute ignites heated off-field debate in Spain

By JENNIFER O'MAHONY Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Repeated racist insults against Brazilian soccer star Vinícius Júnior have unleashed a heated debate in Spain about tolerance for racism in a society that is becoming rapidly more diverse on and off the field.

Since the season began in August, the Real Madrid winger has suffered racist abuse by fans of at least five rival teams, including the hanging of an effigy depicting the Black player from a bridge by a group of Atletico Madrid fans in January.

"Racism is normal in LaLiga," Vinícius said of the top league in Spanish soccer on Instagram and Twitter after he was targeted with monkey chants from Valencia fans at a game on Sunday. "The competition thinks it's normal, as does the federation, and the opponents encourage it."

Through his social media presence, Vinícius has repeatedly called out racist attitudes that he says prevail in a southern European country where a third of children are now born to foreign parents, the majority from Latin America and Africa, and society as a whole is becoming more racially diverse.

Politicians were quick to jump on the controversy, dividing along ideological lines. "Zero tolerance for racism in soccer," tweeted Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. "Hatred and xenophobia should have no place in our soccer or in our society."

Madrid regional President Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who has become a lightning rod for culture war issues before local elections on Sunday, retorted that Spain "is not a racist country," adding that anyone who said so was "lying."

But Spain's wider Black community has long complained of racist treatment in a society that has been home to significant nonwhite communities since the 1990s, and where they feel little action has been taken by either leftist or conservative governments. Reports of racist hate crimes increased 31% from 2020 to 2021, the last year for which government data was available, and racism is the most common form of hate crime reported in Spain.

Rita Bosaho, who oversees legislation relating to race at Spain's Equality Ministry, urged the government to pass a long-delayed anti-racism law "so that no young person has to go through this again," in reference to the abuse suffered by Vinícius.

Spanish author and anti-racism campaigner Moha Gerehou, who is Black, has written about being repeatedly asked which country he is from despite being born in Spain, and of his experiences of police harassment. He said that racism was so normal as to be unremarkable in Spain.

"Vinícius Jr does well to raise his voice to point out without euphemisms what is obvious: Spain is a racist country and soccer fields are not an exception. They are the norm," he tweeted.

Gerehou has previously said that Spaniards struggle to understand that racism can include refusing someone entry to a bar based on their skin color. "The problem is ... that many people don't want to recognize the racism that exists in Spain," he said.

Abraham Jiménez Enoa, a Cuban writer who moved to Spain 16 months ago, has documented the daily episodes of racism he has suffered — 182 so far, including being followed around stores, asked for his ID on public transportation and watching Spaniards compliment his lighter-skinned son.

"There's a close-up of Vinícius in which you can see him suffering from what he is hearing and I really identified with that," Jiménez Enoa said. "Obviously I've never been in a football stadium where thousands of people are shouting 'monkey!' but in the day-to-day. ... A couple of times I have even cried from anger and frustration."

While racism is also an issue in his native Cuba, Jiménez Enoa said that he has "never suffered such explicit racism in the streets, in shops, in the market, wherever" as in Spain.

"I had never suffered from how my skin color marks everyday life," he said.

Far from support, Vinícius has found himself the object of condemnation from some Spanish soccer

authorities. Immediately following Sunday's incident, LaLiga President Javier Tebas criticized the player for attacking the league, saying Vinicius didn't show up for talks on the subject of racism that he himself had requested.

"Instead of criticizing racists, the league president shows up on social media to attack me," Vinícius retorted. "I'm not your friend to talk about racism with you. I want actions and punishment."

Some in Spanish soccer, however, acknowledged the widespread abuse, with Spanish Soccer Federation President Luis Rubiales condemning "a problem of behavior, of education, of racism."

Authorities have been slow to clamp down on fans who insult and attack Black players. Only on Tuesday were four people arrested over the effigy incident, four months after it happened. Police didn't say if the timing had to do with the widespread condemnation of the latest abuse against Vinícius. Three other fans were also detained in Valencia for the racist attack on Sunday.

Spanish player Iñaki Williams, a Black forward on the Basque team Athletic Bilbao, tweeted his support for Vinicius with the words: "Racism is inadmissible in any circumstance."

Williams experienced similar insults at a 2020 match, leading to the first criminal trial against a fan for racial abuse in the history of the Spanish game, expected to happen at some point later this year.

Even children's leagues are not spared.

In March, police in Barcelona arrested a 49-year-old man for insulting a Black child from the stands of a match. Separately, a 12-year-old Black child was subjected to racist taunts in the Catalan town of Sant Vicenç de Castellet in September. In that case, no police action was taken.

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Renata Brito contributed to this report from Barcelona, Spain.

Pills flowed for years as DEA dragged feet on disciplining opioid distributor

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

SHREVEPORT, La. (AP) — The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has allowed one of the nation's largest wholesale drug distributors to keep shipping highly addictive painkillers for nearly four years after a judge recommended it be stripped of its license for its "cavalier disregard" of thousands of suspicious orders fueling the opioid crisis.

The DEA did not respond to repeated questions from The Associated Press about its handling of the case against Morris & Dickson Co. or the involvement of a high-profile consultant the company had hired to stave off punishment and who is now DEA Administrator Anne Milgram's top deputy.

But the delay has raised concerns about how the revolving door between government and industry may be impacting the DEA's mission to police drug companies blamed for tens of thousands of American overdose deaths.

"If the DEA had issued its order in a timely manner, one could then credibly believe that its second-in-command was not involved despite an obvious conflict of interest," said Craig Holman, an ethics expert at the watchdog group Public Citizen in Washington. "The mere fact that its action has been delayed four years just raises red flags. It casts the entire process under grave suspicion."

Last week, after the AP reached out to the DEA for comment, the agency broke its silence on the issue and abruptly notified Morris & Dickson that it has decided to revoke its registration to distribute controlled substances, according to two people familiar with the development who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the exchange. However, no final order has yet been published. The company has described revocation as a "virtual death sentence" and is almost certain to challenge the decision in federal court.

Louis Milione, who was named DEA's principal deputy administrator in 2021, did not respond to requests for comment. He retired from the DEA in 2017 after a storied 21-year career that included two years leading the division that controls the sale of highly addictive narcotics. Like dozens of colleagues in the DEA's powerful-but-little-known Office of Diversion Control, he quickly went to work as a consultant for some of the same companies he had been tasked with regulating, including Morris & Dickson.

Milione was brought in by Morris & Dickson as part of a $3 million contract to save its registration to supply painkillers after the DEA accused the company in 2018 of failing to flag thousands of suspicious, high-volume orders.

Testifying in 2019 before federal Administrative Law Judge Charles W. Dorman, Milione argued that Morris & Dickson "spared no expense" to overhaul its compliance systems, cancel suspicious orders and send daily emails to the DEA spelling out its actions.

But those efforts were too little, too late, the judge wrote in a 159-page recommendation which has not been previously reported and was recently obtained by the AP. Anything less than the most severe punishment, he said, "would communicate to DEA registrants that despite their transgressions, no matter how egregious, they will get a mere slap on the wrist and a second chance so long as they acknowledge their sins and vow to sin no more."

"Acceptance of responsibility and evidence of remediation are not get-out-of-jail-free cards that erase the harm caused by years of cavalier disregard," Dorman wrote. "Allowing the respondent to keep its registration would tell distributors that it is acceptable to take a relaxed approach to DEA regulations until they are caught, at which point they only need to throw millions of dollars at the problem to make the DEA go away."

Shreveport, Louisiana-based Morris & Dickson, the nation's fourth-largest wholesale drug distributor with $4 billion a year in revenue and nearly 600 employees, did not respond to requests for comment. But the company repeatedly said in court filings that losing its license would effectively shut it down and have a "catastrophic" effect on patients in 29 states.

Neither Milgram nor two DEA administrators who preceded her have taken any enforcement action since Dorman's 2019 recommendation, allowing Morris & Dickson to continue operating even as it pursued a potential settlement. Former DEA officials told AP a nearly four-year wait in such a case is highly unusual, noting it rarely takes the agency more than two years to issue a final order.

Milgram's management of DEA has been called into question on another front. AP reported last month that a federal watchdog is investigating whether the agency improperly awarded millions of dollars in no-bid contracts to hire Milgram's past associates.

As for Milione, federal ethics rules bar government employees from taking part in decisions that could benefit companies where they previously worked, but DEA did not respond to questions about whether Milione recused himself from the matter. He would have also faced restrictions on his interactions with the DEA when he left government as a senior official — an issue the agency's own lawyers raised in an attempt to disqualify his testimony in support of Morris & Dickson.

Milione, a lawyer and former bit Hollywood actor, impressed fellow DEA agents for his risk taking and toughness. Among his achievements was running the overseas sting that in 2008 nabbed Russia's notorious arms trafficker Viktor Bout, aka "The Merchant of Death."

But after taking over as the head of Diversion Control in 2015, he ended his predecessor's refusal to meet with drug manufacturers and distributors and opened the DEA's doors to the industry it was charged with regulating.

Among those Milione met with on at least two occasions was Paul Dickson Sr. — then-president of Morris & Dickson. That included a 2016 visit to the Louisiana headquarters with DEA investigators to discuss the company's compliance program.

John Gray, the head of the Healthcare Distributors Alliance, a lobbying group that includes Morris & Dickson, recounted in a 2015 email how Milione, under orders from then-incoming DEA Administrator Chuck Rosenberg, wanted to "reset" relations with the drug industry. And Milione even delivered the keynote speech at the group's annual meeting.

"Overall, he was engaging, exceedingly pleasant and seemed genuinely concerned that we had lost touch with each other," Gray wrote. "It is a very different tone and approach than we have all seen in the past 8-10 years."

Morris & Dickson had been punished for its mishandling of addictive drugs before. In 2019, before Dor-

my hands and feet were cold and I was gasping for breath," he said.

He was able to get more oxygen from his climbing partners, but then battled with bad weather as he approached the summit, which he reached late in the afternoon because of his slow pace. Most climbers try to reach the top in the morning because conditions become dangerous later in the day.

He said he saw rescuers pulling the bodies of two dead climbers along the way.

After his successful climb, "I hugged all the Sherpas and cried like a baby, I was so happy," Magar said in a video released by his press office. "My lifetime goal is to change the perceptions people have of disability. My life changed in a blink of an eye. But whatever happens, you can still lead a fulfilling life."

"If a double above-knee amputee can climb Everest, you can climb whatever mountain you face, as long as you are disciplined, work hard and put everything into it," he said.

Magar was born in a remote mountain village in Nepal and later was recruited by the British army as a Gurkha. He now lives with his family in Canterbury, England.

Hundreds of Nepalese youths are recruited every year to work as Gurkha soldiers, who are known for their fighting skills and bravery.

In addition to dealing with his own disabilities, Magar also had to battle with legal issues because Nepal's government had banned disabled people from climbing high mountains. A case was filed in the Supreme Court, which overturned the ban, allowing Magar to continue his plan to climb Everest.

During the coronavirus pandemic, the government halted mountaineering, further delaying Magar's plan.

Tatum scores 33, Celtics stave off elimination by topping Heat 116-99 in Game 4

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Down nine early in the third quarter, down 3-0 in the series, the Boston Celtics knew their season was completely on the brink.

Three minutes later, everything looked different.

Jayson Tatum had 33 points and 11 rebounds, Jaylen Brown added 17 points and the Celtics staved off elimination in the Eastern Conference finals by running away in the second half to beat the Miami Heat 116-99 in Game 4 on Tuesday night.

"We were just trying to save our season," Tatum said.

They most definitely found a way to do that. The two big differences: a 30-point edge for the Celtics on 3-pointers, and an 18-0 run in that three-minute, third-quarter spurt that changed the game and — they hope — might end up changing the series.

"We can't relax," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "We have to keep the same level of intensity, the same mindset, the same focus in the next game."

Derrick White scored 16 points, Grant Williams had 14, Al Horford added 12 and Marcus Smart scored 11 for the Celtics, who still trail the series 3-1 — but sent it back to Boston for a Game 5 on Thursday.

Jimmy Butler scored 29 for Miami, which was outscored 48-22 in a 14-minute stretch that turned the game — and perhaps the series — completely around. Boston would also have Game 7 on its floor as well if it can keep extending this series.

"Tonight we played with pace, purpose," Tatum said. "We were getting stops. We were getting out in transition. You see layups and free throws go in, the jump shots start to feel a lot easier."

Gabe Vincent scored 17 for Miami, Caleb Martin had 16 and Bam Adebayo added 10. The Heat shot 8 for 32 on 3-pointers, while Boston was 18 for 45.

No team in NBA history has ever successfully rallied from a 3-0 deficit in a best-of-seven series; 150 have tried, 150 have failed.

But the Celtics gave themselves hope.

"We don't really have a choice," Mazzulla said. "It's do-or-die. Got to stick together."

The Heat led by as many as nine points in the opening quarter, kept the lead for the majority of the

first half and were up by nine again when Max Strus connected on a 3-pointer early in the third quarter.

That was the moment where Boston's season was at stake.

And the Celtics responded — most emphatically.

The 18-0 run took Boston from down nine to up nine, a huge turnaround that took 3 minutes, 3 seconds. The Celtics were 6 of 7 from the floor during the run, 4 of 4 from 3-point range, Tatum had nine of the 18 points and just like that the defending East champions — who won three playoff games on Miami's home floor in last year's playoffs — were rolling again.

"We always say the last one to get is the hardest one to get," Adebayo said. "I knew they would be desperate."

Miami got within four late in the third, only to see another lightning-fast spurt by the Celtics — this time, seven unanswered points in 40 seconds. Boston's edge was 88-79 going into the fourth, after winning the third quarter 38-23, with 21 of those points coming on 3-pointers.

The Celtics kept the lead the rest of the way.

"They got us tonight," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "You have to give them credit for that. There's no doubt about it. There's no questioning it. We're not wondering about that. They deserved to win tonight. We have to regroup and get ready for a great opportunity in Boston."

TIP-INS

Celtics: Tatum's second 3-pointer of the night was the 220th of his postseason career, passing Paul Pierce for the most in Celtics playoff history. … Boston's last four-game losing streak was in May 2021, late in the 2020-21 regular season. … Tatum's jumper with 9:22 left put Boston up seven, stopped a Heat spurt — and was his first fourth-quarter field goal of the series.

Heat: Vincent left early in the fourth quarter after turning his left ankle. … Miami was bidding for its first five-game winning streak of the season — not the postseason, the whole season. Its longest win streak of the regular season was four games, back in December.

HERRO UPDATE

Heat guard Tyler Herro, who broke his right hand in Game 1 of Round 1 at Milwaukee, has his brace off and is resuming workouts. "He is starting the process," Spoelstra said. "There's no timetable. But he does have the brace off and he's able to do ballhandling and some shooting."

CELEB WATCH

Among the celebrities in the crowd: PGA champion Brooks Koepka (who also was at the Florida Panthers' win in Game 3 of their Eastern Conference finals series against Carolina on Tuesday night), NBA superfan Jimmy Goldstein, former New York Yankees teammates Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez, and actor Jeremy Piven.

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

1st seditious conspiracy sentences in Jan. 6 attack to be handed down for Rhodes, other Oath Keepers

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and members of his antigovernment group will be the first Jan. 6 defendants sentenced for seditious conspiracy in a series of hearings beginning this week that will set the standard for more punishments of far-right extremists to follow.

Prosecutors will urge the judge on Thursday to put Rhodes behind bars for 25 years, which would be the harshest sentence by far handed down in the U.S. Capitol attack. Describing the Oath Keepers' actions as "terrorism," the Justice Department says stiff punishments are crucial to send a message to future possible instigators of political violence.

"The justice system's reaction to January 6 bears the weighty responsibility of impacting whether January 6 becomes an outlier or a watershed moment," prosecutors wrote in court papers this month.

The hearings will begin Wednesday, when prosecutors and defense lawyers are expected to argue over

legal issues concerning sentencing and begin hearing victim impact statements. Rhodes, from Granbury, Texas, and Florida chapter leader Kelly Meggs — who were convicted of seditious conspiracy in November — will receive their sentences Thursday, and six more Oath Keepers will be sentenced later this week and next.

Rhodes and Meggs were the first people in nearly three decades to be found guilty at trial of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors described as a plot to forcibly stop the transfer of power from President Donald Trump to President Joe Biden. Three co-defendants were acquitted of the sedition charge, but were convicted of obstructing Congress' certification of Biden's victory.

Another four Oath Keepers were convicted of the sedition charge in January during a second trial.

Prosecutors are seeking prison sentences ranging from 10 to 21 years for the Oath Keepers besides Rhodes. The judge canceled the sentencing scheduled this week for one defendant — Thomas Caldwell of Berryville, Virginia — as he weighs whether to overturn the jury's guilty verdict on two charges.

Prosecutors are urging the judge to apply enhanced penalties for terrorism, arguing the Oath Keepers sought to influence the government through "intimidation or coercion." Judges have so far rejected the Justice Department's request to apply the so-called "terrorism enhancement" in the handful of Jan. 6 cases it has sought it in so far, but the Oath Keepers case is unlike any others that have reached sentencing to date.

"The defendants were not mere trespassers or rioters, and they are not comparable to any other defendant who has been convicted for a role in the attack on the Capitol," prosecutors wrote.

More than 1,000 people have been charged with federal crimes stemming from the riot. Just over 500 of them have been sentenced, with more than half receiving terms of imprisonment ranging from a week to over 14 years. The longest sentence so far came earlier this month for a man with a long criminal record who attacked police officers with pepper spray and a chair as he stormed the Capitol.

The sentences for the Oath Keepers may signal how much time prosecutors will seek for leaders of another far-right group, the Proud Boys, who were convicted of seditious conspiracy in a separate trial earlier this month. They include former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrio, who is perhaps the most high-profile person charged in the sprawling Jan. 6 investigation. The Proud Boys are scheduled to be sentenced in August and September.

Using dozens of encrypted messages, recordings and surveillance video, prosecutors made the case that Rhodes and his extremist group followers began shortly after the 2020 election to prepare an armed rebellion to keep Biden out of the White House.

Over seven weeks of testimony, jurors heard how Rhodes rallied his followers to fight to defend Trump, discussed the prospect of a "bloody" civil war and warned the Oath Keepers may have to "rise up in insurrection" to defeat Biden if Trump didn't act.

Jurors watched video of Rhodes' followers wearing combat gear and shouldering their way through the crowd in military-style stack formation before forcing their way into the Capitol. They saw surveillance video at a Virginia hotel where prosecutors said Oath Keepers stashed weapons for "quick reaction force" teams prosecutors said were ready to get weapons into the city quickly if needed. The weapons were never deployed.

Rhodes, who didn't go inside the Capitol, took the witness stand at trial and told jurors that there was never any plan to attack the Capitol and that his followers who did went rouge.

His lawyers are urging the judge to sentence him to the roughly 16 months behind bars he has already served since his January 2022 arrest. In court papers filed this month, Rhodes' attorneys argued that all of Rhodes' writings and statements were "protected political speech."

"None of his protected speech incited or encouraged imminent violent or unlawful acts, nor were any likely to occur as a result of his speech," they wrote.

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North Carolina gerrymander ruling gives electoral gift to GOP in Congress

By GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A North Carolina redistricting ruling has set up a possible electoral windfall for congressional Republicans in preserving their U.S. House majority next year, declaring that judges should stay out of scrutinizing seat boundaries for partisan advantage.

While Democrats only need to flip five GOP seats overall to regain control, experts say the state Supreme Court decision means four Democratic incumbents in the state — three of them first-term members — are vulnerable.

Meanwhile, litigation involving congressional maps in states such as Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Ohio and Texas could also rework district lines and alter the 2024 electoral map.

The legal guardrails on redistricting are in an unusual state of flux. State and federal courts both were active in striking down congressional maps during the most recent bonanza of redrawing legislative lines based on once-a-decade census data. Additional action by the U.S. Supreme Court in the coming weeks could spark new challenges and redrawn maps.

North Carolina's highest court, chosen through partisan elections, flipped to Republican in November. That new Republican majority in late April threw out a 2022 Democratic ruling against partisan gerrymandering, saying the state constitution did not limit the practice.

The state's map, created after last year's court decision, was used last fall, when voters elected seven Democrats and seven Republicans. North Carolina's statewide races are routinely close, with voter registrations roughly in thirds among Democrats, Republicans and unaffiliated residents. Just four years earlier, Republicans had won comfortably 10 of the 13 House seats in the country's ninth-largest state.

Freed from the Democratic constraints, the General Assembly — also controlled by Republicans — plans to redraw those districts by before the 2024 elections.

"It's a signal to the Republican supermajority that within some boundaries they can draw the maps they want," said Chris Cooper, a Western Carolina University political science professor. "The Republicans don't have a blank check, but there's a lot in the bank account."

While North Carolina Republicans don't have details yet on what the new maps will look like, House Speaker Tim Moore said after last year's elections that "7-7 does not reflect the will of the voters in North Carolina." A map approved by Republicans in 2021, but never implemented because it was struck down, would have given the GOP a strong chance to win 10 seats. North Carolina gained a 14th seat this decade thanks to population growth.

The North Carolina ruling "could have an enormous impact on the control of the House," said Dave Wasserman, an editor at the nonpartisan Cook Political Report. A map that tears up the districts of at least four Democrats "would effectively double the Republican cushion" ahead of next year, he said.

State Democrats have few options. The state constitution exempts redistricting legislation from Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's veto.

"I hold out hope that they ... won't be as extreme as the courts seem to have given them leeway to be," Democratic state Sen. Natasha Marcus said. "But I'm also a realist."

Except for federal laws preventing racial gerrymandering and other redistricting standards — such as making districts identical by population — the legislature will have free rein.

"If you want to maximize your power you're going to draw whatever districts the Voting Rights Act requires and you're going to engage in the most partisan gerrymandering that you can," said Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, who follows redistricting and election litigation.

Based on interviews and previous maps, one of the most vulnerable Democrats is expected to be first-term Rep. Jeff Jackson of Charlotte. Even though he won the new 14th Congressional District by 15 percentage points, there are many ways to make the district more Republican.

"They're coming for this seat," said Jackson, a former state senator who has gained prominence using TikTok to reach voters, in a fundraising email.

Also at risk is first-term Rep. Wiley Nickel, who represents the Raleigh-area 13th District. He won the state's lone 2022 toss-up race by 3 percentage points.

Nickel told The Associated Press the Supreme Court's decision was "pure partisan politics" and called the 2022 boundaries "an absolutely fair map for a 50-50 state."

Other endangered Democrats are 6th District Rep. Kathy Manning, who represents the Greensboro area, and first-term Rep. Don Davis, who represents almost 20 northeastern North Carolina counties in the 1st District.

During the previous decade, North Carolina Republicans enjoyed a significant advantage in the way congressional districts were drawn, even as courts repeatedly ordered new maps because of gerrymandering. In both 2016 and 2018, Republicans won between two and three more seats than would have been expected based on their share of the votes, according to an AP analysis using a mathematical formula designed to detect gerrymandering.

In 2020, when Republicans won an 8-5 congressional advantage, the GOP still carried one more seat than expected based on their votes.

But that changed with the 2022 election. Republicans received 52% of the vote, but Democrats outperformed them – carrying 0.6 of a seat more than expected based on their share of the votes, according to the AP's analysis.

Nationally, Democrats are pushing back against the idea that North Carolina losses are inevitable. Their candidates have already shown they can win in tight districts, said Tommy Garcia, a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee spokesperson.

Meanwhile, the National Republican Congressional Committee looks "forward to the state Legislature drawing fair lines that best represent North Carolina," communications director Jack Pandol said.

The U.S. Supreme Court is due to issue a ruling soon that could change rules requiring mapmakers to draw districts that allow minorities to elect representatives of their choosing.

Also before the high court is a case brought by North Carolina Republicans who argued the state's courts didn't have the power to implement the map that produced the 7-7 congressional split last year. However, the justices' decision won't affect the upcoming map draw in North Carolina.

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Associated Press writers David A. Lieb in Jefferson City, Missouri, and Nicholas Riccardi in Denver contributed to this report.

Debt ceiling talks stuck on classic problem: Republicans demand spending cuts and Democrats resist

By LISA MASCARO and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Debt ceiling negotiations are locked on a classic problem that has vexed, divided and disrupted Washington before: Republicans led by House Speaker Kevin McCarthy want to roll back federal government spending, while President Joe Biden and other Democrats do not.

Time is short to strike a deal before a deadline as soon as June 1, when the Treasury says the government risks running out of cash to pay its bills. Negotiators are expected to convene Wednesday for another round of talks as frustration mounts. The political standoff is edging the country closer to a crisis, roiling financial markets and threatening the global economy.

"They've got to acknowledge that we're spending too much," said McCarthy.

Cheered on by a hard-charging conservative House majority that hoisted him to power, McCarthy, R-Calif., was not swayed by a White House counter-offer to freeze spending instead. "A freeze is not going to work," McCarthy said.

The longstanding Washington debate over the size and scope of the federal government now has just days to be resolved. Failure to raise the nation's debt ceiling, now at $31 trillion, would risk a potentially chaotic federal default, almost certain to inflict economic turmoil at home and abroad.

From the White House, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said it was "ridiculous" to suggest Biden

man issued his recommendation, the company agreed to pay $22 million in civil penalties to resolve federal prosecutors' claims that it violated the Controlled Substances Act by failing to report suspicious orders of hydrocodone and oxycodone. The company also agreed to multimillion-dollar upgrades of its compliance program to ensure it reports suspicious orders moving forward.

The case drew far less attention than the enforcement actions DEA took in recent years against Morris & Dickson's larger competitors, a trio of pharmaceutical distributors who have agreed to pay the federal government more than $1 billion in fines and penalties for similar violations. Cardinal Health, AmerisourceBergen and McKesson also agreed to pay $21 billion over 18 years to resolve claims as part of a nationwide settlement.

Among the more than 12,000 suspicious orders that Dorman said Morris & Dickson should have reported to the DEA were 51 unusually large orders of opioids made by Wilkinson Family Pharmacy in suburban New Orleans.

Wilkinson purchased more than 4.5 million pills of oxycodone and hydrocodone from Morris & Dickson between 2014 and 2017, and federal prosecutors say during that time owner Keith Wilkinson laundered more than $345,000 from illegal sales made with forged prescriptions or written by "pill mill" doctors.

In one month, as many as 42% of all prescriptions filled by Wilkinson were for painkillers and 38% of those were paid for in cash. The DEA considers a pharmacy's sales of controlled substances suspicious whenever they surpass 15% or cash transactions exceed 9%.

Yet Morris & Dickson never suspended any shipments to the pharmacy. Over three years, it filed just three suspicious order reports to the DEA – none of which resulted in shipments being suspended.

"Anybody with half a brain could've seen something wasn't right," said Dan Schneider, a retired pharmacist near New Orleans whose fight to hold drug companies accountable for the opioid epidemic was featured in a Netflix documentary series. "They were way out of line."

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Goodman reported from Miami. Contact AP's global investigative team at Investigative@ap.org.

Double amputee Everest climber pledges to work for benefit of people with disabilities

By BINAJ GURUBACHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — The first double above-the-knee amputee to climb Mount Everest returned from the mountain on Tuesday pledging to dedicate the rest of his life to helping people with disabilities.

Hari Budha Magar, a former Gurkha soldier who lives in Britain, reached the peak of the world's highest mountain last week.

"My main aim for the rest of my lifetime is going to be working to bring awareness about disability," Magar said on his return to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital.

As a soldier in a Gurkha regiment in the British army, Magar lost both his legs in Afghanistan when he accidently stepped on an improvised explosive device in 2010.

Hundreds of supporters and officials, including Nepal's tourism minister, greeted him at Kathmandu's airport and offered him garlands.

He was taken from the airport in an open truck decorated with flowers and waved at people along the way.

"We all have our own weaknesses and disabilities, but instead of the weaknesses we should be focusing on our strength, and only then we can all lead a better and meaningful life," he said.

He said the climb up the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) mountain was not easy and he thought several times about quitting because of his family.

"I had made the promise that I will have to return for the sake of my son," he said.

On the way to the summit he ran out of oxygen in the tank he was carrying.

"This was the first time I experienced what it is to be deprived of oxygen. I had the tingling sensation,

wasn't acting with urgency after Republicans complained about the pace. "He wants to see this done as soon as possible," she said.

Dragging into a third week, the negotiations over raising the nation's debt limit were never supposed to arrive at this point.

The White House insisted early on it was unwilling to barter over the need to pay the nation's bills, demanding that Congress simply lift the ceiling as it has done many times before with no strings attached.

But the newly elected speaker visited Biden at the Oval Office in February, urging the president to come to the negotiating table on a budget package that would reduce spending and the nation's ballooning deficits in exchange for the vote to allow future debt.

"I told the president Feb. 1," McCarthy recounted. "I said, Mr. President, you're not going to raise taxes. You've got to spend less money than was spent this year."

Negotiations are focused on finding agreement on a 2024 budget year limit. Republicans have set aside their demand to roll back spending to 2022 levels, but say that next year's government spending must be less than it is now. But the White House instead offered to freeze spending at current 2023 numbers.

"We are holding firm to the speaker's red line," said a top Republican negotiator, Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana. "Which is that we will not do a deal unless it spends less money than we're spending this year."

By sparing defense and some veterans accounts from reductions, the Republicans would shift the bulk of spending reductions to other federal programs, an approach that breaks a tradition in Congress of budget cap parity.

Graves said there were still "significant gaps" between his side and the White House.

Agreement on that topline spending level is vital. It would enable McCarthy to deliver spending restraints for conservatives while not being so severe that it would chase off the Democratic votes that would be needed in the divided Congress to pass any bill.

But what, if anything, Democrats would get if they agreed to deeper spending cuts than Biden's team has proposed is uncertain.

Asked what concessions the Republicans were willing to give, McCarthy quipped, "We're going to raise the debt ceiling."

The White House has continued to argue that deficits can be reduced by ending tax breaks for wealthier households and some corporations, but McCarthy said he told the president at their February meeting that raising revenue from tax hikes is off the table.

The negotiators are now also debating the duration of a 1% cap on annual spending growth going forward, with Republicans dropping their demand for a 10-year cap to six years, but the White House offering only one year, for 2025.

Typically, the debt ceiling has been lifted for the duration of a budget deal, and in this negotiation the White House is angling for a two-year agreement that would push past the presidential elections.

Past debt ceiling talks have produced budget agreements in which both parties have won some concessions in a give and take. Both have wanted to raise the debt limit to prevent a economy-shattering federal default.

Graves explained the Republican position this time around. Since Biden already boosted federal spending in significant ways with his COVID-19 rescue package, Inflation Reduction Act and other bills, "they've already got theirs."

"We're willing to give them an increase in debt ceiling. That's what they're getting," he said.

And yet, the Republicans are pushing additional priorities as the negotiators focus on the $100 billion-plus difference between the 2022 and 2023 spending plans as a place to cut.

Republicans want to beef up work requirements for government aid to recipients of food stamps, cash assistance and the Medicaid health care program that the Biden administration says would impact millions of people who depend on assistance.

All sides have been eyeing the potential for the package to include a framework to ease federal regulations and speed energy project developments. They are all but certain to claw back some $30 billion in unspent COVID-19 funds now that the pandemic emergency has officially lifted.

The White House has countered by keeping defense and nondefense spending flat next year, which would save $90 billion in the 2024 budget year and $1 trillion over 10 years.

The House speaker promised lawmakers he will abide by the rule to post any bill for 72 hours before voting, making any action doubtful until the weekend — just days before the potential deadline. The Senate would also have to pass the package before it could go to Biden's desk to be signed.

McCarthy faces a hard-right flank in his own party that is likely to reject any deal, and that has led some Democrats to encourage Biden to resist any compromise with the Republicans and simply invoke the 14th Amendment to raise the debt ceiling on his own, an unprecedented and legally fraught action the president has resisted for now.

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Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri, Stephen Groves, Kevin Freking, Chris Megerian, Darlene Superville and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

One year after Uvalde shooting, investigation of police response continues

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A criminal investigation in Texas over the hesitant police response to the Robb Elementary School shooting is still ongoing as Wednesday marks one year since a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers inside a fourth-grade classroom in Uvalde.

The continuing probe underlines the lasting fallout over Texas' deadliest school shooting and how the days after the attack were marred by authorities giving inaccurate and conflicting accounts about efforts made to stop a teenage gunman armed with an AR-style rifle.

The investigation has run parallel to a new wave of public anger in the U.S. over gun violence, renewed calls for stricter firearm regulations and legal challenges over authorities in Uvalde continuing to withhold public records related to the shooting and the police response.

Here's a look at what has happened in the year since one of America's deadliest mass shootings:

POLICE SCRUTINY

A damning report by Texas lawmakers put nearly 400 officers on the scene from an array of federal, state and local agencies. The findings laid out how heavily armed officers waited more than an hour to confront and kill the 18-year-old gunman. It also accused police of failing "to prioritize saving innocent lives over their own safety."

All of the students killed were between the ages of 9 and 11 years old.

At least five officers who were put under investigation after the shooting were either fired or resigned, although a full accounting is unclear. The head of the Texas Department of Public Safety, Col. Steve McCraw, put much of the blame after the attack on Uvalde's school police chief, who was later fired by trustees.

McCraw had more than 90 of his own officers at the school — more than any other agency — and has rebuffed calls by some Uvalde families and lawmakers to also resign.

Uvalde County District Attorney Christina Mitchell said last week that Texas Rangers are still investigating the police response and that her office will ultimately present the findings to a grand jury. She said she did not have a timeline for when the investigation would be finished.

On Monday, Uvalde Mayor Don McLaughlin said he was frustrated by the pace of the investigations a year later.

"They don't have answers to simple questions they should have," McLaughlin said of the families.

CALLS FOR GUN CONTROL INTENSIFY

President Joe Biden signed the nation's most sweeping gun violence bill in decades a month after the shooting. It included tougher background checks for the youngest gun buyers and added more funding for mental health programs and aid to schools.

It did not go as far as restrictions sought by some Uvalde families who have called on lawmakers to raise

the purchase age for AR-style rifles. In the GOP-controlled Texas Capitol, Republicans this year rejected virtually all proposals to tighten gun laws over the protests of the families and Democrats.

Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has also waved off calls for tougher gun laws, just as he did after mass shootings at a Sutherland Springs church in 2017 and an El Paso Walmart in 2018. The issue has not turned Texas voters away from Abbott, who easily won a third term months after the Uvalde shooting.

UVALDE GRIEVES

The Uvalde school district permanently closed the Robb Elementary campus and plans for a new school are in the works. Schools in Uvalde will be closed Wednesday.

About a dozen students in the classroom where the shooting unfolded survived the attack. Some returned to class in person last fall. Others attended school virtually, including a girl who spent more than two months in the hospital after being shot multiple times.

Veronica Mata, a kindergarten teacher in Uvalde, also returned to class this year after her 10-daughter Tess was among those killed in the attack.

Some Uvalde families have filed lawsuits against the gun maker and law enforcement.

Just in case: Anxious retirees, social service groups among those making default contingency plans

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Phoenix retiree Saundra Cole has been watching the news about the debt limit negotiations in Washington with dismay — and limiting her air conditioning use to save money just in case her monthly Social Security check is delayed due to a default.

For her, air conditioning is no small thing in a city where the average daily high hits 94 degrees in May. If the government can't make good on its obligations, she says, "I would be devastated."

"What I'm worried about is food banks and electricity here because you know, we've had deaths with seniors because of the heat," says Cole.

Politicians in Washington may be offering assurance that the government will figure out a way to avert default, but around the country, economic anxiety is rising and some people already are adjusting their routines.

Government beneficiaries, social service groups that receive state and federal subsidies and millions more across the country are contemplating the possibility of massive and immediate cuts if the U.S. were to default on its financial obligations.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned last week that a default would destroy jobs and businesses, and leave millions of families who rely on federal government payments to "likely go unpaid," including Social Security beneficiaries, veterans and military families.

"A default could cause widespread suffering as Americans lose the income that they need to get by," she said.

The number of people potentially impacted is huge. According to the Census Bureau, in 2020 roughly 35% of U.S. households included someone receiving Social Security benefits, 36% received Medicaid benefits and more than 13% of the total population received food stamps.

A recent poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 66% of Americans said they're very or extremely concerned about the impact on the U.S. economy if the debt limit is not raised and the government defaults, though only 21% said they're following the debate closely.

Robert Gault, 63, who depends on a $1,900 monthly Social Security disability payment, says an economic default "would make life so real awfully hard on me." The former longtime factory worker said he suffers from chronic back pain caused by degenerating disks in his spine.

Gault, who lives in Bradford, Pennsylvania, near that state's border with New York, said he thinks about the debate — and the stalemate — in Washington a lot.

He hasn't made any drastic changes to the way he lives, but said, "I'm more conscientious of everything

and I think about everything I do now."

Negotiations between the president and congressional leaders are down to the wire as they try to break an impasse. GOP lawmakers have been pressing for spending cuts in exchange for agreeing to increase the government's borrowing authority and President Joe Biden wanted a "clean" debt ceiling increase without conditions.

Without a deal, the U.S. could default as soon as June 1, according to Yellen.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., was asked Monday if people should start preparing for default, and insisted "no, no, no, no."

But people on fixed incomes and organizations that serve the poor — already feeling the after-effects of the pandemic and dealing with inflation — are bracing for a potential debt default that would deal an overwhelming blow to their finances.

Clare Higgins, executive director of Community Action Pioneer Valley in Massachusetts, said demand at the organization's food banks has skyrocketed since the start of the pandemic, and is growing again.

With a possible debt default, she said, she's seeing more demand for food from the three pantries that the organization either runs or financially supports.

"Yes, demand has gone up — but it was already up before," she said.

"We're already behind the eight-ball in what we're able to pay teachers," she said of the organization's head start and early learning programs. "And the inflation that has happened in the economy has already reduced our ability to stretch the dollar."

Higgins said while she's hopeful that Biden and McCarthy can reach a compromise, she's concerned the deal will include Republican-sought budget cuts that would affect the organizations she manages. And if a default does happen, Higgins said, "I hope it's for a short period."

William Howell, a political science professor at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy, said the notion of older people and recipients of government benefits doomsday prepping for disruptions every time budget season comes around is symptomatic of a "dysfunctional" democracy.

"It's not how a healthy democracy handles its business," he said, adding that the consequences of the brinksmanship will impact the government's ability to function and plan in coming years.

"In this era of hyper-polarization, the way you get compromise is walking right up to the edge of economic catastrophe and threatening default — on the other side we have a president almost threatening to invoke the 14th Amendment to do away with the debt ceiling," he said. "This is the stuff of partisan politics."

Adriene Clifford, 58, knows about balance sheets because she is an accounting professor in New York state. The Delhi resident said she was concerned enough about possible disruptions to the banking system in the event of a default that she withdrew money from the bank "just to tie me over."

"I've been most concerned about the banking system going down and the FDIC not being there," Clifford said. She was referring to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., the independent federal agency that exists to maintain stability and public confidence in the U.S. financial system.

At the Kids' Stop Learning Center in Rome, Georgia, Lance Elam, owner of the family business that has been in operation since 1984, says he's not worried that a default will actually occur. But he still has done the calculation on how long operations could last without the subsidies that the organization receives for its three locations in Rome and Cartersville, Georgia.

"We have enough liquid funds to carry on for six to eight months," he said, adding that state and federal funds helped the Kids' Stop Learning Center stay in business through the pandemic.

"We have so many kids on our waiting list," he said, that the center would likely begin dropping kids who couldn't pay without subsidies and prioritize families that can pay out of pocket.

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DeSantis set to make much-anticipated presidential campaign announcement, formalizing Trump rivalry

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, an outspoken cultural conservative long seen as Donald Trump's leading rival for the Republican nomination, is set to launch his 2024 presidential campaign on Wednesday.

The 44-year-old Republican governor plans to announce his decision in an online conversation with Twitter CEO Elon Musk, according to two people with knowledge of the decision. They spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the announcement publicly.

The audio-only event will be streamed on Twitter Spaces beginning at 6 p.m. EDT. He will follow up with a round of prime-time appearances on conservative programs, including Fox News and Mark Levin's radio show.

DeSantis will join a crowded Republican contest to decide whether the party will move on from Trump in 2024 as it works to retake the White House from President Joe Biden.

Beyond Trump, those already in the GOP field include former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson. Former Vice President Mike Pence is expected to announce his candidacy in the coming weeks.

DeSantis has embraced Trump's combative style and many of his policies, but casts himself as a younger and more electable version of the former president.

In choosing Twitter, DeSantis is taking a page out of the playbook that helped turn businessman-TV celebrity Trump into a political star.

The timing of DeSantis' long-expected announcement has been shrouded, with various iterations of plans being leaked over the past few days. Some close to him suspected that he was providing conflicting information about the timing and location to root out leakers. Others believe he changed his initial preparations after news reports came out about them.

Musk, speaking at The Wall Street Journal's CEO Council Summit event in London on Tuesday, seemed to confirm the Wednesday event, saying DeSantis would be making "quite an announcement" on Twitter. "The first time something like this is happening on social media," he said, with live questions and answers.

The news of DeSantis' impending announcement came as Trump was making a video appearance in a New York courtroom as part of his criminal case. A judge tentatively scheduled Trump's trial to begin March 25, which falls in the heart of the presidential primary season. Trump pleaded not guilty last month to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records at his family company, the Trump Organization.

DeSantis was expected to meet with donors Wednesday at the Four Seasons Hotel in Miami before the evening Twitter conversation.

While it is common for campaigns to publicize their announcements in videos shared on social media, it is far more unusual — and perhaps unprecedented — to hold a campaign announcement in a live social media forum.

"Big if true ...," DeSantis' wife, Casey, posted Tuesday on Twitter, linking to a Fox News story on the announcement and adding a smiley face.

DeSantis has emerged as a national star in Republican politics as an unapologetic leader on controversial cultural issues.

The governor sent dozens of immigrants from Texas — by way of Florida —to a small island off the Massachusetts coast to draw attention to the influx of Latin American immigrants trying to cross the Southern border. He signed and then expanded a Parental Rights in Education bill — known by critics as the "Don't Say Gay" law — which bans instruction or classroom discussion of LGBTQ issues in Florida public schools for all grades.

More recently, he signed a law banning abortions at six weeks, which is before most women realize they're pregnant. And he removed an elected prosecutor who vowed not to charge people under Florida's new abortion restrictions or doctors who provide gender-affirming care.

Trump's allies mocked DeSantis' announcement plans.

"This is one of the most out-of-touch campaign launches in modern history. The only thing less relatable than a niche campaign launch on Twitter, is DeSantis' after party at the uber elite Four Seasons resort in Miami," said Karoline Leavitt, a spokesperson for Trump's super PAC.

Trump himself frequently dismisses his rival as Ron "DeSanctimonious."

In choosing to announce with Musk, DeSantis is linking his presidential announcement to one of the world's richest men, who has emerged as a conservative cult hero of sorts.

Since buying Twitter last October, Musk has reinstated the accounts of prominent Republicans, including Trump and Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who had been removed. Popular conservative broadcasters have flocked to Twitter, with ousted Fox News host Tucker Carlson and the podcast hosts of The Daily Wire announcing they will start streaming on the platform.

Musk himself has promoted far-right conspiracy theories on Twitter, including misleading claims questioning a Texas mall shooter's background and a debunked rumor that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband had a relationship with an assailant who attacked him.

Earlier this month, Musk's tweets likening billionaire philanthropist George Soros to a Jewish supervillain were met with criticism from the Anti-Defamation League, which said they would embolden antisemitic extremists. Musk said he would "be more thoughtful in the future."

Twitter was once Trump's most important megaphone — one he used to dominate his rivals in the 2016 primary and to command the news cycle for years. Trump was barred from the platform after a mob of his supporters invaded the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, with Twitter citing "the risk of further incitement of violence." Although his access was reinstated shortly after Musk took over, he has yet to tweet.

About 1 in 5 U.S. adults say they use Twitter, the Pew Research Center found last year.

Democrats are somewhat more likely than Republicans to say they have Twitter accounts, according to a Fox News poll from December. Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say Musk buying Twitter was a good thing and to have a favorable view of him.

Trump makes video appearance in New York criminal case, trial date set for March primary season

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump threw up his hands in frustration Tuesday as a judge scheduled his criminal trial for March 25, putting the former president and current candidate in a Manhattan courtroom in the heat of next year's presidential primary season.

Trump, appearing by video conference at a pretrial hearing in the hush-money case, glowered at the camera as Judge Juan Manuel Merchan advised him to cancel all other obligations for the duration of the trial, which could last several weeks.

Trump, wearing a blue suit against a backdrop of American flags at his Florida estate, then turned to a lawyer by his side — their brief discussion inaudible on the video feed — before sitting with his arms folded for the remainder of the hearing.

Trump said little during the hearing, but lashed out afterward on social media, writing: "Just had New York County Supreme Court hearing where I believe my First Amendment Rights, 'Freedom of Speech,' have been violated, and they forced upon us a trial date of March 25th, right in the middle of Primary season."

"Very unfair, but this is exactly what the Radical Left Democrats wanted," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "It's called ELECTION INTERFERENCE, and nothing like this has ever happened in our Country before!!!"

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

Merchan said he arrived at the March 25 trial date after discussions with Trump's lawyers and prosecutors. Trump's lawyer, Susan Necheles, said Trump knew about the date prior to Tuesday's hearing and said she didn't see his exasperated reaction.

Trump's case is proceeding in state court even as his lawyers seek to have it moved to federal court because some of the alleged conduct occurred while he was president. The Manhattan district attorney's office has until next week to file paperwork stating why it should remain in state court, where the historic indictment was brought.

Trump has made the New York case and the long list of other investigations into his personal, professional and presidential conduct central to his campaign to reclaim the White House in 2024. The Republican has portrayed himself as the victim of a coordinated, politically motivated effort to sully his chances.

Trump often discusses the cases at his rallies, in speeches, TV appearances and on social media. He has repeatedly attacked prosecutors, accusers and judges by name, including Merchan, and has shown no willingness to back down — even after a recent $5 million verdict in a writer's sexual abuse and defamation lawsuit against him.

The plaintiff in that case, writer E. Jean Carroll, filed a new claim Monday seeking an additional $10 million or more to hold Trump liable for remarks he made bashing her on CNN the day after the May 9 verdict.

Trump responded Tuesday by doubling down on his contention that Carroll's allegations were a "Fake, Made Up Story" and a "TOTAL SCAM" and that her case is "part of the Democrats playbook to tarnish my name and person."

Merchan spent the bulk of Tuesday's 15-minute hearing reviewing an order he issued May 8 that sets ground rules for Trump's behavior in the lead-up to the trial.

It's not a gag order and Trump is free to speak about the case and defend himself, Merchan said, but he can't use evidence turned over by prosecutors to attack witnesses or post sensitive documents to social media. If he violates the order, he risks being held in contempt.

Among concerns raised by prosecutors were that Trump could weaponize "highly personal information" found on witnesses' cellphones, such as personal photos and text messages with family and friends, as well as secret grand jury testimony and other material, to rile up anger amongst his supporters.

Nothing in the order prevents Trump from being able to speak "powerfully and persuasively" in his defense without the need to "start attacking individuals, disclosing names, addresses, cellphones' numbers, identity, dates of birth, or anything along those lines," Merchan said. Certain sensitive material shared by prosecutors must be kept only by Trump's lawyers, not Trump himself.

Prosecutors sought the order soon after Trump's arrest, citing what they say is his history of making "harassing, embarrassing, and threatening statements" about people he's tangled with in legal disputes.

Trump was spared a personal appearance at the courthouse Tuesday, avoiding the mammoth security and logistical challenges that accompanied his arraignment last month. Instead, the Republican was connected by video conference, with his face beamed onto TV monitors positioned around the courtroom.

Trump isn't required to appear in court in person again until Jan. 4, just weeks before the first primary votes are expected to be cast.

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Associated Press reporter Jill Colvin contributed to this report. __

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Chief Justice Roberts says Supreme Court can do more on ethics, but offers no specifics

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chief Justice John Roberts said Tuesday that there is more the Supreme Court can do to "adhere to the highest standards" of ethical conduct, an acknowledgment that recent reporting about the justices' ethical missteps is having an effect on public perception of the court.

Speaking at a law dinner where he was honored with an award, Roberts provided no specifics but said the justices "are continuing to look at the things we can do to give practical effect to that commitment."

He said he is "confident there are ways to do that consistent with our status as an independent branch

of government and the Constitution's separation of powers."

The court has resisted adopting an ethics code of its own, and Roberts has raised questions about whether Congress could impose a code of conduct on the court.

All nine justices recently signed a statement of ethics that Roberts provided to the Senate Judiciary Committee. His remarks Tuesday suggested he knows that statement is not enough to quiet critics.

The chief justice's remarks follow a series of stories, mainly by the investigative news site ProPublica, that have detailed lavish trips and other gifts provided to Justice Clarence Thomas by Republican mega-donor Harlan Crow.

Democrats have used the revelations to call for stronger ethics rules for the Supreme Court, and the Democratic-controlled Senate has held two hearings on ethics issues in recent weeks. Republicans have defended Thomas.

Roberts, who has led the court since 2005, also said the hardest decision he has made as chief justice was to keep protesters away from the court last year, in the wake of the leak of the draft opinion overturning Roe v. Wade.

"The hardest decision in 18 years I had to make was whether to erect fences and barricades around the Supreme Court. I had no choice but to go ahead and do it," he said at the American Law Institute dinner in Washington.

The fencing was removed before the court's new term began in October.

Trump lawyers seek meeting with Garland as Mar-a-Lago investigation shows signs of winding down

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lawyers for Donald Trump on Tuesday asked for a meeting with Attorney General Merrick Garland as a Justice Department investigation into the former president's handling of classified documents shows signs of winding down.

In the letter, which Trump posted on his Truth Social platform, attorneys John Rowley and James Trusty asserted that Trump is "being treated unfairly" and asked for a meeting to discuss "the ongoing injustice that is being perpetrated by your Special Counsel and his prosecutors." The language echoed some of Trump's own complaints in recent months about the investigations being led by special counsel Jack Smith.

It was not immediately clear what specifically prompted the letter, but the yearlong documents probe appears to be nearing an end. Agents and prosecutors have interviewed a broad cross-section of witnesses, including attorneys for Trump, former White House officials and other close aides.

The investigation is seeking to determine whether Trump illegally retained hundreds of classified documents taken with him from the White House to his Florida home, Mar-a-Lago, after the end of his tenure and whether he sought to obstruct government efforts to get the records back.

It is not uncommon for defense lawyers to seek meetings with senior Justice Department officials to argue against potential indictments of their clients, though it is unusual for such meetings to include the attorney general.

Special counsels enjoy broad autonomy within the Justice Department, and officials have repeatedly signaled that the recommendation on whether to pursue charges against Trump or anyone else in the investigation belongs with Smith and his team. Garland did not move once to overrule any of the actions taken in the recently concluded probe by another special counsel, John Durham, into the origins of the Trump-Russia investigation in 2016.

Trump's lawyers and a Trump spokesperson did not respond Tuesday to requests for comment. A Justice Department spokeswoman declined to comment.

In addition to the documents investigation, Smith is separately investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to undo the results of the 2020 presidential election.

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As India's electrical grid strains, rural hospitals and clinics find reliable power in rooftop solar

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

RAICHUR, India (AP) — In the searing heat that often envelops Raichur, an ancient town in southern India, a ceiling fan that spins without interruption brings sweet relief for the newborn babies and their mothers at the Government Maternity Hospital.

But such respite wasn't always guaranteed in a region where frequent power cuts to India's overmatched electrical grid can last hours. It wasn't until the hospital installed rooftop solar panels a year ago that it could depend on constant electricity that keeps the lights on, patients and staff comfortable and vaccines and medicines safely refrigerated.

The diesel generator that used to provide emergency backup — spewing planet-warming gases and toxic smoke within breathing distance of newborns every time it was running — is gone. So is the need to use flashlights to see during one of the hospital's roughly 600 births per year, as staff sometimes had to do amid a sudden blackout if the old generators weren't working.

For Martha Jones, a senior nurse who has helped deliver countless babies, the reliability that solar has brought has been a revelation.

"We don't even know when power is cut or when it has come back," Jones said.

In semi-urban and rural regions of India and other developing countries with unreliable power grids, decentralized renewable energy — especially solar — is making all the difference in delivering modern health care. And it's becoming even more indispensable where heat and weather extremes are increasing due to climate change. In Raichur, for example, temperatures can soar to 42 degrees Celsius (107 degrees Fahrenheit) in the warmest months.

The hospital, Government Maternity, a bare-bones facility that serves thousands who can't afford private health care, is one of 251 medical facilities in the Raichur district that runs on rooftop solar under a program spearheaded by Selco Foundation. The Bengaluru-based not-for-profit has raised funds from Indian and international corporations and coordinated with the local government since 2017.

It costs about $8,500 to install a system at public health care centers, including lead-acid batteries that store power for use at night. Smaller clinics run closer to about $2,000. The sites remain connected to the power grid, but only as a backup to the solar.

Some of Government Maternity's patients, like 25-year-old Sandhya Shivappa, said they knew little or nothing about the hospital's use of solar power and were simply grateful for its free services.

"We would be paying 30,000 rupees ($367) if I wanted to deliver my baby at a private hospital," said Sandhya Shivappa, a 25-year-old who had just delivered a healthy baby girl when a reporter visited.

Shifting the hospitals and clinics to clean energy helps cut emissions in a sector that accounts for about 4.4% of the global figure, according to a study by Health Care Without Harm, an international nonprofit that advocates to reduce that. And that fits broader goals in India, the world's most populous nation and the third-largest emitter of planet-warming gases.

While India currently relies heavily on coal for its electricity, it has a target of installing 450 gigawatts of renewable energy that should account for about half its needs by the end of this decade. Rapid increase in solar, especially rooftop solar, will be necessary to meet that goal.

India has currently only installed about one-fourth of the 40 gigawatts of rooftop solar that policymakers had planned to have by last year. Supply chain issues and taxes on imported components — intended to protect domestic makers — have contributed to that shortfall. But India has also constantly reiterated the importance of getting money from developed countries and multilateral development banks to help achieve its climate goals.

Besides providing uninterrupted power, the rooftop solar is helping the medical facilities cut costs. In nearby Zaheerabad, a low-income neighborhood, Dr. Kavyashree Sugur said the public health center she

oversees has paid at least 50% less for electricity in the two years since installing solar panels.

That's a big benefit in a country that is among the lowest spenders on health care in the world — India spends just a little more than 2% of its national budget on health care, compared to the United States' 18% — and many hospitals and health clinics are cash-strapped.

The addition of solar to health care centers in remote regions has been especially important for villagers who don't have the time or money to visit hospitals in the city, and likely would have simply gone without health care, said Hanumantappa Channadaser, Selco's branch manager in Raichur.

"Before solar, people were apprehensive to visit these hospitals because of power shortages and they didn't have faith in the treatment they might get," Channadaser said.

Recently, Selco, Swedish furniture company Ikea and the Indian health ministry announced that they will set up solar power for 25,000 government health care facilities across 12 Indian states by 2026. Ikea has committed $48 million to the project. Selco is also working with the International Renewable Energy Agency and World Health Organization in Africa to scale up decentralized solar for health facilities on that continent.

Shireen Fatima, who was four months pregnant and visiting the Zaheerabad health care center for a checkup, said she appreciates how "blood tests, tablets, everything is free here." The hospital's shift to solar energy is "definitely good," she added.

"If the hospital is saving on bills, the benefits will be for us too," she said.

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Target removes some LGBTQ merchandise from stores ahead of June Pride month after threats to workers

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Target is removing certain items from its stores and making other changes to its LGBTQ merchandise nationwide ahead of Pride month, after an intense backlash from some customers including violent confrontations with its workers.

"Since introducing this year's collection, we've experienced threats impacting our team members' sense of safety and well-being while at work," Target said in a statement Tuesday. "Given these volatile circumstances, we are making adjustments to our plans, including removing items that have been at the center of the most significant confrontational behavior."

Target declined to say which items it was removing but among the ones that garnered the most attention were "tuck friendly" women's swimsuits that allow trans women who have not had gender-affirming operations to conceal their private parts. Designs by Abprallen, a London-based company that designs and sells occult- and satanic-themed LGBTQ clothing and accessories, have also created backlash.

The Pride merchandise has been on sale since early May. Pride month is held in June.

Target confirmed that it has moved its Pride merchandise from the front of the stores to the back in some Southern stores after confrontations and backlash from shoppers in those areas.

Target's Pride month collection has also been the subject of several misleading videos in recent weeks, with social media users falsely claiming the retailer is selling "tuck-friendly" bathing suits designed for kids or in kids' sizes.

The moves come as beer brand Bud Light is still grappling with a backlash from customers angered by its attempt to broaden its customer base by partnering with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney. Bud Light's parent company said it will triple its marketing spending in the U.S. this summer as it tries to restore sales it lost after the brand partnered with the transgender influencer.

Target and other retailers including Walmart and H&M have been expanding their LGBTQ displays to

celebrate Pride month for roughly a decade. This year transgender issues — including gender-affirming health care and participation in sports — have been a divisive topic in state legislatures and the backlash has turned hostile.

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

Jimmy Carter, 3 months into hospice, is aware of tributes, enjoying ice cream

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

NORCROSS, Ga. (AP) — Three months after entering end-of-life care at home, former President Jimmy Carter remains in good spirits as he visits with family, follows public discussion of his legacy and receives updates on The Carter Center's humanitarian work around the world, his grandson says. He's even enjoying regular servings of ice cream.

"They're just meeting with family right now, but they're doing it in the best possible way: the two of them together at home," Jason Carter said of Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, now 98 and 95 years old.

"They've been together 70-plus years. They also know that they're not in charge," the younger Carter said Tuesday in a brief interview. "Their faith is really grounding in this moment. In that way, it's as good as it can be."

The longest-lived U.S. president, Jimmy Carter announced in February that after a series of brief hospital stays, he would forgo further medical intervention and spend the remainder of his life in the same modest, one-story house in Plains where they lived when he was first elected to the state Senate in 1962. No illness was disclosed.

The hospice care announcement prompted ongoing tributes and media attention on his 1977-81 presidency and the global humanitarian work the couple has done since co-founding The Carter Center in 1982.

"That's been one of the blessings of the last couple of months," Jason Carter said after speaking Tuesday at an event honoring his grandfather. "He is certainly getting to see the outpouring and it's been gratifying to him for sure."

The former president also gets updates on The Carter Center's Guinea worm eradication program, launched in the mid-1980s when millions of people suffered from the parasite spread by unclean drinking water. Last year, there were fewer than two dozen cases worldwide.

And in less serious moments, he also continues to enjoy peanut butter ice cream, his preferred flavor, in keeping with his political brand as a peanut farmer, his grandson said.

Andrew Young, who served as Carter's U.N. Ambassador, told the AP that he too visited the Carters "a few weeks back" and was "very pleased we could laugh and joke about old times."

Young and Jason Carter joined other friends and admirers Tuesday at a celebration of the former president along Jimmy Carter Boulevard in suburban Norcross, just northeast of Atlanta. Young said the setting — in one of the most racially and ethnically diverse suburban swaths in America — reflected the former president's broader legacy as someone who pursued peace, conflict resolution and racial equity.

When the almost 10-mile stretch of highway in Gwinnett County was renamed in 1976 — the year he was elected president — the small towns and bedroom communities on the edge of metropolitan Atlanta were only beginning to boom. Now, Gwinnett alone has a population of about 1 million people, and Jimmy Carter Boulevard is thriving, with many businesses owned by Black proprietors, immigrants or first-generation Americans.

Young, a top aide to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights Movement, said Carter began as a white politician from south Georgia in the days of Jim Crow segregation, but he proved his values were different.

As governor and president, Carter believed "that the world can come to Georgia and show everybody how to live together," Young said.

Now, Georgia "looks like the whole world," said Young, 91.

Nicole Love Hendrickson, elected in 2020 as the first Black chair of the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners, praised Carter as "a man with an exceptional regard for the humanity of others."

Alluding to Carter's landslide re-election defeat, Young said he has personally relished seeing historians and others finding success stories as they reassess Carter's presidency — ceding control of the Panama Canal, developing a national energy strategy, engaging more in Africa than any U.S. president had. Such achievements were either unpopular at the time or overshadowed by Carter's inability to corral inflation, tame energy crises or free the American hostages in Iran before the 1980 election.

"I told him, 'you know, it took them over 50 years to appreciate President Lincoln. It may take that long to appreciate you,'" Young said.

"Nobody was thinking about the Panama Canal. Nobody would have thought about bringing Egypt and Israel together. I mean, I was thinking about trying to do something in Africa, but nobody else in Washington was, and he did. He's always had an idea about everything."

Still, when Jason Carter addressed his grandparents' admirers Tuesday, he argued against thinking about them like global celebrities.

"They're just like all of y'all's grandparents — I mean, to the extent y'all's grandparents are rednecks from south Georgia," he said to laughter. "If you go down there even today, next to their sink they have a little rack where they dry Ziplock bags."

Most remarkable, Jason Carter said, is the fact such a gathering occurred with his grandfather still living.

"We did think that when he went into hospice it was very close to the end," he told attendees. "Now, I'm just going to tell you, he's going to be 99 in October."

Texas sues Biden administration over asylum rule, saying phone app encourages illegal immigration

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

The state of Texas is suing the Biden administration in an attempt to have a newly-introduced asylum rule thrown out, saying a phone app used by migrants to set up appointments at the border to seek entry into the United States is encouraging illegal immigration.

The lawsuit filed Tuesday is the latest legal salvo attacking various aspects of the administration's plan to manage migration in the aftermath of the end of a key pandemic-era immigration regulation called Title 42.

In the lawsuit, Texas argues that the asylum rule encourages the use of a cellphone app — called CBP One — for migrants who don't have proper documentation to make an appointments to come to a port of entry and seek entry into the United States.

Texas argues the Biden administration is essentially encouraging people to come to the U.S. even though they don't have legal basis to stay.

"The Biden Administration deliberately conceived of this phone app with the goal of illegally pre-approving more foreign aliens to enter the country and go where they please once they arrive," said Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in a news release.

The complaint was filed in the Western District of Texas.

While the lawsuit focuses on the phone app, it seeks to throw out the entire asylum rule, called the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways. The rule went into effect when Title 42 expired May 11. The rule makes it extremely difficult for migrants who travel to the southern border to get asylum if they don't first seek protection in a country they passed through before reaching the U.S. or if they don't apply online through the app.

Use of the app is a core part of the administration's plans to create a more orderly system at the border where migrants set up appointments ahead of time, but when the app was rolled out in January it was criticized for technological problems and because demand has far outstripped available spaces. Migrants can make appointments for specific ports of entry — five of which are in Texas.

Texas argues that according to federal law, people entering the country illegally — with rare exceptions — should be expelled but that the app doesn't verify whether the migrants seeking appointments would

qualify for exceptions. Therefore, the state argues, the Biden administration's use of the app essentially encourages people to come to the U.S. even if they don't qualify. Texas also argues that it has to pay the financial burden of migrants coming to the U.S. through things like health care or education.

The new asylum rule has also been attacked by rights groups who argue the U.S. has an obligation to offer asylum to those in desperate need. They're suing to have the rule thrown out as well. Texas is also part of another lawsuit accusing the administration of overstepping its authority by allowing as many as 360,000 people a year from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to enter the U.S. under its humanitarian parole authority.

JPMorgan Chase defends lawsuit by blaming US Virgin Islands for Jeffrey Epstein's sex crimes

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — JPMorgan Chase defended itself on Tuesday against a lawsuit by the U.S. Virgin Islands accusing it of empowering Jeffrey Epstein to abuse teenage girls by arguing in court papers that it was the islands, not the bank, that enabled the financier to commit his crimes.

Lawyers for the bank said in the Manhattan federal court filing that the government of the Virgin Islands was complicit, letting high ranking officials be bought off by Epstein and actively working with him while "reaping the benefits of his wealth."

"He gave them money, advice, influence, and favors. In exchange, they shielded and even rewarded him," providing lucrative tax breaks worth millions of dollars, they wrote.

Most troubling, they said, was that officials from the islands "protected Epstein, fostering the perfect conditions for Epstein's criminal conduct to continue undetected."

The lawyers added: "For two decades, and for long after JPMC exited Epstein as a client, the entity that most directly failed to protect public safety and most actively facilitated and benefited from Epstein's continued criminal activity was the plaintiff in this case — the USVI government itself."

The Virgin Islands, where Epstein had an estate, sued JPMorgan last year, saying its investigation revealed that the financial services giant enabled Epstein's recruiters to pay victims and was "indispensable to the operation and concealment of the Epstein trafficking enterprise."

"JPMorgan Chase facilitated Jeffrey Epstein's abuse, and should be held accountable for violating the law," a spokesperson from the U.S. Virgin Islands attorney general's office said in an email Tuesday. "This is an obvious attempt to shift blame away from JPMorgan Chase, which had a legal responsibility to report the evidence in its possession of Epstein's human trafficking, and failed to do so."

In their filing Tuesday, the bank's lawyers said Virgin Islands officials looked the other way when Epstein went through its airports with girls and young women as he donated generously to political campaigns. The lawyers said officials were lenient with requirements that he register as a sex offender, doing inspections of his residence that were "cursory at best."

"In sum, in exchange for Epstein's cash and gifts, USVI made life easy for him," the lawyers said. "The government mitigated any burdens from his sex offender status. And it made sure that no one asked too many questions about his transport and keeping of young girls on his island."

Portions of the filing were heavily redacted. It asked Judge Jed Rakoff to reject the islands' attempts to prevent the bank from using defenses at trial that would expose the islands' role in Epstein's dealings.

The lawyers wrote that "alleged damages must be balanced against the considerable benefits that USVI reaped from its facilitation of Epstein's crimes."

Epstein was 66 when he took his life in August 2019 in a Manhattan federal jail where he was awaiting trial on sex trafficking charges. He had pleaded not guilty to charges of sexually abusing dozens of girls, some as young as 14 years old.

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Wes Anderson on his new '50s-set film 'Asteroid City,' AI and all those TikTok videos

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — When Wes Anderson comes down from Paris for the Cannes Film Festival in the south of France, he and his actors don't stay in one of Cannes' luxury hotels but more than an hour down the coast and well outside the frenzy of the festival.

"When we arrived here yesterday, we arrived at a calm, peaceful hotel," Anderson said in a interview. "We're one hour away, but it's a total normal life."

Normal life can mean something different in a Wes Anderson film, and that may be doubly so in his latest, "Asteroid City." It's among Anderson's most charmingly chock-full creations, a much-layered, '50s-set fusion of science fiction, midcentury theater and about a hundred other influences ranging from Looney Tunes to "Bad Day at Black Rock."

"Asteroid City," which Focus Features will release June 16, premiered Tuesday in Cannes. Anderson and his starry cast — including Jason Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Steve Carell, Margot Robbie, Bryan Cranston, Jeffrey Wright and Adrien Brody — arrived all together in a coach bus.

The film, which Anderson wrote with Roman Coppola, takes place in a Southwest desert town where a group of characters, some of them nursing an unspoken grief, gather for various reasons, be it a stargazing convention or a broken-down car. But even that story is part of a Russian Doll fiction. It's a play being performed — which, itself, is being filmed for a TV broadcast.

All of which is to say "Asteroid City" is going to give all those Tik Tok videos made in Anderson's distinct, diorama style fresh fodder for new social-media replicas, both human-made and AI-crafted. Anderson spoke about those Tik Toks in an interview the day before "Asteroid City" debuted in Cannes, as well as other questions of style and inspiration in "Asteroid City," a sun-dried and melancholic work of vintage Anderson density.

"I do feel like this might be a movie that benefits from being seen twice," Anderson said. "Brian De Palma liked it the first time and had a much bigger reaction on the second time. But what can you say? You can't make a movie and say, 'I think it's best everyone sees it twice.'"

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AP: It's quite a treat to read in the movie's opening credits "Jeff Goldblum as the alien," before you even know there's an alien. That seems to announce something.

ANDERSON: We naturally were debating whether this is necessary in the opening credits. I said, "You know, it's a good thing." It's a little foreshadowing. In our story, it's not a expansive role. But part of what the movie is to me and to Roman, it has something to do with actors and this strange thing that they do. What does it mean when you give a performance? If somebody has probably written something and then you study it and learn and you have an interpretation. But essentially you take yourself and put it in the movie. And then you take a bunch of people taking themselves and putting themselves in the movie. They have their faces and their voices, and they're more complex than anything than even the AI is going to come up with. The AI has to know them to invent them. They do all these emotional things that are usually a mystery to me. I usually stand back and watch and it's always quite moving.

AP: The alien may signal doom for the characters of "Asteroid City," and there are atomic bomb tests in the area. Is this your version of an apocalyptic movie?

ANDERSON: The apocalyptic stuff was all there. There probably were no aliens, but there certainly was a strong interest in them. There certainly were atom bombs going off. And there had just been I think we can say the worst war in the history of mankind. There's a certain point where I remember saying to Roman: "I think not only is one of these men suffering some kind of post-traumatic stress that he's totally unaware of, but he's sharing it with his family in a way that's going to end up with Woodstock. But also: They should all be armed. So everybody's got a pistol.

AP: Since maybe "Grand Budapest Hotel," you seem to be adding more and more frames within frames for Russian doll movies of one layer after another. Your first movies, "Bottle Rocket" and "Rushmore" are

starting to seem almost realistic by comparison. Do you think your films are getting more elaborate as you get older?

ANDERSON: Ultimately, every time I make a movie, I'm just trying to figure out what I want to do and then figure out how to make it such that we do what I want. It's usually an emotional choice and it's usually quite mysterious to me how end up with how end up. The most improvisation aspect of making a movie to me is writing it. I have a tendency to obsess over the stage directions, which are not in the movie. With "Grand Budapest" we had multiple layers to it, and "French Dispatch" certainly had that. This one is really split in two but there's more complex layers. We know the main movie is the play. But we also have a behind-the-scenes making of the play. We also have a guy telling us that this is a television broadcast of a hypothetical play that doesn't actually exist. It's not intention to make it complicated. It's just me doing what I want.

AP: Have you seen all the TikTok videos that have made in your style? They're everywhere.

ANDERSON: No, I haven't seen it. I've never seen any TikTok, actually. I've not seen the ones related to me or the ones not related to me. And I've not seen any of the AI-type stuff related to me.

AP: You could look at it as a new generation discovering your films.

ANDERSON: The only reason I don't look at the stuff is because it probably takes the things that I do the same again and again. We're forced to accept when I make a movie, it's got to be made by me. But what I will say is anytime anyone's responding with enthusiasm to these movies I've made over these many years, that's a nice, lucky thing. So I'm happy to have it. But I have a feeling I would just feel like: Gosh, is that what I'm doing? So I protect myself.

AP: People sometimes miss in your films that the characters operating in such precise worlds are deeply flawed and comic. The ornate tableaux may be exact but the people are all imperfect.

ANDERSON: That's what I would aspire to, anyway. In the end, it's a lot more important to me what it's about. I spend a lot more time writing the movie than doing anything to do with making it. It's the actors who are the center of it all to me. You can't simulate them. Or maybe you can. If you look at the AI, maybe I'll see that you can.

AP: In "Asteroid City," you combined an interest in really disparate ideas — the '50s theater of Sam Shepard with the automat. How does a combination like that happen?

ANDERSON: We had an idea that we wanted to do a '50s setting and it's got these two sides. One is New York theater. There's a picture of Paul Newman sitting with a T-shirt on and a foot on the chair in the Actors Studio. It was about that world of summer stock, behind the scenes of that, and these towns that were built and never moved into. That becomes the East Coast and the West Coat and the theater and the cinema. There's a series of dichotomies. And one of the central things was we wanted to make a character for Jason Schwartzman that was different from what he's done before. The things that go into making a movie, it eventually becomes too much to even pin down. So many things get added into the mix, which I like. And part of what the movie is about is what you can't control in life. In a way, the invention of a movie is one of those things.

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Follow AP Film Writer Jake Coyle on Twitter at: http://twitter.com/jakecoyleAP

DeSantis plans to announce 2024 bid Wednesday on Twitter Spaces with Elon Musk, sources tell AP

By STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, long seen as Donald Trump's leading rival for the Republican nomination, plans to launch his 2024 presidential campaign on Wednesday in an online conversation with Twitter CEO Elon Musk, according to two people with knowledge of the decision.

DeSantis, an outspoken cultural conservative, will outline his plans in an evening audio event streamed on Twitter Spaces, according to the two people. They spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the announcement publicly.

The 44-year-old two-term governor would be joining a crowded Republican contest to decide whether the party will move on from Trump in 2024. DeSantis has embraced Trump's combative style and many of his policies, but casts himself as a younger and more electable version of the former president.

In choosing Twitter, DeSantis is taking a page out of the playbook that helped turn businessman-TV celebrity Trump into a political star.

The timing of DeSantis' long-expected announcement has been shrouded, with various iterations of plans being leaked over the past few days. Some close to him suspected that he was providing conflicting information about the timing and location to root out leakers. Others believe he changed his initial preparations after news reports came out about them.

Musk, speaking at The Wall Street Journal's CEO Council Summit event in London on Tuesday, seemed to confirm the Wednesday event, saying DeSantis would be making "quite an announcement" on Twitter. "The first time something like this is happening on social media," he said, with live questions and answers.

The news of DeSantis' impending announcement came as Trump was making a video appearance in a New York courtroom as part of his criminal case. A judge tentatively scheduled Trump's trial to begin March 25, which falls in the heart of the presidential primary season. Trump pleaded not guilty last month to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records at his family company, the Trump Organization.

DeSantis was expected to meet with donors Wednesday at the Four Seasons Hotel in Miami before the Twitter Spaces event, which was scheduled for 6 p.m. EDT.

While it is common for campaigns to publicize their announcements in videos shared on social media, it is far more unusual — and perhaps unprecedented — to hold a campaign announcement in a live social media forum.

"Big if true ...," DeSantis' wife, Casey, posted Tuesday on Twitter, linking to a Fox News story on the announcement and adding a smiley face.

Earlier Tuesday, the Florida governor gave no hints of his 2024 plans during a short Cabinet meeting in Tallahassee where he discussed state business with agency heads. The media was barred from covering a subsequent bill signing ceremony.

DeSantis has emerged as a national star in Republican politics as an unapologetic leader on controversial issues.

The governor sent dozens of immigrants from Texas — by way of Florida —to a small island off the Massachusetts coast to draw attention to the influx of Latin American immigrants trying to cross the Southern border. He signed and then expanded a Parental Rights in Education bill — known by critics as the "Don't Say Gay" law — which bans instruction or classroom discussion of LGBTQ issues in Florida public schools for all grades.

More recently, he signed a law banning abortions at six weeks, which is before most women realize they're pregnant. And he removed an elected prosecutor who vowed not to charge people under Florida's new abortion restrictions or doctors who provide gender-affirming care.

Trump's allies lashed out Tuesday at DeSantis' plan.

"This is one of the most out-of-touch campaign launches in modern history. The only thing less relatable than a niche campaign launch on Twitter, is DeSantis' after party at the uber elite Four Seasons resort in Miami," said Karoline Leavitt, a spokesperson for Trump's super PAC.

Trump himself frequently dismisses his rival as Ron "DeSanctimonious."

In choosing to announce with Musk, DeSantis is linking his presidential announcement to one of the world's richest men, who has emerged as a conservative cult hero of sorts.

Since buying Twitter last October, Musk has reinstated the accounts of prominent Republicans, including Trump and Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who had been removed. Popular conservative broadcasters have flocked to Twitter, with ousted Fox News host Tucker Carlson and the podcast hosts of The Daily Wire announcing they will start streaming on the platform.

Musk himself has promoted far-right conspiracy theories on Twitter, including misleading claims questioning a Texas mall shooter's background and a debunked rumor that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband

had a relationship with an assailant who attacked him.

Earlier this month, Musk's tweets likening billionaire philanthropist George Soros to a Jewish supervillain were met with criticism from the Anti-Defamation League, which said they would embolden antisemitic extremists. Musk said he would "be more thoughtful in the future."

Twitter was once Trump's most important megaphone — one he used to dominate his rivals in the 2016 primary and to command the news cycle for years. Trump was barred from the platform after a mob of his supporters invaded the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, with Twitter citing "the risk of further incitement of violence." Although his access was reinstated shortly after Musk took over, he has yet to tweet.

About 1 in 5 U.S. adults say they use Twitter, the Pew Research Center found last year.

Democrats are somewhat more likely than Republicans to say they have Twitter accounts, according to a Fox News poll from December. Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to say Musk buying Twitter was a good thing and to have a favorable view of him.

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Associated Press writers Jill Colvin and Ali Swenson in New York, Barbara Ortutay in San Francisco and Emily Swanson in Washington contributed to this report.

Missouri man accused of deliberately crashing U-Haul truck into security barrier near White House

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Missouri man flew to Washington, rented a U-Haul truck and drove straight to the White House, where he crashed the truck into a security barrier and began waving around a Nazi flag in the culmination of a six-month plan to "seize power" from the government, authorities said Tuesday.

Sai Varshith Kandula, 19, removed the flag from a backpack shortly after smashing the box truck into the barrier near the north side of Lafayette Square on Monday around 10 p.m., according to charging documents. He was quickly arrested by a U.S. Park Police officer who rushed to the scene of the crash and saw him take out the flag.

Kandula later told Secret Service agents that he'd flown from St. Louis on a one-way ticket that night after months of planning. He wanted to "get to the White House, seize power, and be put in charge of the nation," and he said he would "kill the president, if that's what I have to do," charges state.

Kandula, who is from the St. Louis suburb of Chesterfield, Missouri, said he bought the flag online because he admires the Nazis' "great history" as well as their "authoritarian nature, eugenics, and their one world order."

No one was injured in the crash. No explosives or weapons were found in the truck or on Kandula.

Kandula rented the U-Haul in Herndon, Virginia, and had a valid contract in his own name, the company said. People can rent a truck from U-Haul at age 18, and there were no red flags on his rental record that would have prevented the contract, according to U-Haul.

A witness, Chris Zaboji, said the driver smashed into the barrier at least twice. Zaboji, a 25-year-old pilot who lives in Washington, was finishing a run close by Lafayette Square when he heard the loud crash of the U-Haul truck hitting the barrier. He said he took out his phone and captured the moment the truck struck the barrier again before he heard sirens approaching.

"When the van backed up and rammed it again, I decided I wanted to get out of there," he said.

Officers from the Secret Service and the Metropolitan Police Department searched the truck after the crash. Video posted by WUSA-TV shows a police officer at the scene picking up and inventorying several pieces of evidence from the truck, including a Nazi flag.

Kandula was arrested on multiple charges, and prosecutors charged him with damaging U.S. property.

Biden was briefed on the crash Tuesday morning by the Secret Service and Park Police, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "He's relieved that no one was injured last night," she said.

The U.S. Secret Service monitors hundreds of people who have made threats to the president, but it's not clear whether Kandula was on their radar at all or if he had threatened the president before, which

would trigger the Secret Service's involvement.

No attorney was listed for Kandula in court records, multiple telephone numbers listed under his surname in public records were out of service, and efforts by The Associated Press to reach relatives who could speak on his behalf on Tuesday were not immediately successful. People at a Missouri home listed as being associated with Kandula would not speak with an AP reporter.

Lafayette Square offers perhaps the best view of the White House available to the public, and Kandula sent multiple people running when he drove onto the sidewalk to reach the barrier.

The square has also long been one of the nation's most prominent venues for demonstrations. The park was closed for nearly a year after federal authorities fenced off the area at the height of nationwide protests over policing following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, but it reopened in May 2021.

U-Haul is a moving truck, trailer and self-storage rental company based in Phoenix.

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Associated Press writers Jim Salter in Chesterfield, Missouri, Colleen Long and Michael Balsamo in Washington and newsgathering producer Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed to this report.

Man killed while helping ducklings safely cross busy California street

By SOPHIE AUSTIN and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

ROCKLIN, Calif. (AP) — His family says it's no surprise that Casey Rivara's final act was one of compassion. When he spotted a mama duck trying to guide her ducklings across a busy California intersection, Rivara stopped his car at a red light and got out to help them make it to safety.

Rivara made sure traffic in all directions was stopped, witnesses said, then escorted the duck and her babies to the other side of the street around 8:15 p.m. last Thursday in suburban Rocklin, northeast of Sacramento.

"All the ducks made it safely across," said 11-year-old Jude Peterson, who was watching with a carpool group after track practice. "He did something amazing."

His good deed done, Rivara was walking back to his car when another vehicle came through the intersection and struck him. He flew through the air and landed in the street. The 41-year-old father of two died at the scene.

"Casey was the kindest, most amazing husband and father. Even his last act in this world was a sign of his compassion," his aunt, Tracey Rivara, wrote on a verified GoFundMe page raising money for his widow and their 11-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son. Nearly $90,000 was raised by Tuesday afternoon.

"The family is trying to figure out how to recover and keep going after this immense loss," his aunt wrote.

The driver of the car that hit him, a 17-year-old girl, remained at the scene and is cooperating with investigators, said Rocklin police Capt. Scott Horrillo. Detectives are still interviewing witnesses and reviewing video, he said, but it doesn't appear the teen driver will face charges.

"Right now, we don't have any reason to believe there was any criminal negligence," Horrillo said Monday. He called it a tragic accident.

Flowers adorned a growing memorial to Rivara at the accident site on Tuesday in Rocklin, a city of about 73,000 people. Somebody also left several toy rubber ducks.

Casey was married to Angel Chow, his high school sweetheart. The inseparable pair met at age 17 when she arrived at his high school as an exchange student from Hong Kong, according to the GoFundMe page.

"His family was Casey's world, and to remain even closer to them he had recently started working at their children's school," Tracey Rivara wrote. "He loved working at the school as he was able to positively impact other children."

His wife said the family has been touched by the outpouring of love and support from family, friends, co-workers and community members.

"It's truly humbling to hear how Casey has positively impacted your lives, and we're extremely grateful for that," Chow wrote Monday on Facebook.

She said she planned to compile the tributes in a book "that our children can turn to whenever they miss him."

Jude Peterson, the young witness, said he was "in shock and so scared" after witnessing the tragedy. His mother, Summer Peterson, said Jude was in tears when he got home that night.

By Monday, his mother said, Jude had processed his shock and was filled with admiration for Rivara.

"He did the right thing," Jude said. "He wanted to help because there were ducks in the road, and he didn't want anyone to hit the ducks."

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Weber reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press researcher Rhonda Shafner contributed from New York.

Catholic clergy sexually abused Illinois kids far more often than church acknowledged, state finds

By KATHLEEN FOODY and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — More than 450 Catholic clergy in Illinois sexually abused nearly 2,000 children since 1950, the state's attorney general found in an investigation released Tuesday, revealing that the problem was far worse than the church had let on.

Attorney General Kwame Raoul said at a news conference that investigators found that 451 Catholic clergy abused 1,997 children in Illinois between 1950 and 2019, though he acknowledged that the statute of limitations has expired in many cases and that those abusers "will never see justice in a legal sense."

"It is my hope that this report will shine light both on those who violated their positions of power and trust to abuse innocent children, and on the men in church leadership who covered up that abuse," Raoul said, crediting the accusers for making the review possible. "These perpetrators may never be held accountable in a court of law, but by naming them here, the intention is to provide a public accountability and a measure of healing to survivors who have long suffered in silence."

The review began in 2018 under Raoul's predecessor, Lisa Madigan, who released a blistering report as she prepared to leave office. Raoul continued the investigation, and he said Tuesday that 25 staff members reviewed more than 100,000 pages of diocesan documents and engaged in more than 600 confidential interactions with contacts.

The lengthy report describes Illinois church leaders as woefully slow to acknowledge the extent of the abuse. It also accuses them of frequently dragging their feet to confront accused clergy and of failing to warn parishioners about possible abusers in their midst, sometimes even decades after allegations emerged.

In a joint statement issued Friday ahead of Raoul's announcement, the state's Catholic dioceses said the attorney general's investigation prompted a yearslong review of their policies and unspecified changes. Cardinal Blase Cupich, archbishop of Chicago, on Monday called abuse "repugnant" but said the church in 1992 began overhauling its policies and programs and cooperated fully with the state's review.

"My hope is that the release of this report will be an occasion for the attorney general to issue a rallying cry to all adults to join in the work of safeguarding children, lest this moment be a lost opportunity," Cupich said. "I stand ready to continue to do my part."

Much of the report is dedicated to individual accounts of sexual abuse and lists of clergy and religious brothers in each diocese accused of child sexual abuse. Some of those named have become infamous due to criminal proceedings or lawsuits, including Father Daniel McCormack, who was the subject of more than 100 abuse claims in the decades before his 2006 arrest for abusing five boys in Chicago.

He later pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years in prison.

Even after McCormack's first arrest in 2005 for sexual abuse, the Chicago archdiocese did not remove him from the ministry since those charges were dropped for a lack of evidence, the report says. An archdiocese review board recommended McCormack's removal that year, but then-Cardinal Francis George declined.

According to the report, the mother of one of McCormack's victims later said: "If Cardinal George (had) done the right thing, these other boys would not have been molested. (Instead), he just opened the door

for (McCormack) to take advantage of other Black children."

Many of the accounts contained in the report have remained private for decades. It includes the account of Bob Corcoran, who reported that Father Thomas Considine, who was a teacher at a high school in Elgin, repeatedly sexually abused Corcoran in the 1970s. Considine was removed from ministry in 1980 for undetermined reasons and died in 1988, the report states.

Corcoran told state investigators that he reported the abuse to the Rockford diocese in 2011 and that the church eventually determined his claims couldn't be proven or disproven. He asked that Raoul's office include his name in its final report and said the document's release provided a sense of relief.

"To see the light at the end of the tunnel, and there is no longer a freight train racing towards me, is freeing," Corcoran said in a statement released by his attorneys. "We all need to do our part in bringing resolution to the most vulnerable – children like you and me."

In a statement released Tuesday, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests called the report "stunning" but emphasized that the numbers of victims and abusers cited by Raoul are likely undercounted. The group also called on state and local officials to conduct similar reviews.

"There is no questioning the facts of the report — until 2018 when the investigation began, hierarchs in every Illinois diocese kept known abusers under wraps, declined to include them on their accused lists, and refused to acknowledge the truth that survivors of abuse who came forward to make a report shared with them," the group said.

Similar government-led investigations detailing reports of clergy sexual abuse and church leaders' failure to hold perpetrators accountable have rocked archdioceses in other states, including Pennsylvania and Maryland.

The Catholic Conference of Illinois says 3.5 million Catholics make up approximately 27% of Illinois' total population, and that the Church maintains 949 parishes and has 2,215 priests, 1,372 deacons, and 260 religious brothers.

Accusers and activists for years have complained that abusers belonging to orders have often been able to avoid the scrutiny other clergy received because of their semi-autonomy from archdioceses. The new report, however, officially names some former clergy tied to such orders.

Among those listed is Bruce Wellems, a former priest with the Claretians missionaries assigned for years to Hispanic neighborhoods in Chicago. His accuser says Wellems sexually abused him more than a dozen times starting in 1973 when they were neighbors in New Mexico. The accuser was in the second grade and Wellems was in high school. Wellems admitted in a 2014 interview with The Associated Press that he had inappropriately touched the boy, but he said he never again abused a child.

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This story was updated to correct instances in which Daniel McCormack's name was misspelled "McCormick."

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Find more AP coverage of the church sexual abuse scandal: https://apnews.com/hub/sexual-abuse-by-clergy. Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter: @mtarm

Largest US gay rights group issues Florida travel advisory for anti-LGBTQ+ laws

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The largest LGBTQ+ rights organization in the U.S. joined other civil rights organizations Tuesday in issuing a travel advisory for Florida, warning that newly passed laws and policies may pose risks to minorities, immigrants and gay travelers.

The Human Rights Campaign joined the NAACP, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Florida Immigrant Coalition and Equality Florida in issuing travel or relocation warnings for the Sunshine State, one of the most popular states for tourists to visit in the U.S.

While the LGBTQ+ advocacy group said it wasn't calling for a boycott or making a blanket recommendation against visiting Florida, it said it wanted to highlight new laws passed by the Republican-controlled Florida Legislature that they said are hostile to the LGBTQ+ community, restrict abortion access and allow

Floridians to carry concealed weapons without a permit.

"Those who visit must join us in their vocal opposition to these dangerous policies," Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement. "Those who pick another place to work, to go to school or to spend their vacation should make clear why they're not heading to Florida."

Last weekend, the NAACP, the nation's oldest civil rights organization, issued its advisory warning that recent laws and policies championed by Gov. Ron DeSantis and Florida lawmakers are "openly hostile toward African Americans, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals."

After the NAACP made its announcement, DeSantis' spokesman, Jeremy Redfern, called the travel advisory "nothing more than a stunt."

"As Governor DeSantis announced last week, Florida is seeing record-breaking tourism," Redfern said in a statement.

More than 137.5 million tourists visited Florida last year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels, according to Visit Florida, the state's tourism promotion agency. Tourism supports 1.6 million full-time and part-time jobs, and visitors spent $98.8 billion in Florida in 2019, according to last year's figures.

Caustic feedback, serious injuries and the quiet mental health suffering of horse racing jockeys

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — Eurico Rosa da Silva was in a dark place.

On the track, the jockey in his early 30s was winning races and making money. At home, he was fighting suicidal thoughts every day.

"I got to the point where I have no more choice but to go for help," he recalled recently. "I went because if I have no choice, I would kill myself."

Da Silva got help in 2006 and rode for more than a decade before retiring. He's one of the lucky ones.

Earlier this year, horse racing was stunned by the suicides less than six weeks apart of two young jockeys, 23-year-old Avery Whisman and 29-year-old Alex Canchari. A friend of Whisman's, Triple Crown-winning rider Mike Smith, said he has seen similar tragedies over three decades.

"I know several riders that I knew very well committed suicide when it was all said and done," Smith said. "This is not all of a sudden just happening. It's been going on. You just never heard of it."

The dangers of riding thoroughbreds at high speed add up to an average of two jockeys dying from racing each year and 60 being paralyzed, according to one industry veteran, citing data dating to 1940. Combine that with criticism from owners, trainers and bettors and the need to maintain the low weight necessary to establish a career, and jockeys have been quietly suffering for as long as they have been riding horses.

While jockeys interviewed for this story worry that racing has lagged behind other sports in accepting the importance of their mental health on the job, there is hope that renewed conversation about it prompts real change.

"This needs to be addressed," jockey Trevor McCarthy said. "We take a lot of beatings mentally and physically. With the mental and physical state, when you mix both of them together, it can be a recipe for disaster. Look, there's proof of it, right? We lost two guys."

McCarthy last year, like da Silva before him, sought help before it was too late. His father was a jockey, as is his father-in-law and his wife, Katie Davis McCarthy. They are all used to the ups and downs of the job, from the broken pelvis and collarbone from his spill during a race in November to the uncertain hold on a ride.

A particularly rough summer, including flying up and down the East Coast to ride, took a toll on McCarthy, who at 118 pounds could feel his diet and lack of calories affect his work. He wanted to quit.

"I was going absolutely nuts, and my body couldn't handle it," McCarthy said. "You're constantly going through mind games. And I think a lot of guys get caught up in that with the weight and the mind game of not doing good or thinking they're not good enough."

His wife made him promise to talk to a sports therapist. McCarthy did so for months, learning how to find a better work-life balance that has helped him win 28 races already this year.

Now 47, da Silva was named Canada's best jockey seven times and is the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame.

"In 30 years of riding horses, I can say to you that I never heard anybody talk about the emotional pain, never talked about going for help," said da Silva, who's now a mental health coach and spoke Tuesday at the first jockey mental health symposium in Lexington, Kentucky. "I approached many jockeys that I feel like they need help, and many times I said, 'Go for help.' I motivate them to go for help. They just listen, but they don't really want to talk about."

Dr. Ciara Losty of South East Technological University in Waterford, Ireland, pointed out that jockeys have an "underdeveloped sense of self inside of their sport," compared to team sport or Olympic athletes who are less likely to burn out because they seek out other activities. She said jockeys can also be less familiar with mental health topics because of low literacy levels and lack the support system of a coach or coaching staff.

"Maintaining a low weight and obviously disordered eating is a big part of it," said Losty, who co-authored a 2018 study on jockey mental health. "Being a jockey, you have a risk of serious injuries, and if you've had a serious injury the fear of re-injury when you engage or get back up on the horse again may impact your performance or lead you to some kind of distress."

Dr. Lewis King, now at Ireland's Technological University of the Shannon, did his doctoral degree in 2021 on the subject because he wanted to explore what makes jockeys susceptible to mental health problems and what stopped them from seeking help. In talking to 84 jockeys in Ireland, he said, he found 61% met the threshold for adverse alcohol use, 35% for depression and 27% for anxiety.

King's research showed that despite nearly 80% of jockeys having at least one common mental health disorder, only a third saw a professional. He said most feared losing their jobs.

"The main barrier was stigma and the negative perceptions of others," King said. "But primarily it was related to the negative perceptions of trainers. There was a perception within the jockeys I interviewed that if they spoke about their mental health issues or it somehow got back to their trainer that it may impact whether they get rides. The trainer may perceive them as not in the right headspace, for instance, to ride their horses."

Trainers told King and his colleagues they felt similar worries about sharing their own mental health concerns with owners.

McCarthy, who has been a jockey since 2011, said in recent months he has actually confronted trainers in the U.S., telling them to ease up on berating fellow jockeys after races.

The entire cycle speaks to horse racing being "an old-school sport," McCarthy said. Losty pinned the lack of progress in mental health on the masculinized nature of the industry, and da Silva said the topic is still "taboo" in racing.

"Asking for help in our sport is almost a sign of weakness, sad to say," said Smith, who rode Justify to the Triple Crown in 2018 and is still riding at 57. "You certainly don't want to show any signs of that. We're supposed to be tough and be able to handle it all."

The Jockeys' Guild and Horseracing Integrity and Safety Authority recently sent out an anonymous survey — the first of its kind — to gauge the best ways to support riders' mental health and wellbeing, a hotline is among the ideas being considered.

The results of that survey, returned by 230 jockeys, included 10% describing their mental health as "poor," a third saying sadness, depression or anxiety were causing challenges in their daily life over the past month and 93% expressing concern about financial stability and providing for their families.

Surveyed jockeys also said money, weight concerns and the pressure to win were among the biggest stressors; they cited the fear of losing work and a stigma around seeking support as barriers to seeking help.

"It's important for the industry to come together on this issue and other issues to grow our industry

and make sure equine and human athletes are taken care of," said Jockeys' Guild president and CEO Terry Meyocks, a third-generation horseman whose daughter, Abby, is married to Kentucky Derby-winning jockey Javier Castellano.

"It's important that people talk about it," said Meyocks, who noted an average of two jockeys have died and 60 have been paralyzed annually dating to 1940.

McCarthy only started talking seriously about it after getting married and daughter Riley was born, knowing he's at the leading edge of thinking about mental health and how far behind other jockeys are.

"We're just behind the 8-ball a little bit with that," he said. "It's going to be baby steps, but we have a long way to go."

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AP sports: https://apnews.com/hub/sports and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

As abortion battle shifts, Planned Parenthood to boost regional affiliate funds, cut national staff

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and THALIA BEATY Associated Press

Planned Parenthood is shifting funding to its state affiliates and cutting national office staff to reflect a changed landscape in both how abortion is provided and how battles over access are playing out.

The group, a major provider of abortion and other health services and also an advocate for abortion access, told its staff on Monday that layoff notices would go out in June. It provided The Associated Press with an overview Tuesday.

The changes are to kick in on July 1, just over a year after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that overturned Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision that provided a right to abortion across the country. Since then, most Republican-controlled states have banned or restricted abortion, and most Democrat-controlled states have made moves to protect access.

"We are in a moment when I just believe that Planned Parenthood needs to change, too," said Alexis McGill Johnson, president and CEO of the two arms of the organization: the political Planned Parenthood Action Fund and the network for local service providers, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

She said the changes do not reflect financial struggles for the organization — just priorities that need to change.

Currently, bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy are in effect in 14 states. Planned Parenthood affiliates have sued several states over their restrictions.

The organization plans to increase funding for non-abortion health services in states with bans. Planned Parenthood's services include testing for sexually transmitted infections, providing contraception, cancer screenings and gender-affirming care. The group also plans to increase funding in places where abortion remains legal in order to help serve patients who travel from states with restrictions.

To fund the changes, McGill Johnson said that 10% to 15% of the group's 725 to 750 employees — possibly around 100 — face layoffs in June.

Service Employees International Union locals that represent Planned Parenthood workers criticized the layoffs. "We have served PPFA during the toughest times for abortion access," they said in a statement. "We deserve more than empty claims of equity and of supporting our futures."

In Ohio, a court has blocked enforcement of a ban on abortion after cardiac activity can be detected — generally about six weeks and before many women know they are pregnant. For now, the state has an influx of abortion patients from neighboring Kentucky and West Virginia and other states with bans. But a court ruling could bring a strict ban to the state.

More funding from the national Planned Parenthood will help, said Kersha Deibel, president and CEO of Cincinnati-based Planned Parenthood Southwest Ohio Region. "No matter what happens, we are continuing to build power and making plans to protect and support patients who need access to care," she said.

The national group plans to improve technology for electronic medial record sharing and telehealth. It will also launch an initiative to better serve Black patients, particularly in the South and Midwest. That

element is in a multi-year, $50 million effort that began more than a year ago and has so far focused mostly on the planning stages.

The group's political arm is looking to increase funding at the state level. Last year, six states had ballot measures that dealt with abortion, and the side that supported abortion access prevailed in all of them — even generally conservative states like Kansas and Kentucky. Abortion is expected to be on ballots elsewhere in coming years, including in Ohio this fall.

The New York-based group said the Black health equality initiative will cost $15 million in the coming budget year and other elements will total close to $70 million. Political spending on these initiatives will be added on top of those costs.

Also Tuesday, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, a major anti-abortion group, announced it is working with Kellyanne Conway, a former adviser to President Donald Trump, to "get pro-life candidates on offense in the 2024 election cycle."

Millionaire's elaborate jail escape plan foiled, Florida sheriff says

By FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Authorities say they've foiled an elderly businessman's plan to escape a Florida jail and return to France where he had previously fled in an attempt to avoid child pornography charges.

A tip from outside the jail sparked a two-month investigation of John Manchec, 78, and people he had enlisted in his escape plan, Indian River County Sheriff Eric Flowers said Monday during a news conference.

"Essentially, the plan comes down to this," Sheriff Flowers said. "These folks that are on the outside are going to wait until Manchec has a doctor's visit, and they are going to take out our corrections staff while he's out at the medical facility."

The plan called for Manchec's employees to pepper-spray prison guards and take him to his private plane in nearby Fort Pierce, so that he could fly to France, Flowers said.

Manchec is a multimillionaire with dual U.S. and French citizenship, Flowers said.

Manchec was arrested in 2014 on 49 child pornography charges. Flowers said he left the country to avoid prosecution after posting a nearly $500,000 bond, and moved to his medieval estate in southern France, the Chateau Pechrigal.

France denied U.S. attempts to extradite him, but he was eventually arrested in the Dominican Republic in 2020, and returned to Florida, according to the sheriff.

Manchec requested permission to leave jail in January, saying he suffered from chronic medical conditions, and because he broke his hip and wrist late last year, the sheriff said. The request was denied.

The escape plot centered on an April 12 medical appointment, Flowers said. But at least one of the people involved tipped off law enforcement, allowing investigators to unravel the plot.

An examination of Manchec's jail phone records discovered he used the code words "paint job" while talking with his employees about the plot.

They were to prepare his plane, his 140-foot (42-meter) yacht, a black utility van and other vehicles purchased just for the escape attempt, Flowers said. Manchec even paid the bail for a cellmate, and then allowed them to live in his home. That person helped prepare for the escape, down to packing a suitcase, and his favorite liquor, the sheriff said.

Flowers said the plan was to go "back to his castle in France" and never have to face the charges.

Manchec remains in the Indian River County Jail, with additional charges related to the escape. Two inmates and two employees were also arrested and charged with conspiracy in the escape plot. A lawyer listed on Manchec's court records did not immediately return an email seeking comment on the new charges.

Manchec was originally arrested in December 2014, following a child pornography investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

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Toddler shot by stray bullet at Utah day care while playing outside

By SAM METZ and RICK BOWMER Associated Press

SPANISH FORK, Utah (AP) — A 2-year-old boy shot in the head by a stray bullet while playing outside at day care in Utah is in stable condition, the facility's owner and authorities said Tuesday.

Spanish Fork police believe the bullet came from a pellet or air gun shot from a farming field across the street west of the facility, Lt. Clay Slaymaker said. There are currently no suspects, but a bullet hole could be seen through the vinyl fence that wraps the play area where the incident occurred.

Lane Mugleston, the owner of Leap Ahead Daycare, confirmed that the shooting happened at his facility in Spanish Fork. He said two employees were outside when one near the toddler noticed him suddenly stumble, bleeding from the face, while kids played in the fenced-in area outside the day care on Monday afternoon. Nobody heard the shots at the facility, which is in a light industrial area near an airport, he said.

"We're absolutely dumbfounded. And we pray for the family and hope that the doctors are able to do everything needed, but we're absolutely surprised," Mugleston said.

Mugleston said employees contacted the toddler's parents after observing the injuries and when doctors saw a small-caliber bullet lodged in the victim's head on brain scans later in the evening, they called authorities. The young boy was then transported the child to Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City, 52 miles (84 kilometers) north of Spanish Fork.

"Detectives are continuing to investigate where the bullet may have been shot from and why," police said in a statement. "It appears this was a tragic accident. Open fields are directly west of the day care and it is believed the round may have come from that area."

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Metz reported from Salt Lake City.

Appeals court ruling deals legal setback to Biden administration in gun stabilizing brace case

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court dealt a legal setback to the Biden administration on guns Tuesday in a lawsuit challenging tighter regulations on stabilizing braces, an accessory that has been used in several mass shootings in the U.S.

The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals temporarily blocked the Biden administration's rule from going into effect for the gun owners and groups who filed the lawsuit. The order came shortly before a deadline that would have required people to register stabilizing braces and pay a fee, or remove the braces from their weapons.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives finalized the rule earlier this year after finding the accessories make pistols as dangerously powerful and easy to conceal as short-barreled rifles or sawed-off shotguns, weapons that have been highly regulated since the days of Al Capone.

The rule was quickly challenged by gun-rights groups that argued it violated Second Amendment protections by requiring millions of people to alter or register their weapons. They argued the ATF found a decade ago that the braces did not make pistols like short-barreled rifles.

The accessories, also known as pistol braces, let a shooter fire one handed by attaching to the back of a gun, lengthening the weapon and strapping to the arm. The were originally developed for disabled veterans, though gun-control groups say they became a loophole exploited by gunmakers to make weapons more deadly.

At least three million guns with stabilizing braces are in circulation in the U.S., according to the ATF. Other estimates place the number much higher.

The full impact of the decision wasn't immediately clear. The order applied only to the plaintiffs in the case: two gun owners, a company that makes pistols with stabilizing braces, and a gun-rights group. The appeals court did not say whether the rule was blocked for others, including people who buy the guns

from the company, Maxim Defense Industries, and members of the Firearms Policy Coalition.

An attorney on the case, Erik Jaffe, said they were pleased with the ruling and looking forward to arguments in the case, which the Fifth Circuit also ordered be argued quickly.

The lawsuit came before the court after the Firearms Policy Coalition appealed a lower-court order from a Texas judge who declined to block enforcement of the rule as the case played out.

President Joe Biden first announced the regulation in 2021, after a man using a stabilizing brace killed 10 people at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. A stabilizing brace was also used in a shooting in Dayton, Ohio, that left nine people dead in 2019. In March, a shooter who killed three students and three staff members at a Christian school in Nashville also used one.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said when the rule was finalized that it would help keep communities safe from gun violence.

The ruling comes amid upheaval in the legal landscape for guns after the U.S. Supreme Court's conservative majority set new standards for reviewing the nation's firearm laws, requiring that they be "consistent with the Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation."

The Fifth Circuit also ruled in February that the government can't stop people who have domestic violence restraining orders against them from owning guns.

Who's behind the attack on a Russian region on the border with Ukraine?

By DASHA LITVINOVA, YURAS KARMANAU and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russia alleges that dozens of Ukrainian militants crossed into one of its border towns in its Belgorod region, striking targets and forcing an evacuation, before over 70 of the attackers were killed or pushed back by what the authorities termed a counterterrorism operation.

Ukraine denied any involvement in the skirmishes Monday and Tuesday, instead blaming two Russian groups that claim to be volunteers fighting alongside Kyiv's forces in an uprising against the government of President Vladimir Putin.

While neither version could be independently verified, whatever happened appears to have sent Moscow scrambling to respond to one of the most serious border incursions since Putin launched the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said an elderly woman died in the chaotic evacuation, and 12 people were wounded in the attack and shelling. As fighting there apparently continued Tuesday morning, he urged residents not to return to their homes, and only in late afternoon declared the operation was over.

A look at what's known about the attack and the murky groups who say they carried it out:

WHO'S CLAIMING RESPONSIBILITY?

Two groups — the Freedom of Russia Legion and Russian Volunteer Corps – claimed responsibility for the attack and announced an ambitious goal of "liberating" the Belgorod region. Little is known about them beyond what they say about themselves, and it's not clear how they are.

The website of the Freedom of Russia Legion says it was formed last spring "out of Russians' desire to fight against Putin's armed gang" and is "officially recognized" by Kyiv's military. "We are fighting in full cooperation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and under the leadership of the Ukrainian command," the website says.

The website said it fought last summer in "small battle groups," and now was involved in the battle for the eastern city of Bakhmut.

The Russian Volunteer Corps' page in the messaging app Telegram used to say it was a formation within the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It now describes itself as merely fighting on the Ukrainian side.

In August 2022, an announcement posted there said: "We, Russian volunteers living in Ukraine, decided to take up arms and create a military formation, the Russian Volunteer Corps, in order to together with our Ukrainian comrades defend their homeland which gave us shelter, and then continue the fight against the criminal Putin regime and his henchmen."

Other posts claimed the group was fighting in southeastern Ukraine, or as volunteers serving elsewhere in the country, including in Kyiv's suburbs of Bucha and Irpin.

In March, the Russian Volunteer Corps claimed responsibility for an incursion in Russia's Bryansk region, another border area. Media reports at the time identified some of its members as Russian nationalists.

In a post Tuesday, the Russian Volunteer Corps described its political views as "right-wing conservative and traditionalist."

WHAT DOES UKRAINE SAY?

Ukrainian officials have never confirmed any ties with either group. The government in Kyiv denied involvement in this week's Belgorod incident, calling it an act by disgruntled Russians.

When they did talk about it, officials were vague. Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said "patriots of Russia" and "people who actually rebelled against Putin's regime" were behind the attack. Presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak blamed "underground guerrilla groups" that are "composed of Russian citizens."

In remarks to the news outlet Suspilne, Ukraine intelligence official Andrii Yusov said it was the Russian Volunteer Corps and the Freedom of Russia Legion.

Andrii Cherniak, another intelligence representative pointed to the fact that the two groups claimed responsibility. "This is the consequence of aggressive politics of Putin's regime and Russia's invasion of Ukraine," he told The Associated Press.

WHAT DOES RUSSIA SAY?

Russia calls it an incursion by saboteurs deployed by Kyiv, with officials and state media using various epithets ranging from "militants" to "terrorists."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the Belgorod attack was a diversion, meant "to draw attention away" from Russia's victory in the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, which Moscow claimed to have captured over the weekend after months of bloody fighting.

Asked Tuesday about claims that the invaders were ethnic Russians, Peskov insisted that "these are Ukrainian militants from Ukraine."

"There are lots of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, but these are still Ukrainian militants," Peskov said.

Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said more than 70 "Ukrainian terrorists" were killed in Russia's operation. He also referred to the attackers as "nationalists."

Russian state TV reported the invaders were from Ukraine's armed forces. One report alleged the attackers used U.S. military equipment despite Washington's assurances its weapons won't be used for attacks on Russia.

WHAT'S THE TRUTH?

It's hard to know. Analysts and commentators say both Russia and Ukraine would likely benefit from its own version of the events.

The British Defense Ministry tweeted Tuesday that "Russia will almost certainly use these incidents to support the official narrative that it is the victim in the war."

Russian state media coverage appears to support this notion, with its allegations that U.S. weapons were used in the attack and the general tone of some reports that overlaid video from the region with tense, dramatic music.

For Kyiv, it's beneficial "to take up the position of an observer and not admit its involvement," said Ukrainian military analyst Oleh Zhdanov.

"The fact is that the war is happening on Russian territory, the Kremlin is being clearly indicated that Russians are not the only ones who can employ hybrid (warfare) methods," Zhdanov told AP.

The involvement of the Russian Volunteer Corps and the Freedom of Russia Legion should serve as signs that "there are forces inside Russia who can resist Putin's regime," he said.

At the same time, the Belgorod attack "showed Russia's helplessness," Zhdanov said.

"Russia turned out to be completely unprepared -– neither its security forces, nor border guards, nor special services were prepared for hostilities on their own turf. The myth that Russia keeps its border locked has been busted," he added.

Some Russian voices echoed that sentiment. Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner private military con-

tractor, used the incident as yet another chance to bash the Russian Defense Ministry for not adequately protecting the border.

Alexander Kots, military correspondent with the pro-Kremlin newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, also raised questions on his Telegram page.

"What's with our technical equipment of the border, surveillance systems, motion detection systems?" he asked. "What's with mining of the potentially dangerous areas? What's with anti-tank equipment? Why did an enemy armored group breach deep into our territory?"

These are the questions "to which there are no answers," Kots said. "To be more accurate, there are, but they're very unpleasant."

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Karmanau reported from Tallinn and Arhirova reported from Kyiv, Ukraine.

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

UPS strike looms in a world grown reliant on everything delivered everywhere all the time

By MATT OTT and HALELUYA HADERO AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Living in New York City, working full time and without a car, Jessica Ray and her husband have come to rely on deliveries of food and just about everything else for their home. It has meant more free time on weekends with their young son, rather than standing in line for toilet paper or dragging heavy bags of dog food back to their apartment.

"I don't even know where to buy dog food," said Jessica Ray of the specialty food she buys for the family's aging dog.

There are millions of families like the Rays who have swapped store visits for doorstep deliveries in recent years, meaning that contentious labor negotiations now underway at UPS could become vastly more disruptive than the last time it happened in 1997, when a scrappy upstart called Amazon.com became a public company.

UPS delivers millions more packages every day than it did just five years ago and its 350,000 unionized workers, represented by the Teamsters, still seethe about a contract they feel was forced on them in 2018.

In an environment of energized labor movements and lingering resentment among UPS workers, the Teamsters are expected to dig in, with the potential to cow a major logistical force in the U.S.

The 24 million packages UPS ships on an average day amounts to about a quarter of all U.S. parcel volume, according to the global shipping and logistics firm Pitney Bowes, or as UPS puts it, the equivalent of about 6% of nation's gross domestic product.

Higher prices and long wait times are all but certain if there is an impasse.

"Something's got to give," said Thomas Goldsby, logistics chairman in the Supply Chain Management Department at the University of Tennessee. "The python can't swallow the alligator, and that's going to be felt by all of us."

In other words, brace yourself for Supply Chain Breakdown: The Sequel.

In the second half of 2021, the phrase "global supply chain" began to enter casual conversations as the world emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses struggled to get what they needed, raising prices and wait times. Automakers held vehicles just off the assembly line because they didn't have all the parts.

Some of those problems still linger and a strike at UPS threatens to extend the suffering.

Those who have come to rely on doorstep deliveries for the basic may have to rethink weekly schedules.

"We finally reached a point where we finally feel pretty good about it," Ray said. "We can take a Saturday afternoon and do a fun family activity and not feel the burden of making everything work for the day-to-day functioning of our household."

UPS workers feel they have played a part in the transformation of how Americans shop since the last contract was ratified in 2018, while helping to make UPS a much more valuable company.

Annual profits at UPS in the past two years are close to three times what they were before the pandemic. The Atlanta company returned about $8.6 billion to shareholders in the form of dividends and stock buybacks in 2022, and forecasts another $8.4 billion for shareholders this year.

The Teamsters say frontline UPS workers deserve some of that windfall.

"Our members worked really hard over the pandemic," said Teamsters spokesperson Kara Denize. "They need to see their fair share."

Union members rejected the contract they were offered in 2018, but it was pushed through by union leadership based on a technicality. The acrimony over the current contract was so fierce that last year workers rejected a candidate to lead the Teamsters favored by longtime union head James Hoffa, instead choosing the more combative Sean O'Brien.

O'Brien went on a nationwide tour of local Teamsters shops preparing frontline workers ahead of negotiations.

In addition to addressing part-time pay, and what workers say is excessive overtime, the union wants to eliminate a contract provision that created two separate hierarchies of workers with different pay scales, hours and benefits. Driver safety, particularly the lack of air conditioning in delivery trucks, is also in the mix.

A win at UPS could have implications for the organized labor outside the company.

Teamsters are attempting to organize Amazon workers and dozens of company delivery drivers and dispatchers in California joined the union last month. There are also prominent labor organization campaigns at Apple, Starbucks, Trader Joe's, Apple, even strippers at a dance club in Los Angeles.

"This has just huge implications for the entire labor movement in the United States," said John Logan, the director of labor and employment studies at San Francisco State University, referring to labor talks at UPS. "There's greater assertiveness and militancy on the part of a lot of young labor activists and some sectors of the labor establishment. Sean O'Brien is representative of that."

When dozens of UPS locals met with Teamsters leadership early this year, O'Brien delivered a message of urgency.

"We're going into these negotiations with a clear message to UPS that we're not going past August 1," O'Brien told the gathering.

It would be the first work stoppage since a walkout by 185,000 workers crippled the company a quarter century ago.

UPS CEO Carol Tomé has remained optimistic publicly, telling investors recently that the company and the Teamsters were not far apart on major issues.

"While we expect to hear a great deal of noise during the negotiation, I remain confident that a win-win-win contract is very achievable and that UPS and the Teamsters will reach agreement by the end of July," Tomé said.

If Tomé is wrong, Americans may need to put aside more time to shop like they used to do.

"It has the potential to be significantly impactful," Ray said. "My husband and I have invested a lot in figuring out how to remove the burden of just making sure we always have toilet paper."

8 tips for parents and teens on social media use — from the US surgeon general

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

The U.S. surgeon general is calling for tech companies and lawmakers to take "immediate action" to protect kids' and adolescents' mental health on social media.

But after years of insufficient action by both social media platforms and policymakers, parents and young people still bear most of the burden in navigating the fast-changing, often harmful world of secretive algorithms, addictive apps and extreme and inappropriate content found on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat.

So what can parents and young people do now? Surgeon General Vivek Murthy has some tips.

"Our children and adolescents don't have the luxury of waiting years until we know the full extent of

social media's impact," Murthy said in an advisory released Tuesday. "Their childhoods and development are happening now."

TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

— Reach out for help: If you or someone you know is being negatively affected by social media, reach out to a trusted friend or adult for help. Check the American Academy of Pediatrics' guidance on social media.

— Create boundaries: Limit the use of phones, tablets, and computers for at least one hour before bedtime and through the night to make sure you get enough sleep. Keep mealtimes and in-person gatherings device-free to help build social bonds and engage in two-way conversations with others. Connect with people in person and make unplugged interactions a daily priority.

— Be cautious about what you share: Personal information about you has value. Be selective with what you post and share online and with whom, as it is often public and can be stored permanently. If you aren't sure if you should post something, it's usually best if you don't.

— Don't keep harassment or abuse a secret: Reach out to at least one person you trust, such as a close friend, family member, counselor, or teacher, who can give you the help and support you deserve. Visit stopbullying.gov for tips on how to report cyberbullying. If you have experienced online harassment and abuse by a dating partner, contact an expert at Love is Respect for support. If your private images have been taken and shared online without your permission, visit Take It Down to help get them removed.

TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

— Create a family media plan: Agreed-upon expectations can help establish healthy technology boundaries at home – including social media use. A family media plan can promote open family discussion and rules about media use and include topics such as balancing screen/online time, content boundaries, and not disclosing personal information

— Create tech-free zones: Restrict the use of electronics at least one hour before bedtime and through the night. Keep meal times and other in-person gatherings tech-free. Help children develop social skills and nurture their in-person relationships by encouraging unstructured and offline connections with others.

— Model responsible behavior: Parents can set a good example of what responsible and healthy social media use looks like by limiting their own use, being mindful of social media habits (including when and how parents share information or content about their child), and modeling positive behavior on your social media accounts.

— Empower kids: Teach kids about technology and empower them to be responsible online participants at the appropriate age. Discuss with children the benefits and risks of social media as well as the importance of respecting privacy and protecting personal information in age-appropriate ways. Have conversations with children about who they are connecting with, their privacy settings, their online experiences, and how they are spending their time online.

Guam residents stock up, batten down as dangerous Super Typhoon Mawar closes in

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — President Joe Biden approved an emergency declaration as an intensifying Super Typhoon Mawar approached Guam, where anyone not living in a concrete house was urged to seek safety elsewhere and emergency shelters began to fill ahead of what could be the most powerful storm to hit the U.S. Pacific territory in two decades.

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero said on social media that the declaration will support the mobilization of resources into Guam, which is "especially crucial given our distance from the continental U.S." Guerrero ordered residents of coastal, low-lying and flood-prone areas of the territory of over 150,000 people to evacuate to higher elevations.

Federal assistance will be needed to save lives and property and "mitigate the effects of this imminent catastrophe," Guerrero said in a letter to the president requesting a "pre-landfall emergency" for Guam. Officials warned residents who aren't in fully concrete structures — many homes on the far-flung island

are made of wood and tin — to consider moving.

With rain from the storm's outer bands already falling on the territory, National Weather Service said the storm had been upgraded to a Category 4 "super typhoon," meaning maximum sustained winds of 150 mph (241 kph) or greater. Its center was about 140 miles (225 kilometers) southeast of Guam late Tuesday local time and was moving to the north-northwest, according to the weather service.

The weather service said the storm was intensifying and warned of a "triple threat" of winds, torrential rains and life-threatening storm surge on Guam. The weather service said the storm could hit southern Guam around midday Wednesday, which is Tuesday evening in the mainland United States. Guam lies west of the International Date Line and is a day ahead of the mainland and Hawaii, which is 3,800 miles (6,115 kilometers) to the east. Manila, Philippines, is 1,600 miles (1,575 kilometers) to the west.

If Guam doesn't take a direct hit, it will be very close, said Patrick Doll, the lead weather service meteorologist in Tiyan, Guam.

Guerrero urged residents in a YouTube message to remain calm and ordered the National Guard to help those in low-lying areas evacuate as residents stocked up on water and generators.

"We are at the crosshairs of Typhoon Mawar," she said. "Take action now, stay calm, stay informed and stay safe."

A storm surge of 6 to 10 feet (2 to 3 meters) above the normal high tide was expected and could reach as high as 15 feet (4 1/2 meters). Surf was expected to build sharply in the next day or two along south- and east-facing reefs, with dangerous surf of 20 to 25 feet (6 to 7 1/2 meters) into Wednesday, the weather service said.

The storm is moving at only 5 mph (8 kph) but has an eye 17 miles (27 kilometers) wide, meaning people at the typhoon's center could see calm conditions for over three hours and conclude, far too soon, that the worst is over, Doll said. As the eye leaves, the winds could rise to 150 mph (241 kph) in minutes, so people should remain sheltered until the government gives the all-clear, he said.

"Folks may say, 'Hey it's over, we could go outside and start cleaning up,'" Doll said. "That is totally wrong."

Guam resident Albert Eliasson told KUAM News he is stocking up and battening down, including making sure to have enough water to drink and flush toilets.

"Just making sure that we have things prepared, shutters on the windows that need it," he said.

Oshean Saralu told KUAM he is also doing everything he can to prepare for a direct hit. "We usually pack everything up for most of our stuff inside our garage and just secure everything, especially the windows," he told KUAM.

At the island's grocery and hardware stores Monday, people left with shopping carts full of canned goods, cases of water and generators, the Pacific Daily News reported.

Rota, an island in the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, was also under a typhoon warning, Doll said. Tinian and Saipan, in the Northern Marianas, were under tropical storm warnings.

Some people in those areas are still in temporary shelters or tents after Category 5 Super Typhoon Yutu in 2018, Doll noted.

"Guam takes a Category 4 or 5 hit every five to seven years. Mother Nature has spared us as of late," Doll said, adding that the last direct hit was in 2002. "So we are way overdue."

Typhoon season runs from July 1 to Dec. 15 in the western North Pacific, according to the weather service.

Biden leaning into global diplomacy to manage migration at US-Mexico border

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — On President Joe Biden 's first day in office, he handed Congress a legislative plan to modernize the nation's immigration system.

It went nowhere, just like so many past overhaul attempts.

Meanwhile, the number of migrants illegally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border climbed to record highs and so did the backlog of cases in the nation's immigration court system. Title 42 emergency health powers

that allowed border officials to turn away many migrants were sure to end as the coronavirus pandemic eased. And Congress couldn't agree on even simple questions like whether the U.S. should let in more people, or fewer.

So administration officials went looking outside the U.S. for solutions, seeking to portray immigration not as one of America's most intractable problems, but as an issue for the entire Western hemisphere to address.

It was a shift in focus that plays to Biden's faith in the power of global diplomacy, and one that also may hold more promise for making progress, particularly as smuggling networks increasingly steer migrant families from around the world up through the dangerous and often deadly Darien Gap between Colombia and Panama.

"No nation should bear this responsibility alone." Biden said last year as he summoned the leaders of 23 nations attending a Summit of the Americas to come up with a shared plan on migration and security. "The economic futures depend on one another. Each of our futures depend on one another. And our security is linked in ways that I don't think most people in my country fully understand."

If the solutions for Biden are international, the politics are still domestic.

He's running for reelection, and the border is a top issue for Republicans who portray him as soft on security. His involvement in immigration policy before he became president was relatively light. Prior to this year's visit, he'd only been down to the 1,951-mile U.S.-Mexico border for a few hours during a 2008 campaign stop, and he played no significant role in past reform efforts in the Senate when he served there.

His foreign policy experience, though, stretches back decades from his years on the Hill and through his two terms as vice president, and that carries weight internationally.

"No other president who has sat in the Oval Office has the mileage, the understanding, the engagement that Joe Biden has had in the region. It's just a fact," said Arturo Sarukhan, the Mexican ambassador to the U.S. from 2007 to 2013. "That is an important add that Biden brings to the table."

Sarukhan said Biden's approach has focused on engagement and negotiation, by sending top leaders to the region for discussions, and through invitations to Washington. "Biden hasn't put the gun to anyone's forehead," he said.

But immigrant advocates worry there's a cost to the new approach that will likely be paid by migrants who are fleeing persecution and poverty in their homelands.

"I do think they are trying to manage migration, rather than end migration," said Yael Schacher, director for the Americas and Europe at Refugees International. "But managing migration can also have human rights, terrible human rights, consequences. There's a moral distancing -- the possibility for wiping your hands of a problem if it isn't at your door anymore."

The makeup of those migrating has changed dramatically over the past two decades, bringing new challenges as well.

Those crossing the border used to be mostly Mexican men who were coming for work and could be easily sent back. Now, families are increasingly arriving from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Haiti, fleeing drought brought on by climate change as well as oppressive regimes.

It reflects a larger trend. UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, estimates 103 million people are displaced globally -- more than 1% of the world's population.

"We are finding ourselves in a unique moment and we do have to understand it's not a domestic issue, but a regional and global one," said Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, head of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, which helps migrants and refugees in the U.S.

The number of illegal U.S.-Mexico border crossings has been declining since new rules were put into place by the Biden administration on May 11, but it's not clear yet whether the administration's approach will be effective in the long term or whether it can survive legal challenges and a possible administration change in 2024.

Under the new rules, migrants are barred from asking for asylum if they cross through another country on their way to the U.S. without seeking protection there or fail to make an appointment to come to the U.S. through a new government app. If caught crossing illegally, they are barred from returning for five

years and face criminal charges if they do.

But up to 30,000 Venezuela, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Cubans per month will be allowed into the U.S. to work legally if they come with sponsors. And as many as 100,000 immigrants from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia will be allowed in if they have family members who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents.

The leaders of Mexico and several other nations had boycotted the June summit in Los Angeles over a decision to exclude authoritarian leaders. Still, it ended with a signed pact and set of principles that included legal pathways to enter countries, aid to communities most affected by migration, more humane border management and coordinated emergency responses.

Administration officials then set to work on new immigration rules that would take effect once Title 42 ended, with new directives that aim to expand legal pathways for entry while cracking down on illegal crossings, intertwined with actions by Guatemala, Ecuador and Colombia. They negotiated with Mexico. Canada and Spain to take in migrants who would otherwise be bound for the U.S.

Guatemala and Colombia will open regional hubs where people can go to make claims, with as many as 100 opening regionally. But Colombia and Guatemala fear the hubs might draw millions to their shores, and other nations are reluctant to sign on to host hubs for that reason.

Meanwhile, many migrants remain in limbo. Last week, advocates said the new migrant app was having major problems and that people were unable to get the OK to cross - some who desperately needed to get into the U.S., who were sexually assaulted and beaten by their captors over the border.

"Understand that what the people who are terrified to return to their home countries who are seeking asylum, they want to do this the right way so badly that they wait for an app that does not work," said Priscilla Orta, an immigration attorney at Project Corazon. "And that is a lottery for their lives."

A lifetime of racism makes Alzheimer's more prevalent in Black Americans

By KAT STAFFORD Associated Press

FREDERICKSBURG, Va. (AP) — Constance Guthrie is not yet dead, but her daughter has begun to plan her funeral.

It will be, Jessica Guthrie says, in a Black-owned funeral home, with the songs of her ancestors. She envisions a celebration of her mother's life, not a tragic recitation of her long decline.

As it should be. Constance has lived 74 years, many of them good, as a Black woman, a mother, educator and businesswoman.

But she will die of Alzheimer's disease, a scourge of Black Americans that threatens to grow far worse in coming decades.

Black people are more likely to develop Alzheimer's than white people in the United States. They are less likely to be correctly diagnosed, and their families often struggle to get treatment from a medical system filled with bias against them.

About 14% of Black people in America over the age of 65 have Alzheimer's, compared with 10% of white people, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The disparity is likely even more, because many Black people aren't correctly diagnosed.

And by 2060, cases are expected to increase fourfold among Black Americans.

While some risk factors may differ by race, the large disparities among racial groups can't be explained just by genetics.

The problems start much earlier in life. Health conditions like heart disease and diabetes are known risk factors. Both are more common among Black populations, because of where they live in relation to polluting industries, lack of healthy food choices, and other factors. Depression, high blood pressure, obesity and chronic stress can also raise the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's. So can poverty.

Across the board, Black people don't receive the same quality of health care throughout life as white people.

So they don't get high quality treatment — or any treatment — for all those conditions that are risk factors. Then, at the end, they're less likely to get medication to ease the symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia-related disorders.

And there's the insidious impact of a life experiencing racism.

Racism is trauma that can lead to increased stress, which can in turn cause health problems like inflammation, which is a risk factor for cognitive decline, said Dr. Carl V. Hill, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer of the Alzheimer's Association.

"But because of this structural racism that creates poor access to health, medication, housing, those who experience racism and discrimination are not provided a pathway to lower their risk," Hill said.

It is, he said, "a one-two punch."

For Jessica, it has meant the final years of her mother's life have been filled not with peace, but heartache and frustration, as she navigates doctors who don't believe her when she says her mom is suffering. In the slow, plodding walk that is her mother's final years, she has few health care partners.

"It has been pervasive across multiple doctors, emergency rooms and hospital doctors," Jessica said. "Not being listened to, not believed, not given the full treatment."

"To be a caregiver of someone living with Alzheimer's is that you watch your loved one die every day. I've been grieving my mom for seven years."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an AP series examining the health disparities experienced by Black Americans across a lifetime.

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The salon was called "Hair by Connie," and for 18 years it was the place to go in Alexandria, Virginia, if you were a Black woman who wanted to look her best. Reigning over the shop was its owner, Constance Guthrie.

She traveled the world, attending hair shows. She opened her salon to fashion shows like the "Tall, Full and Sassy" event advertised in an old flyer she now keeps in a box of mementos. She donned dazzling, colorful and flamboyant outfits to match her larger-than-life personality.

In the 1990s, she made the difficult decision to move and close her beloved salon. She bought a home in Fredericksburg so her daughter could attend the best schools, and later became a paraprofessional in the local school district, which allowed her to have a schedule where she never missed oratorical contests or choir recitals.

She was always there for Jessica, who is her only child. They often stayed up into the wee hours of the night working on school projects together. Despite meager means, Jessica grew up surrounded by encouragement and love.

"My mother gave up everything to make sure that I had the greatest support, the greatest opportunities," Jessica Guthrie recalled. "We were like two peas in a pod."

Her mother's hard work paid off. Jessica became a teacher and later moved to Dallas to build her own life and chase her dreams, where she was a successful chief program officer for an education service.

Then, seven years ago, Constance began her descent into dementia.

She started to forget simple things, like where her keys were. She lost her way coming home from work on a familiar route she traveled almost daily for 18 years. She got into a car accident.

The frequency of troubling incidents began to increase, worrying Jessica who was still hundreds of miles away in Texas.

They tried to use Post-it notes to remind Constance of daily tasks. Some of the colorful notes still line the walls of the family's home.

For a woman who had grown accustomed to being so independent, it was hard for her to accept that she needed help.

"She spent so long trying to hide it," Jessica said. "Like, 'Oh, I'm good, I'm fine. I just forgot.' But you could tell that a lot of her anxiety and stress was because she was trying to cover this up from other people."

She began to wander around her neighborhood. Jessica and nearby loved ones tried to bolt the door to prevent her from wandering.

A neurologist confirmed she was suffering early cognitive decline and that it was likely Alzheimer's.

She was just 66 when she was diagnosed.

Soon after, Jessica made the tough decision to pack up and leave Dallas behind to care for her mother full time. She recently began working remotely again after taking an extended leave of absence to care for her mother.

Constance never had diabetes nor high blood pressure — which are common risk factors. She was fairly active and healthy, and would often walk around her neighborhood. But in 2015, Constance suffered a transient ischaemic attack, or a "mini stroke," which is a brief disruption in the blood supply to part of the brain.

Jessica believes the mini stroke could have been caused in part by the heavy stress her mother endured at her job, where she worked for 18 years as a special education paraprofessional.

She also questions the role genetics played in her mother's diagnosis. Her mother's aunts are all living with the disease. Her mother's brother, who was a doctor, has started to experience cognitive decline. ___

Lost in her own mind, Constance can no longer testify to the difficulties she endured — as a mother, a Black entrepreneur running a business on her own.

But her daughter, Jessica, can attest to the struggles she's had, as a Black caregiver, trying to ensure that her mother receives appropriate care.

In 2018, her mother started pointing at her stomach, repeatedly, trying to tell her daughter she was in pain. Jessica took her to her primary care physician, who is white and brushed the concerns aside.

"My mother couldn't articulate that there was significant pain in the moment and the doctor of the practice basically said, 'Oh, well, you know, sometimes they just come in and put on a show and it seems like she's fine,'" Jessica said. "They asked, 'Are you sure she's in so much pain?'"

They sent her home without performing further diagnostic tests. But the pain persisted.

Jessica took her mother to the emergency room the next day and a Black male doctor ordered the necessary imaging. She needed emergency surgery to correct a painful, protruding hernia.

Then there was the time she took her mother to the emergency room for intense leg pain. She had arthritis in her knee but Jessica suspected something more serious.

The doctor told her she likely just needed rehab for her bad knee. Jessica advocated for more testing and it turned out Constance had a blood clot in her leg.

"Racism is implicit and deeply rooted in the air that we breathe," said Jessica, who has started an Instagram account to chronicle her experiences.

The problems Black people face getting medical care are pervasive. Black people living with serious illnesses get less help managing pain and other symptoms, and they have worse communication with doctors, according to the Center to Advance Palliative Care.

Studies show they are less likely to receive dementia-related medication that can help ease symptoms like hallucinations and depression that make the disease particularly terrifying for families.

Among non-white caregivers, half or more say they have faced discrimination when navigating health care settings for their care recipient. Their top concern: Because of their race, providers or staff do not listen to them.

And there are barriers to even being diagnosed properly. A recent study found that Black participants in Alzheimer's disease research studies were 35% less likely to be diagnosed than white participants. Part of the problem is a lack of Black doctors. Just 1 in 3 of the nation's physicians is Black, Indigenous, Hispanic or Asian. That lack of representation has had a compounding effect on the care that Black people receive — especially later in life when older Americans suffering from illnesses like Alzheimer's lack the ability to advocate for themselves.

All these things put an outsized burden on Black families providing care.

Through her Instagram, Jessica regularly hears from other Black caregivers, mostly women, who have

eerily similar stories of not being heard, feeling isolated or being denied proper treatment.

"I think that part of my journey would have looked significantly different if I were a middle-aged white person or a white male," she said. "I would have been listened to the first time." ___ Jessica has spent the past several months preparing for her mother's imminent death, making sure every detail is perfect.

But in an unexpected twist, she learned in February that her mother would be discharged from home hospice care in early March. Medicare typically covers hospice care for those who are terminally ill, with a life expectancy of six months or less.

Although she remains in the last stage of Alzheimer's disease, Constance has been deemed stable.

Both her appetite and water intake are great. Her skin is glowing. She still has glimmers of her sassy spirit.

On the surface, this is good news. Jessica's relishing every extra day she has with her mother.

Still, the discharge feels like a slap in the face.

Several studies have found that Black patients, across various serious illness diagnoses, are less likely to be referred to hospice or use hospice.

Losing hospice services means Jessica will lose all equipment and supplies, including the hospital grade bed that her mother sleeps in, the lift she uses to get her out of bed and her wheelchair. She has lost the weekly nurse visits, vital checks, the social worker and the extra services that her mother loved — music and massage therapy.

Jessica is concerned about how she'll handle the next medical emergency. She'll have to rely on local hospitals that provided her mother with problematic care before.

"Everything's gone and it feels like I'm back at square one again," she said. "I feel like the system's failed us and has failed so many other caregivers."

It's the latest, but maybe not the last, burden, and it's taking its toll.

At 34, many of her friends are married, starting families, traveling and investing money for the future.

But she's had to spend money on her mother's care and largely put her life on hold.

"When you think about how I spent so long trying not to repeat this cycle of poverty, now I'm sitting in a place where I make a pretty good salary, and yet I'm not setting myself up for the future that I know that I should have," she said.

Some days she mourns the life that could have been and everything she has had to sacrifice. She sees undeniable parallels between all that her mother sacrificed and what she now has given up. But she wouldn't change a thing.

Her exhausting experience as a caregiver has added purpose to her life. She feels she is also helping other Black caregivers to be seen and heard.

For now, she is happy to spend time with the woman she calls "CG."

Every morning after Constance wakes up, Jessica flips on the TV in her mother's small room to the gospel music station. "Music brightens my mom. She would sing no matter if she was on key or not."

Now, the daughter sings to her mother as she's changing or feeding her. On a recent day Jessica tried making it through "Take My Hand, Precious Lord," as she massaged her mother's fingers, before her voice cracked and her shoulders bounced as she cried.

"You saying goodbye?" her mother mumbled.

Constance doesn't sing or clap along anymore, but she lightly tapped her feet under her blanket. And she let out a low, steady hum.

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Kat Stafford, based in Detroit, is a national investigative race writer for the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. She was a 2022 Knight-Wallace Reporting Fellow at the University of Michigan. Follow her on Twitter: https://twitter.com/kat__stafford.

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From Xerox to TV box, long awaited adaptation of 'American Born Chinese' book hits Disney+

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

Gene Luen Yang remembers feeling pumped in 2007 when Hollywood came calling about his trailblazing graphic novel "American Born Chinese." But that excitement turned into exasperation when it became clear the interested party completely missed the point of the book.

"It came out that the reason why they were interested is because the Beijing Olympics were coming up in 2008. And they wanted some property that had the word China or Chinese in it," Yang said in a recent interview. "Every now and then there would be an inquiry. But I really think the world needed to change in order for there to be an appetite for a story about an Asian American protagonist."

Change has finally come. After 17 years, the cartoonist is seeing his American dream play out.

"American Born Chinese" debuts on Disney+ on Wednesday with a mostly Asian cast that now includes two new Oscar winners — Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan. The show, which also boasts Asian American showrunners, centers on high school soccer player Jin Wang (Ben Wang) growing up amid pressure to reconcile his American and Chinese sides. Mixing elements of teen drama, fantasy and fight sequences, the show, like the book, jumps between Jin's storyline and one involving the Monkey King, an iconic character in Chinese folklore. The story threads eventually intertwine.

"It feels like a very surreal moment to have this book that I did as Xerox copies that I would put together at my local Kinko's eventually become a show on Disney+," Yang said.

The first two episodes have been screened around the country from San Francisco to New York City to the White House, partly to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. The predominantly Asian American audiences have praised the show's heartfelt and at times humorous portrayal of an Asian American family

"'American Born Chinese,' you can't do it in one long movie," said Yeoh, who's proud of how the series turned out. "There's so many different aspects of it that need to be shown, it needs that space and time on screen."

Yeoh, who made history as the first Asian to win her Oscar category for "Everything Everywhere All at Once," plays Guanyin, the goddess of mercy. She was invited to the project by her "Shang-Chi and the Legends of the Ten Rings" director, Destin Daniel Cretton, an executive producer.

In the show, Yeoh gets to don a sweeping gown and headdress as well as sweats and a baseball cap. Being a revered Chinese folklore figure, many people already have an image of Guanyin. The Malaysia-born Yeoh didn't dwell on the pressure of playing someone larger than life.

"What I do think about is how we have to be very respectful of this goddess of mercy because she represents so many things to so many followers all around the world," Yeoh said. "We gave her the gravitas the she deserved and the respect to show you what we love about her."

Yeoh and Quan had already wrapped up "Everything Everywhere All At Once," when they started filming "American Born Chinese." Castmates Stephanie Hsu and James Hong also guest-star in an episode. The best picture winner premiered in the middle of production and then "we watched the whole world change," executive producer Kelvin Yu said.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Wang is the star after doing mostly one-episode guest spots. He still isn't quite used to seeing himself on posters. Having grown up seeing little on-screen Asian representation, it's a novel concept that he could be an example for a teenage Asian American boy today.

"It's very surreal and strange," Wang said. "I still can't believe that it's me. I just feel like it's someone who looks like me, which is double weird. It's like seeing your doppelgänger."

The television adaptation comes in the wake of other teen shows with an Asian American lens. Disney+ also has "Ms. Marvel" featuring a Muslim American female superhero. Jenny Han's two book series, "To All the Boys I've Loved Before" and "The Summer I Turned Pretty," have been hits for Netflix and Amazon Prime, respectively. The fourth and final season of "Never Have I Ever," about an Indian American high schooler, drops in June.

"We're standing on the shoulders of those kinds of things, going back to 'Joy Luck Club' ... all the way up to 'Fresh Off the Boat' and shows like 'Never Have I Ever,'" Yu said. "We'll take all that momentum. We'll take all that sort of education for an audience to get used to faces like ours and we'll embrace it and move forward."

The graphic novel was landmark literature for Asian American millennials. Reviews lauded it as a fresh take on adolescence, bi-cultural identity and racism. It won several accolades and was a National Book Awards finalist.

For many young Chinese American readers, it was the first time they had seen themselves and the Monkey King — a legend they likely heard about from their parents — in that genre. The character first appeared in the epic 16th century Chinese novel, "Journey to the West." The tome has been adapted several times including a memorable 1980s TV series created by China Central Television (CCTV). The super-powered simian is well-known across Asia like Batman or Spider-Man, according to Yu.

Daniel Wu, who grew up in California but began his acting career in Hong Kong, plays the Monkey King. This project brings him full circle from when he dealt with his own "American-born Chinese" issues.

"Even though I was warmly accepted by the audiences there, I always felt like slightly being an outsider because I was American," Wu said. "Because we knew we were trying to tell Gene's story of what it's like to be of both sides, there was this kind of special energy that was on set. We knew that we were trying to tell authentically what our story was."

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Terry Tang is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at https://twitter.com/ttangAP

High blood pressure plagues many Black Americans. Combined with COVID, it's catastrophic

By KAT STAFFORD Associated Press

DISTRICT HEIGHTS, Md. (AP) — Charles Thomas was unwell but he had no time for rest.

He was on the cusp of a management promotion and a move to Florida to begin a new chapter that would alter his family's financial future and break the cycle of generational poverty.

Yet, as his family's prospects improved, concerns about his health grew.

A severe bout of COVID-19 left the 52-year-old weak and in recovery for weeks. His wife, Melanese Marr-Thomas, worried he was pushing himself too hard to get back in the swing of things. Charles was a big man at 6 feet tall and 300 pounds. He struggled for years to get his weight under control.

Later in life, that struggle gave way to high blood pressure and a medley of medications.

In a nation plagued by high blood pressure, Black people are more likely to suffer from it — and so, in the time of COVID-19, they are more likely than white people to die. It's a stark reality. And it has played out in thousands of Black households that have lost mothers and fathers over the past three years, a distinct calamity within the many tragedies of the pandemic.

It has devastated families like the Thomases of District Heights, Maryland.

Charles had an intense fear of hospitals, needles and doctors, partially because they had, in the past, brushed aside his concerns. He felt doctors were quick to blame any ailments solely on his weight, but slow to listen to his symptoms or examine other causes. He eventually gave up on seeking medical care for a long time because he was tired of feeling judged.

His family had recently found a Black doctor who, for the first time in his life, made Charles feel comfortable —- and most importantly, heard.

"He knew he needed to take better care of himself so we were trying to change his diet and be more active," Melanese said. "His blood pressure was beginning to come down."

But then, COVID intervened.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an AP series examining the health disparities experienced by Black Americans across a lifetime.

___ About 56% of Black adults have high blood pressure, compared to 48% of white people. Three in four African Americans are likely to develop the disorder by age 55.

When the force of your blood pushing against the walls of your blood vessels is consistently too high, it makes the heart and blood vessels work harder and less efficiently, which can lead to significant health issues.

While only 32% of white adults with high blood pressure have their condition under control with medication, the figure for Black Americans is even lower — 25%.

And it's likely to get worse: By 2060, the number of Americans battling cardiovascular disease is expected to drastically increase. High blood pressure rates alone are projected to rise 27.2%, or from roughly 127.8 million to 162.5 million Americans.

Among white people, the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors and disease is projected to decrease over time. Yet significant increases are projected among people of color, especially Black and Latino Americans.

It is clear that high blood pressure has played a major role in COVID deaths, and especially in the COVID deaths of Black people. Together, high blood pressure and COVID have created a deadly combination: While high blood pressure is listed as a contributing factor in 15.5% of the deaths of white COVID sufferers, the figure for Black victims is 21.4% — the highest of any racial group.

Like many conditions, genetics do play a part. Experts also blame poor diets, high cholesterol, obesity and smoking — risk factors that often exist at higher rates in Black communities. In recent years, more academics and doctors have called attention to structural inequities.

The nation's health disparities have had a tragic impact: Over the past two decades, the higher mortality rate among Black Americans resulted in 1.6 million excess deaths compared to white Americans. That higher mortality rate resulted in a cumulative loss of more than 80 million years of life due to people dying young and billions of dollars in health care and lost opportunity.

"Until we reach health equity, these disparities are going to be a scar on the health care landscape in the United States," said Dr. Keith C. Ferdinand, the Gerald S. Berenson Endowed Chair in Preventive Cardiology at Tulane University's School of Medicine. He emphasized the importance of equal access to primary and specialty care and medications.

"If we don't do that, then we don't have a just society," Ferdinand said. ___

Charles Thomas' infectious laugh could fill any room he entered. He also was a great storyteller. It's what made his wife, Melanese Marr-Thomas, fall in love with him decades ago when she was still a college student at Howard University in the late '90s.

When they met, the two quickly hit it off and could spend hours just talking. But they were in vastly different places in life: While Melanese was focused on her studies, Charles was trying to survive in a particularly tough Maryland neighborhood.

He eventually cut off all ties from her with little explanation.

"'You deserve so much more than what I can give,'" Melanese recalled Charles saying to her. "I was so hurt."

Years later, she found out it was because he was struggling to find his way out of a life of selling drugs.

Charles eventually had a son, Charles Thomas III, with another woman — a child whom Charles tried to be heavily involved in raising. But his street life eventually caught up with him.

Charles was incarcerated off and on for much of his son's childhood and teenage years.

"He was heavy in the streets," Charles Thomas III, 33, recalled. "But he made his presence known even when he was in jail. He would still find a way to send me gifts for Christmas. I'll never forget the little toy car he sent me and I said 'My daddy sent me this present,' not putting two and two together that he was in jail."

It took years for Charles to eventually begin the hard journey of changing his life. Years later, he ac-

knowledged the vicious cycle he found himself in. As a young Black man, he grew up poor and bounced around various communities that all suffered from the simmering effects of racism and segregation-era policies, with little hope and few pathways to escape poverty.

Eating healthy was hardly at the top of his mind, and largely out of reach. His neighborhoods were filled with fast food options, yet few grocery stores. And he was inundated with the toxic stress of living in a dangerous environment.

While in prison, Charles' health suffered, too. Healthy foods weren't readily available and routine health care was sporadic. His wife believes his high blood pressure and other ailments could have begun while he was incarcerated.

It wasn't until his mother died while he was in prison that Charles felt a true spark to change.

"She was his backbone," Melanese said. "But after his mother passed, he had no sense of home and he said, 'I have to create my home and find my purpose and meaning.'"

Charles and Melanese reconnected in late 2009 and rekindled their romance. The couple eventually married and blended their families. He never shied away from talking about his earlier struggles in life. He acknowledged his mistakes and instead used it as a powerful way to teach his children to avoid the pitfalls he fell prey to.

"My dad, he was a great father to me and my best friend," said Charles Thomas III, who is now a teacher. "He taught me what I needed to know. He taught me how to be self-sufficient and stand on my own two feet. When he did things that were wrong, he never made excuses for it. He always told me the truth, so I never held anything against him."

Charles' family is what mattered most to him. And Black fatherhood was something that he cherished. He often spent long nights staying up with his kids and wife, reminiscing and sharing fatherly wisdom — sage advice they cling to today.

He worked his way up at his job as a concrete truck driver and became well respected in the company — and within his community, as a known father figure to other Black boys at his youngest son's football games. He launched a food truck and catering business, Sol Familia Mobile Kitchen, with his wife. Everything was looking up, finally.

But Charles Thomas began to feel sick around Thanksgiving in 2020. He thought it was a passing cold, but his wife was worried; the number of COVID cases was climbing, both nationally and locally, and the vaccine wasn't yet widely available.

Melanese was right. The entire family — parents and six children — would be diagnosed with COVID. But as the others got better, Charles' condition worsened.

His wife convinced him to go to the hospital, where his oxygen levels dropped severely and he spent eight days in the intensive care unit, where he was nearly placed on a ventilator. But he recovered, and went home in time for Christmas.

The family thought the worst was over.

Then Charles began having trouble breathing. The smallest tasks left him breathless and taking a few steps left him tired and struggling for air. Still, in late January 2021, he decided to go back to work.

"He was so enthusiastic about trying to make sure we got our food truck back up and running," Melanese said. "But I told him he just came out of the ICU with double pneumonia. I asked, 'Why are you going back so quickly?'"

She suspects Charles felt he still had to "make up" for time lost and his past mistakes.

The stress of it was toxic, and taxing on his health, and Melanese worried it exacerbated his high blood pressure — and also his COVID complications.

"I think that also killed him," Melanese said. ___

More and more, researchers acknowledge that high blood pressure and other ailments that strike Black Americans disproportionately can, in great measure, be traced to the inequities of Black life in America.

Black Americans are more likely to live in communities that lack access to fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. They're also more likely to live in communities inundated with fast food options that

are often cheaper and easier to access but less healthy.

The same Black communities that experienced discriminatory housing policies more than 60 years ago are at a greater risk of heart disease and other related risk factors today, according to a July study in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology.

Residents of those neighborhoods also have less access to public transportation and health insurance. They also see lower life expectancies and higher incidence of chronic diseases that are risk factors for poor outcomes from COVID-19 — including high blood pressure.

Research is examining the effect of stress on high blood pressure rates in Black communities, according to Dr. Anika L. Hines, director of the Equity in Cardiovascular Health Outcomes Lab at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine.

For Black Americans in particular, psychological stress — including discrimination or navigating racism — and its ensuing effects could be a precursor to high blood pressure, Hines said.

Historically, medicine has overlooked the role of structural barriers to good health among Black Americans. Instead, genetics, individual choice and even race have been blamed.

"As more people begin to embrace antiracism and accept race as a social construct and not as a biological construct, more attention will be paid to these social factors, psychosocial factors, cultural context, and history," Hines said.

Delmonte Jefferson, executive director of the Center for Black Health and Equity, said it's important to understand how health inequities that date back generations created today's conditions.

"This country has not, did not, does not at this point in time, value the health and well-being of people of color and so we keep having challenges with health and health disparities," Jefferson said.

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Near the end of February 2021, Charles Thomas' 16-year-old ran into the room one evening and shook Melanese awake. Something was wrong with Dad.

She rushed into the bedroom and found her husband on the floor on his hands and knees.

"It looked like he had fallen and was trying to get himself back up," Melanese said. "I said, 'What's wrong?' He couldn't speak. He couldn't say anything to me."

He struggled to get up, but collapsed on the floor and stopped breathing.

Emergency responders performed CPR, but it was too late. Charles died Feb. 28, 2021, of COVID-19 related complications. He was 52.

So much was lost that night. The family was getting ready to move to Jacksonville, Florida. Charles had just been offered a job he spent 10 years working toward. He was slated to be a plant manager. The family was in the midst of planning a trip to look at homes there.

"I still relive that night," Melanese said. "I was so numb and in disbelief that someone that was just talking to me is no longer here. He was the pillar of our family, the foundation, our protector. He was everything and it is an immeasurable loss."

Since Charles' death, the family has worked hard together — and in their own ways individually — to keep his memory alive.

For his stepdaughter, Serena Marr, that means getting treatment for her own mental health in the wake of his death, and finishing college.

For Melanese, his beloved wife, that means cherishing his memory and their love.

"I'm spending my life reminding others that he was a husband, a father, a brother, an uncle, a nephew, a granddad, a co-worker and a friend to so many," Melanese said. "He was not a COVID number. He was a person who had hopes and dreams, aspirations."

For his namesake, Charles Thomas III, that means imparting love and wisdom to his own 5-year-old daughter, who his father adored. It also means supporting Melanese and helping her with his younger siblings.

"I can't look in the mirror without seeing my dad," he said. "When I go to school as teacher and I'm correcting my students, I see my dad. When I'm talking to my daughter and my girlfriend, I hear my father. Everything I say. I can hear him. He's going to live on through me."

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Kat Stafford, based in Detroit, is a national investigative race writer for the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. She was a 2022 Knight-Wallace Reporting Fellow at the University of Michigan. Follow her on Twitter: https://twitter.com/kat__stafford.

Indian wrestlers hold candlelight march demanding arrest of sports official for sexual abuse

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's top female wrestlers led a candlelight march of nearly 1,000 protesters in the capital on Tuesday demanding the resignation and arrest of the president of the wrestling federation for allegedly sexually harassing young athletes, one of whom was a minor.

Carrying India's national flag, they marched to India Gate, a monument close to the country's parliament building. A strong presence of police accompanied them on the marching route.

The protesters have been staging a protest in the center of New Delhi for nearly a month, amid a brutal heat wave, while foregoing their training schedules. Two Olympics medalists, Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, are part of the protests and have threatened to hand back their medals if no action is taken against Wrestling Federation of India president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

The protests have grown with many members of opposition parties and farmer unions taking up the wrestlers' cause. Most of the Indian wrestlers come from the northern agricultural states of Haryana and Punjab.

They accused Singh, a 66-year-old powerful lawmaker representing the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, of sexually harassing seven young female wrestlers.

Singh has denied the accusations and called the protests "politically motivated" by the opposition Congress party.

Vinesh Phogat, who has won wrestling medals at the world championships, Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, claimed in January that several coaches have exploited female wrestlers at the behest of the WFI president.

Indian police are investigating the allegations of sexual harassment against Singh, and he has been questioned in the case. India's Supreme Court has also acknowledged that the case involves "serious allegations of sexual harassment," but it has been met with silence from the ruling party leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

After their initial protest in January, Indian Sports Minister Anurag Singh Thakur asked the president of the federation to step aside and help in carrying out the probe. He also said a committee would be set up to investigate the allegations and a report will be released in four weeks.

Singh continues to head the federation and no report has been released in the months since. The women returned to their protest in April and have said they will not move until Singh is arrested.

"Our fight for justice seems like it has been forever because the wheels of justice have moved very slowly," Phogat wrote in The Indian Express newspaper Tuesday.

The case has again highlighted the #MeToo movement in India, which picked up pace in 2018 when a spate of actresses and writers flooded social media with allegations of sexual harassment and assault.

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More AP sports: https://apnews.com/hub/apf-sports and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

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Black children are more likely to have asthma. A lot comes down to where they live

By KAT STAFFORD Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Amid the balloons, cake and games at his best friend's birthday party on a farm, 5-year-old Carter Manson clutched his small chest.

"He just kept saying 'I can't breathe, I can't breathe,'" his mother, Catherine, recalled tearfully. "I picked him up and told him it was OK and to just breathe. Just breathe."

It was the first time Carter had an asthma attack in public, and the inhaler he sorely needed was in the family car. Catherine calmed her terrified son and ran to get the inhaler; only then was Carter able to breathe easily.

"You say in your head as a parent that I'm going to be prepared next time," Catherine, 39, said.

"But anything can trigger them," she said.

Black children are more likely to have asthma than kids of any other race in America. They're more likely to live near polluting plants, and in rental housing with mold and other triggers, because of racist housing laws in the nation's past. Their asthma often is more severe and less likely to be controlled, because of poor medical care and mistrust of doctors.

About 4 million kids in the U.S. have asthma. The percentage of Black children with asthma is far higher than white kids; more than 12% of Black kids nationwide suffer from the disease, compared with 5.5% of white children. They also die at a much higher rate.

Across America, nearly 4 in 10 Black children live in areas with poor environmental and health conditions compared to 1 in 10 white children. Factories spew nitrogen oxide and particulate matter. Idling trucks and freeway traffic kick up noxious fumes and dust.

The disparities are built into a housing system shaped by the longstanding effects of slavery and Jim Crow-era laws. Many of the communities that have substandard housing today or are located near toxic sites are the same as those that were segregated and redlined decades ago.

"The majority of what drives disparities in asthma, it's actually social and structural," said Sanaz Eftekhari, vice president of corporate affairs and research of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. "You can tie a lot of the asthma disparities back to things that have happened, years and years and decades ago."

Asthma is treatable. It can be managed with medicine, routine appointments and inhalers. But Black children often struggle to get treatment, and are more likely than white kids to end up in the emergency room with asthma symptoms.

Kamora Herrington, a community organizer in Hartford, Connecticut, doesn't need to study the statistics to know that the children of her city are suffering.

"We know that our emergency rooms in the middle of the night during the summer are filled with children who can't breathe," Herrington said.

The prime cause, she said, is just as apparent.

"People need to demand change for real and people need to not be reasonable. At what point do you say, this is bull —--? White supremacy and racism have everything to do with it."

___ EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of an AP series examining the health disparities experienced by Black Americans across a lifetime. ___

The stubborn mold spores reappeared, no matter how hard Catherine Manson scrubbed the walls of her apartment, outside of Connecticut's capital of Hartford.

As the mold began to spread further throughout the home, it dotted the walls of the bathroom and even on the bottom of one of the family's sofas. Catherine became increasingly worried about her family's health, noticing both she and the kids were coughing more. Their nebulizer treatments became more frequent while they lived there, and Catherine herself was prescribed an albuterol inhaler and diagnosed with asthma.

The property was owned by two different landlords during the four years the family lived there. The first didn't attempt to fix the mold; the second tried, but failed, Catherine said.

The family thought the apartment would be a good place to raise their children. After all, it was in a relatively quiet neighborhood and affordable.

But as the mold worsened, the family increasingly felt stuck and unable to leave. It was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and funds were tight. Catherine suspects the mold began to form because the owners failed to address a leaky roof. The family noticed water and moisture on the walls, whenever it snowed or rained.

"I was so angry," she recalled. "Everybody was lacking funds. There was nothing we could have done different."

The family finally moved in 2021.

It's a common problem for Black families.

The nation's discriminatory housing policies make Black Americans more likely to live in rental housing. Throughout the 20th century, federal housing policies promoted homeownership and wealth generation — but those benefits were largely inaccessible to Black families.

Rental units are much more likely to have deficiencies or inadequacies and fewer means to address problems that increase exposure to asthma triggers.

In Connecticut, more than half of Black households rent, compared with a quarter of white households. In Hartford, almost 7 in 10 Black households rent.

An Asthma Allergy Foundation of America report examining asthma disparities found that Black renters were more likely to report the presence of mice, cockroaches or mold in their homes. Black people also live in older housing at higher rates, exposing them to triggers like dust and mold. In Hartford, 63% of Black households live in structures built before 1960, according to DataHaven, a nonprofit community organization.

"So many of our children are living in these just utterly disrepair homes with mold, open cracks, leaking, and vermin," said Dr. Jessica Hollenbach, co-director of the Asthma Center of Connecticut Children's. ___

Pollution is also a major factor in asthma rates.

In Connecticut, poor neighborhoods in the state's five largest cities — Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Stamford, and Waterbury — have high concentrations of kids with asthma.

Those same communities are at a higher risk for chemical and environmental exposures that are known asthma triggers.

A recent Environmental Protection Agency National Emissions Inventory shows Fairfield, Harford, New Haven and New London counties produced more than 10% of the state's total nitrogen oxide emissions. All four of the counties include census tracts with the highest combined asthma rates.

Nitrogen oxide gases are typically emitted from vehicle exhaust, coal, oil, diesel and natural gas burning and can cause health issues such as eye irritation and asthma aggravation.

Dr. Mark Mitchell, a former director of Hartford's health department and a founder of the Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice, has tried to sound the alarm on Hartford's asthma rates.

The coalition began investigating and advocating for environmental justice after concerns arose about a regional landfill expansion and possible links to high rates of asthma, cancer and other diseases in communities neighboring them. Mitchell recalled how, in the mid '90s, he examined about 30 kids and found that a third of them had asthma. He urged the state to look into what he believed was a clear pattern of disparities.

"They told me … we don't really know who has asthma and doesn't have asthma, and besides, it's not unusual for a third of inner-city kids to have asthma," said Mitchell, who is now associate professor of climate change at George Mason University.

The state's health department did not respond to multiple requests for comment on its efforts to combat its asthma rates.

Mitchell said his research and work have led him to believe that the state's asthma rates are heavily tied to traffic-related air pollution, as well as other air pollutants.

Black people suffer the brunt of it. Exposure to pollutants — specifically, fine particulate matter — is often disproportionately experienced by Black and Hispanic populations, while the emissions are dispro-

portionately caused by white populations.

Between 2018 and 2021, more than 21% of children in East Hartford had asthma — compared to 13% statewide, according to DataHaven.

Kamora Herrington has lived in Hartford for much of her life. She launched a gathering space, Kamora's Cultural Corner, for residents in a north-end neighborhood in Hartford — a mostly Black area of the city facing many socioeconomic challenges and the rippling effects of racism that have led to high poverty rates, poor health outcomes and shortened life expectancies.

Herrington remembers that for decades, where a garden now sits, rows of milk delivery trucks would idle daily, pouring black smoke into the air and clouds of dust. Toxins seeped into the ground as trucks were also repaired on the lot. Across the street sat low-income apartments and multifamily houses; children played nearby. They're still there today.

The ground is too toxic to plant in, so they use raised flower beds. They're raising funds to do an environmental cleanup of the lot.

But she wonders about the health impact on generations of Black children who have traversed the neighborhood and the city's north end. While people may prefer to blame Black parents, saying they should make better choices for their families, she points to the years of inequities that have led people to live where they can.

"As a Black woman who is also a Black mother, I have experienced ridiculous amounts of blame and abuse from a larger system that understands they're culpable but understands that the issues are so big, that it's a whole lot easier to say, 'Black mommy, you're the problem,'" she said.

Since much of the city's rental housing stock predates the 1960s, Herrington noted, it often lacks air conditioning or proper ventilation — a burden on asthmatic children during hot summers.

Abimbola Ortade, an activist and board member of Hartford's Black Lives Matter 860 chapter, recently lost his sister to COVID. Like many Hartford residents, she had asthma for most of her life, and diabetes, a combination that proved deadly. Ortade also has asthma, along with two of his children. He worries frequently about their future — and his.

Asthma, Ortade said, is merely one example of how structural racism fuels health disparities that are likely to worsen as Black children go through life — including the toll of toxic stress on their mental health.

"In my neighborhood, you've got to worry about the police killing you, stress killing you, heart failure or asthma killing you," he said.

Ortade is critical of elected officials and what he believes is a reluctance to truly address the disparities and root causes.

Asthma, he said, "is like a ticking time bomb." ___ Black kids have other things working against them when it comes to asthma risks.

Low birth weight, which is highest among Black babies, is one risk factor.

The confluence of toxic stress, racism and discrimination that many Black people endure, heightens the risk of preterm births and low birth weights — and the disorders, like asthma, that may follow. These factors are present regardless of socioeconomic level.

Segregated or low-income communities are less likely to have easy access to health care facilities or specialty medical clinics, which are predominantly in or next to white or higher-income communities.

Advocates say increasing representation of Black doctors — including pulmonologists, allergists, immunologists and researchers — is key to better care, eliminating bias and disrupting valid mistrust in doctors.

Catherine Manson said it's been challenging to find the right health care professionals to help control her kids' asthma.

"I feel like the pediatricians are not as knowledgeable as they should be," Manson said. "As a parent, you have to make those decisions on your own. I'm the advocate for my kids."

Asthma can be particularly disruptive for Black children and their families beyond its health implications, creating a trickle down effect in other facets of their lives.

Carter, and his 9-year-old sister Caydence who also has asthma, have missed weeks of school, leaving

them behind in schoolwork. And in turn, their parents were forced to miss work to care for them – putting a strain on the family's finances.

"I'm the parent, the teacher, the nurse," Catherine said, of the toll. "It feels like you're kind of failing them."

___ There have been efforts to bring asthma under control.

Dr. Melanie Sue Collins, director of the Pediatric Pulmonary Fellowship and Cardiopulmonary Lab at Connecticut Children's, pointed to the hospital's Easy Breathing program, which involves more than 330 pediatricians in more than 90 practices in Connecticut and has been adapted for use in schools.

More than 150,000 children have been screened and more than 41,000 have been diagnosed with asthma. The program focuses on improving diagnosis rates and creating a standardized approach to help keep asthma under control.

"I think the biggest issue is that asthma is a chronic disease that requires care every single day," she said. "And what I see many of my patients and families struggling with is the basic needs of life."

HUSKY Health, which includes the state's Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, covers about 22% of the state population.

On a federal level, resources have been put toward various housing and health grant programs. An Asthma Disparities Subcommittee was formed by the National Institutes of Health in 2010 and published a federal action plan in 2012. And the Affordable Care Act broadened coverage access for millions.

But advocates say more asthma-specific legislation and funding is needed. Overall asthma rates have trended downward in recent years but rates among Black children remain outsized and disparate.

In Connecticut, the prevalence of asthma in the state's public school system has slightly decreased over time but about 1 in 8 students have asthma. The incidence among Black students is about 50% higher.

That often means absenteeism — and in the near and long term, failure.

"If you miss school, you can't succeed in school," Collins said of a fraught cycle many kids encounter. "And if you don't succeed in school, you have a really difficult time having a life where you can do things comfortably, whether it's eating, having shelter or a successful job."

___ After seemingly endless years of stress, things are improving for the Manson children. Catherine has done well adhering to the children's asthma control plan. The hard work appears to be paying off.

Carter is playing flag football, something that would have been unheard of just a year ago, and Caydence is running track.

Carter hasn't used his inhaler since last November. They haven't missed a day of school this year. It's a win his mother is proud of.

Still, worry lingers in the background as the seasons change and potential triggers loom.

"I've missed work, their dad has missed work," said Catherine, who now works in the medical field as a patient service representative, after leaving a beloved career in part to focus on her family's health.

"But you have to pay the bills. Then you miss work and you miss money and that comes out of your budget. It affects everything."

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Kat Stafford, based in Detroit, is a national investigative race writer for the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. She was a 2022 Knight-Wallace Reporting Fellow at the University of Michigan. Follow her on Twitter: https://twitter.com/kat__stafford.

Why do so many Black women die in pregnancy? One reason: Doctors don't take them seriously

By KAT STAFFORD Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Angelica Lyons knew it was dangerous for Black women to give birth in America.

As a public health instructor, she taught college students about racial health disparities, including the fact that Black women in the U.S. are nearly three times more likely to die during pregnancy or delivery than any other race. Her home state of Alabama has the third-highest maternal mortality rate in the nation.

Then, in 2019, it nearly happened to her.

What should have been a joyous first pregnancy quickly turned into a nightmare when she began to suffer debilitating stomach pain.

Her pleas for help were shrugged off, she said, and she was repeatedly sent home from the hospital. Doctors and nurses told her she was suffering from normal contractions, she said, even as her abdominal pain worsened and she began to vomit bile. Angelica said she wasn't taken seriously until a searing pain rocketed throughout her body and her baby's heart rate plummeted.

Rushed into the operating room for an emergency cesarean section, months before her due date, she nearly died of an undiagnosed case of sepsis.

Even more disheartening: Angelica worked at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the university affiliated with the hospital that treated her.

Her experience is a reflection of the medical racism, bias and inattentive care that Black Americans endure. Black women have the highest maternal mortality rate in the United States — 69.9 per 100,000 live births for 2021, almost three times the rate for white women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Black babies are more likely to die, and also far more likely to be born prematurely, setting the stage for health issues that could follow them through their lives.

"Race plays a huge part, especially in the South, in terms of how you're treated," Angelica said, and the effects are catastrophic. "People are dying."

To be Black anywhere in America is to experience higher rates of chronic ailments like asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, Alzheimer's and, most recently, COVID-19. Black Americans have less access to adequate medical care; their life expectancy is shorter.

From birth to death, regardless of wealth or social standing, they are far more likely to get sick and die from common ailments.

Black Americans' health issues have long been ascribed to genetics or behavior, when in actuality, an array of circumstances linked to racism — among them, restrictions on where people could live and historical lack of access to care — play major roles.

Discrimination and bias in hospital settings have been disastrous.

The nation's health disparities have had a tragic impact: Over the past two decades, the higher mortality rate among Black Americans resulted in 1.6 million excess deaths compared to white Americans. That higher mortality rate resulted in a cumulative loss of more than 80 million years of life due to people dying young and billions of dollars in health care and lost opportunity.

A yearlong Associated Press project found that the health challenges Black Americans endure often begin before their first breath.

The AP conducted dozens of interviews with doctors, medical professionals, advocates, historians and researchers who detailed how a history of racism that began during the foundational years of America led to the disparities seen today.

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Angelica Lyons' pregnancy troubles began during her first trimester, with nausea and severe acid reflux. She was prescribed medication that helped alleviate her symptoms but it also caused severe constipation.

In the last week of October 2019, while she was giving her students a test, her stomach started to hurt badly.

"I remember talking to a couple of my students and they said, 'You don't look good, Ms. Lyons,'" Angelica recalled.

She called the University of Alabama-Birmingham Hospital's labor and delivery unit to tell them she was having a hard time using the bathroom and her stomach was hurting. A woman who answered the phone told her it was a common pregnancy issue, Angelica said, and that she shouldn't worry too much.

"She made me feel like my concern wasn't important, and because this was my first pregnancy, I decided not to go because I wasn't sure and thought maybe I was overreacting," Angelica said.

The pain persisted. She went to the hospital a few days later and was admitted.

She had an enema — a procedure where fluids are used to cleanse or stimulate the emptying of bowels — to alleviate her constipation, but Angelica continued to plead with them that she was in pain.

"They were like, 'Oh, it's nothing, it's just the Braxton Hicks contractions,'" she said. "They just ignored me."

She was sent home but her stomach continued to ache, so she went back to the hospital a day later. Several tests, including MRIs, couldn't find the source of the issue.

Angelica was eventually moved to the labor and delivery floor of the hospital so they could monitor her son's heartbeat, which had dropped slightly. There, they performed another enema that finally helped with the pain. She also was diagnosed with preeclampsia, a dangerous condition that can cause severe pregnancy complications or death.

Then she began to vomit what appeared to be bile.

"I got worse and worse with the pain and I kept telling them, 'Hey, I'm in pain,'" Angelica said. "They'd say, 'Oh, you want some Tylenol?' But it wasn't helping."

She struggled to eat dinner that night. When she stood up to go to the bathroom, she felt a sharp pain ricochet throughout her body.

"I started hollering because I had no idea what was going on," she said. "I told my sister I was in so much pain and to please call the nurse."

What happened next remains a blur. Angelica recalls the chaos of hospital staff rushing her to labor and delivery, putting up a blue sheet to prepare her for an emergency C-section as her family and ex-husband tried to understand what went wrong.

She later learned that she nearly died.

"I was on life support," recalled Angelica, 34. "I coded."

She woke up three days later, unable to talk because of a ventilator in her mouth. She remembers gesturing wildly to her mother, asking where her son, Malik, was.

He was OK. But Angelica felt so much had been taken from her. She never got to experience those first moments of joy of having her newborn placed on her chest. She didn't even know what her son looked like.

Maternal sepsis is a leading cause of maternal mortality in America. Black women are twice as likely to develop severe maternal sepsis, as compared to their white counterparts. Common symptoms can include fever or pain in the area of infection. Sepsis can develop quickly, so a timely response is crucial.

Sepsis in its early stages can mirror common pregnancy symptoms, so it can be hard to diagnose. Due to a lack of training, some medical providers don't know what to look for. But slow or missed diagnoses are also the result of bias, structural racism in medicine and inattentive care that leads to patients, particularly Black women, not being heard.

"The way structural racism can play out in this particular disease is not being taken seriously," said Dr. Laura Riley, chief of obstetrics and gynecology at Weill Cornell Medicine and New York-Presbyterian Hospital. "We know that delay in diagnosis is what leads to these really bad outcomes."

In the days and weeks that followed, Angelica demanded explanations from the medical staff of what happened. But she felt the answers she received on how it occurred were sparse and confusing.

A spokesperson for the University of Alabama at Birmingham said in a statement to The Associated Press that they couldn't talk about Angelica's case because of patient privacy laws. They pointed to a recent internal survey done by its Obstetrics and Gynecology department that showed that most of its patients are satisfied with their care and "are largely feeling respected," and said the university and hospital "maintain intentional, proactive efforts in addressing health disparities and maternal mortality."

Angelica's son, Malik, was born eight weeks early, weighing under 5 pounds. He spent a month in intensive care. He received home visits through the first year of life to monitor his growth.

While he's now a curious and vivacious 3-year-old who loves to explore the world around him, Angelica recalls those days in the ICU, and she feels guilty because she could not be with him.

"It's scary to know I could have died, that we could have died," Lyons said, wiping away tears. ___

For decades, frustrated birth advocates and medical professionals have tried to sound an alarm about the ways medicine has failed Black women. Historians trace that maltreatment to racist medical practices

that Black people endured amid and after slavery.

To fully understand maternal mortality and infant mortality crises for Black women and babies, the nation must first reckon with the dark history of how gynecology began, said Deirdre Cooper Owens, a historian and author.

"The history of this particular medical branch … it begins on a slave farm in Alabama," Owens said. "The advancement of obstetrics and gynecology had such an intimate relationship with slavery, and was literally built on the wounds of Black women."

Reproductive surgeries that were experimental at the time, like cesarean sections, were commonly performed on enslaved Black women.

Physicians like the once-heralded J. Marion Sims, an Alabama doctor many call the "father of gynecology," performed torturous surgical experiments on enslaved Black women in the 1840s without anesthesia.

And well after the abolition of slavery, hospitals performed unnecessary hysterectomies on Black women, and eugenics programs sterilized them.

Health care segregation also played a major role in the racial health gap still experienced today.

Until Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Black families were mostly barred from well-funded white hospitals and often received limited, poor or inhumane medical treatment. Black-led clinics and doctors worked to fill in the gaps, but even after the new protections, hospitals once reserved for Black families remained under-resourced, and Black women didn't get the same support regularly available for white women.

That history of abuse and neglect led to deep-rooted distrust of health care institutions among communities of color.

"We have to recognize that it's not about just some racist people or a few bad actors," said Rana A. Hogarth, an associate professor of History at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. "People need to stop thinking about things like slavery and racism as just these features that happened that are part of the contours of history and maybe think of them more as foundational and institutions that have been with us every step of the way."

Some health care providers still hold false beliefs about biological differences between Black and white people, such as Black people having "less sensitive nerve endings, thicker skin, and stronger bones." Those beliefs have caused medical providers today to rate Black patients' pain lower, and recommend less relief.

The differences exist regardless of education or income level. Black women who have a college education or higher have a pregnancy-related mortality rate that is more than five times higher than that of white women. Notably, the pregnancy-related mortality rate for Black women with a college education is 1.6. times higher than that of white women with less than a high school degree.

In Angelica Lyons' home state of Alabama, about 40 mothers die within one year after delivery. The toll on Black mothers is disproportionate.

The state's infant mortality rate for 2021 was 7.6 deaths per 1,000 live births. The disparities between Black and white babies is stark: The infant mortality rate in 2021 for white mothers was 5.8, while the infant mortality rate for Black mothers was 12.1, an increase from 10.9 from the prior year.

Black babies account for just 29% of births in Alabama, yet nearly 47% of infant deaths.

A 2020 report by the Alabama Maternal Mortality Review Committee found that more than 55% of 80 pregnancy-related deaths that they reviewed in 2016 and 2017 could have been prevented.

Alabama launched its Maternal Mortality Review Committee in 2018 to investigate maternal deaths. But Dr. Scott Harris, Alabama's Department of Public Health State Health Officer, said work remains to collect a fuller picture of why the disparities exist.

"We certainly know that from national numbers as well that Black women have worse maternal outcomes at every income level, which is pretty startling," said Dr. Harris. "Age matters and just overall ZIP code matters. Unfortunately, where people live, where these children are born, is strongly associated with infant mortality. I think we'll see something similar for maternal outcomes."

And concerns about access and barriers to care remain.

In Alabama, 37% of counties are maternity care deserts — more than 240,000 women live in counties

with no or little care. About 39% of counties don't have a single obstetric provider.

Alabama is not alone in this. More than 2.2 million American women of childbearing age live in maternity care deserts, and another 4.8 million such women reside in counties with limited access to maternity care.

Angelica Lyons said she wanted to seek maternal care at another hospital but the University of Alabama was the only one near her home equipped to handle her high-risk pregnancy, which included high blood pressure near the beginning.

Dr. Harris acknowledged the lack of access to care is a barrier for Black women who live in the state's rural areas. Much of the state's public health efforts are targeted along the rural Black Belt, which gets its name from the rich soil but it was also a region where many plantations were clustered.

Centuries later, the Black Belt continues to be a high-poverty region with a large Black population. More than half of the nation's Black population lives in the South.

"We've talked a lot about structural racism and the impact of that on African American women and how it has no place in society," Harris said. "I think we have to publicly call it what it is."

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Angelica Lyons' traumatic birth experience was not the only one in her family. After two miscarriages, her younger sister, Ansonia, became pregnant in 2020, and it was difficult.

Doctors told her she was suffering from regular morning sickness, though she was vomiting blood.

She was eventually diagnosed with an excessive vomiting disorder, hyperemesis gravidarum, and was extremely dehydrated. Ansonia spent months in and out of the same hospital where her sister had been treated.

"They said, 'Welcome to the pregnancy, sweetheart. This is what pregnancy is,'" Ansonia, 30, recalled. "I told her, 'No, this is not normal for me to be throwing up 10 to 20 times a day.' My own primary care wasn't listening to me."

Ansonia said throughout her pregnancy she encountered hospital staff that made stereotypical jokes, calling her child's father her "baby daddy," a trope often lobbed at Black parents.

"She said, 'So, your baby daddy, where does he work?'" Ansonia recalled. "I said, 'I don't know what a baby daddy is but the father of my child is at work.' She asked where he worked and I told her he had two businesses and she acted like she was surprised."

Ansonia said staff assumed she didn't have any health insurance, when she had insurance through her employer.

Ansonia has Type 2 diabetes and had issues with her blood pressure and heart throughout the pregnancy. She started to see a cardiologist and by the time she was 21 weeks pregnant, she was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. She was placed on a medley of medications, and her doctors decided to deliver the baby early via C-section.

Ansonia was scared, given everything she witnessed her sister go through nearly two years prior.

"There were several times I told my boyfriend that I thought that I was going to die," she said.

The C-section went well. Ansonia's son, Adrien, was due in July 2021 but he was born at the end of May.

He spent his first five days in the intensive care unit, then was hospitalized for another two weeks for some early breathing problems.

Cesarean delivery rates are higher for Black women than white women, 36.8% and 31%, respectively, in 2021.

Problems continued for Ansonia after the delivery. She ended up needing a blood transfusion and was unable to see her son for his first few days of life.

A few months postpartum, she was still vomiting and having fainting spells that led to her being admitted to the hospital off and on. Her arms suffered from bruising from needles used to treat her throughout the pregnancy. She had always been slow to heal from any bruising, a common problem for diabetics.

Yet a doctor who had been involved throughout her entire pregnancy questioned why she had bruises on her arms and asked if she "smoked weed" or took any other recreational drugs. The hospital declined to comment, citing patient privacy laws.

"I said, 'This is from me being stuck so many times and having to be in the hospital.' I told him I don't do any drugs," she said.

He still sent her blood work off to be tested. The tests came back negative.

"That just made me not trust them, it made me not want to go back," she said.

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There are indications that the sufferings of Black mothers and their babies are being recognized, however late.

In 2019, U.S. Rep. Lauren Underwood, an Illinois Democrat, and Rep. Alma Adams, a North Carolina Democrat, launched the Black Maternal Health Caucus. It is now one of the largest bipartisan congressional caucuses. The caucus introduced the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act in 2019 and again in 2021, proposing sweeping changes that would increase funding and strengthen oversight. Key parts of the legislation have been adopted but the bill itself has yet to be approved.

President Joe Biden's budget for fiscal year 2024 includes $471 million in funding to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity rates, expand maternal health initiatives in rural communities, and implicit bias training and other initiatives. It also requires states to provide continuous Medicaid coverage for 12 months postpartum, to eliminate gaps in health insurance. It also includes $1.9 billion in funding for women and child health programs.

U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra told The Associated Press more must be done at all levels of government to root out racism and bias within health care.

"We know that if we provide access to care for mother and baby for a full year, that we probably help produce not just good health results, but a promising future for mom and baby moving forward," he said.

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Shelonda Lyons always taught both her daughters the bitter truth of racism, hoping it would prepare them to navigate life growing up in Birmingham, the Deep South city known for its place in civil rights history.

"When we were young, she was showing us those images of all the Black people being hung, being burned on the trees," Angelica said, pointing to a book that remains on the family's coffee table. "She wanted us to understand it, to know where we lived and that racism was something that we might have to deal with."

But Shelonda never could have prepared for the treatment her daughters endured during their pregnancies. She remembers feeling helpless and angry.

"It's like a slap in the face to me because at what point do you realize that you're dealing with human beings? That it doesn't matter what color they are," she said, adding that now she worries any time they or her grandsons need to go to the doctor. "I don't have a lot of trust."

Angelica underwent two surgeries in the weeks that followed her C-section to repair internal damage and address her infection. She had to wear a colostomy bag for several months until she healed.

More than three years later, her stomach remains disfigured.

"I love my child, I love him all the same but this isn't the body I was born with," she said. "This is the body that they caused from them not paying attention to me, not listening to me."

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Kat Stafford, based in Detroit, is a national investigative race writer for the AP's Race and Ethnicity team. She was a 2022 Knight-Wallace Reporting Fellow at the University of Michigan. Follow her on Twitter: https://twitter.com/kat__stafford.

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LeBron questions retirement after Lakers are eliminated from playoffs

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — LeBron James questioned retirement after his Lakers were swept by the Denver Nuggets despite the highest-scoring postseason half of James' matchless NBA career.

James set a personal record with 31 points in the first half of Game 4 of the Western Conference finals on Monday night, but he missed two potential tying shots in the final minute as the Nuggets ended the Lakers' season with a 113-111 victory.

The 38-year-old James finished with 40 points, 10 rebounds, nine assists and immense frustration after Los Angeles' remarkable late-season surge ended with four consecutive defeats. Although the top scorer in NBA history spoke about himself as part of the Lakers next season, James also said he hasn't made up his mind on retirement.

"We'll see what happens going forward," James said in the final answer of his postgame news conference. "I don't know. I don't know. I've got a lot to think about, to be honest. Just for me personally going forward with the game of basketball, I've got a lot to think about."

James is under contract for $46.9 million next season with the Lakers, but he is in charge of his future after surpassing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's career scoring record earlier this year. He hasn't previously suggested much personal conflict about finishing his contract alongside Anthony Davis, and his play hasn't significantly declined after two decades in the NBA — although his health has grown less sturdy, particularly in his balky feet and ankles.

"It's all about availability for me and keeping my mind sharp, and things of that nature," James said. "Being present on the floor, being present in the locker room and bus rides and plane rides, things of that nature. It's challenging, for sure. It was a very challenging season for me, for our ballclub, and obviously we know whatever went on early on (in the Lakers' 2-10 start to the season). It was cool, a pretty cool ride."

James missed a month of the regular season with a foot injury down the stretch, but he returned with a series of stellar playoff performances while the Lakers knocked off second-seeded Memphis and eliminated defending champion Golden State. That didn't matter much to James, whose frustration broke through at several points after Game 4.

"I don't like to say it's a successful year, because I don't play for anything besides winning championships at this point in my career," James said. "You know, I don't get a kick out of making a conference (finals) appearance. I've done it a lot, and it's not fun to me to not be able to be a part of getting to the (NBA) Finals."

In his NBA-record 282nd career playoff game, James dropped 21 points in a dynamic first quarter in Game 4. He added 10 more in the second while playing nearly the entire half of a do-or-die game against the top-seeded Nuggets.

But James had only nine points on 4-of-12 shooting in the second half, and he missed two chances to score in the final minute. He took a strange fallaway jumper that missed badly with 26 seconds left, and his final drive to the hoop was thwarted by Denver's Jamal Murray and Aaron Gordon at the buzzer.

But the first half was vintage LeBron: He made 11 of his 13 shots and hit four 3-pointers without a miss in the highest-scoring playoff half of his career, which began in 2003 and has included four NBA championships. James added four rebounds and four assists, and he also got a technical foul after a physical exchange with Gordon when the two got locked up on the Lakers' end of the court.

James had struggled from distance previously in the series, going 3 for 19 in the first three games. He fixed his shot in Game 4 — and he even got credit for a 3-pointer in the first quarter when his lob pass to Rui Hachimura accidentally went in the basket.

James already had the highest scoring average in NBA history in elimination games (33.5 points per game) among all players with at least 10 such appearances.

After failing to win a title this year, James is clearly thinking about whether he wants to do it all again. One major obstacle to any retirement thoughts is his long-stated desire to play an NBA season alongside

his son, Bronny, who will be a freshman at USC this fall and couldn't join the league until the fall of 2024 at the earliest.

"I guess I'll reflect on my career when I'm done, but I don't know," James said when asked to assess his 20th season. "The only thing I concern myself with is being available to my teammates, and I don't like the fact that I didn't play as many games as I would have liked because of injury. That's the only thing I care about, is being available to my teammates."

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

Some worshippers switching congregations amid United Methodist split over LGBTQ issues

By PETER SMITH and HOLLY MEYER Associated Press

The Rev. Bill Farmer reached the point where he couldn't stay in the United Methodist Church anymore — but the congregation he attended was staying.

Michael Hahn always wanted to stay in the UMC — but his congregation was leaving it.

Each has found new church homes, and they're not alone.

Thousands of United Methodist congregations have been voting on whether to stay or quit one of the nation's largest denominations amid intractable debates over theology and the role of LGBTQ people. There are sharp differences over recognizing same-sex marriage and ordaining LGBTQ clergy.

But the dividing line isn't just running between congregations. It's running right through the pews of individual churches, separating people who had long worshipped together.

Those who come up on the short end of a disaffiliation vote face the dilemma of whether stay or go.

The splintering — often grievous and tense — has spurred new initiatives to provide havens for the unmoored. Some United Methodist regional conferences have begun designating "Lighthouse" congregations — ones that actively welcome people who wanted to stay United Methodist but whose former churches voted to leave. Other conferences use different names, such as "Beacon" or "Oasis," but the idea is the same.

"The pain is real, and there is a lot of grief and a lot of heartache over the split in the United Methodist Church," said the Rev. Lynda Ferguson, the great-grandchild of a circuit-riding Methodist pastor.

Her North Carolina church, First United Methodist Asheboro, became a Lighthouse congregation. That assures newcomers that it's committed to staying United Methodist, so they won't have to worry about another disaffiliation vote. More than 400 congregations have disaffiliated in North Carolina.

Ferguson said she can personally relate to those from departing congregations. Her childhood church — the one that shaped her faith and where at age 12 she felt the call to ministry — also voted to leave.

"Part of the Lighthouse mission is to let people know the United Methodist Church is still here and still welcoming," said the Rev. Ed McKinney, pastor of Stokesdale United Methodist Church in Stokesdale, North Carolina, which also became a Lighthouse congregation.

Michael Hahn and his family are among a group of newcomers who have begun participating in Stokesdale after their previous congregations left the denomination.

Hahn, whose family has been Methodist for generations, said he couldn't imagine leaving the denomination, which he values for blending faith and rationality: "It's a place where I don't have to check my logic and reason at the door and blindly accept things."

Hahn said he, his wife and daughters have found "a very warm and welcoming environment" in the Stokesdale congregation, with people saying, "We're glad to have you here, we want to walk through this period with you."

Many of the departing churches are joining the conservative Global Methodist Church, created last year. Others are going independent or joining different denominations.

While the Global Methodist Church doesn't have a program like the Lighthouse initiative, it has begun

launching or adopting congregations that can become homes for those who want to leave the United Methodist Church but whose congregations are staying.

That was the case with the founders of Grace Methodist Church. They launched the church in January in Homosassa, Florida, after their previous congregation voted to stay in the UMC. The new church immediately affiliated with the Global Methodist Church.

Grace Methodist has been renting a former lodge hall for its services and has already started Bible studies and community outreaches, while also working to attract attendees from their neighborhood.

"We're not there just to go to church on Sunday for an hour; we're there to help the community," said member Neil Kline. The enthusiasm of participants is evident, he said: "They can't wait to get to church, and they don't want to leave."

Farmer came out of retirement to serve as the church's pastor.

The group's previous congregation "was a good church," Farmer said, and he wished it well. But "my struggle was with the United Methodist structure, what's going on in the United States, particularly."

The ongoing schism has been long in the making.

The United Methodist Church — with about 6.5 million members in the United States and at least that many abroad — has long debated its bans on same-sex marriages and the ordination of openly LGBTQ clergy.

The denomination has repeatedly upheld the bans, largely through the voting strength of the growing, more conservative churches abroad. But conservatives chose to form a new denomination amid growing defiance of the bans in U.S. churches.

More than 3,500 U.S. congregations have received their local conferences' permission to disaffiliate from the UMC, according to United Methodist News Service. With conference season underway, disaffiliations are closing in on 4,000 and could rise even more by the end of the year, said the Rev. Jay Therrell, president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, a conservative group advocating for departing congregations.

That's a fraction of the United Methodists' 30,000 U.S. churches, though several of the departing congregations are among the largest in their states.

Therrell said he had no problem with the Lighthouse concept but renewed his call to allow churches to disaffiliate on reasonable terms.

"I want everyone to be in the theological home that is the best fit," Therrell said. "Certainly, the United Methodist Church is welcome to try to create churches to do that. I hope they would respect traditionalists and allow us to get to the place where we need to be."

In the Arkansas Conference, more than 100 churches — out of roughly 600 total — have received permission to disaffiliate. That leaves parts of the state with few or no remaining United Methodist congregations, said the Rev. Michael Roberts, director of the conference's new Restart Initiative, which is hoping to enlist congregations to be Beacon churches. Such churches would invite self-described "exiles, refugees, nomads" to worship services, help them start home groups or develop other ways to keep them connected.

"We're just really simply inviting churches to consider how they can provide this kind of hospitality," Roberts said. "I love the word 'hospitality' because the word 'hospital' comes from that word. It is about providing healing."

In the Western Pennsylvania Conference, 17 congregations officially became Lighthouse congregations as of May 1.

About a third of the estimated 800 churches in the Western Pennsylvania Conference — a sprawling 23-county region — are seeking to have their disaffiliations approved at the conference's June annual meeting, according to Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi.

"There have been very few votes where it was unanimous," she said. For those on the short end of those votes — sometimes described as pilgrims — the Lighthouse congregations offer places where they can join or just find temporary harbor until they figure out next steps.

But Lighthouse churches aren't places to settle into old routines, she said.

"This has been an opportunity to really think about folks who are unchurched, and how this nucleus of people looking for a church home might help us discern needs in the community and create faith com-

munities" to reach people in new ways.

Added B.T. Gilligan, senior pastor at Nixon United Methodist Church, a Lighthouse congregation in Butler, Pennsylvania: "I really hope this extends and goes far beyond the disaffiliation, but allows for people who have been hurt by churches for all different kinds of reasons."

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The cyber gulag: How Russia tracks, censors and controls its citizens

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — When Yekaterina Maksimova can't afford to be late, the journalist and activist avoids taking the Moscow subway, even though it's probably the most efficient route.

That's because she's been detained five times in the past year, thanks to the system's pervasive security cameras with facial recognition. She says police would tell her the cameras "reacted" to her — although they often seemed not to understand why, and would let her go after a few hours.

"It seems like I'm in some kind of a database," says Maksimova, who was previously arrested twice: in 2019 after taking part in a demonstration in Moscow and in 2020 over her environmental activism.

For many Russians like her, it has become increasingly hard to evade the scrutiny of the authorities, with the government actively monitoring social media accounts and using surveillance cameras against activists.

Even an online platform once praised by users for easily navigating bureaucratic tasks is being used as a tool of control: Authorities plan to use it to serve military summonses, thus thwarting a popular tactic by draft evaders of avoiding being handed the military recruitment paperwork in person.

Rights advocates say that Russia under President Vladimir Putin has harnessed digital technology to track, censor and control the population, building what some call a "cyber gulag" — a dark reference to the labor camps that held political prisoners in Soviet times.

It's new territory, even for a nation with a long history of spying on its citizens.

"The Kremlin has indeed become the beneficiary of digitalization and is using all opportunities for state propaganda, for surveilling people, for de-anonymizing internet users," said Sarkis Darbinyan, head of legal practice at Roskomsvoboda, a Russian internet freedom group the Kremlin deems a "foreign agent."

RISING ONLINE CENSORSHIP AND PROSECUTIONS

The Kremlin's seeming indifference about digital monitoring appeared to change after 2011-12 mass protests were coordinated online, prompting authorities to tighten internet controls.

Some regulations allowed them to block websites; others mandated that cellphone operators and internet providers store call records and messages, sharing the information with security services if needed. Authorities pressured companies like Google, Apple and Facebook to store user data on Russian servers, to no avail, and announced plans to build a "sovereign internet" that could be cut off from the rest of the world.

Many experts initially dismissed these efforts as futile, and some still seem ineffective. Russia's measures might amount to a picket fence compared to China's Great Firewall, but the Kremlin online crackdown has gained momentum.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, online censorship and prosecutions for social media posts and comments spiked so much that it broke all existing records.

According to Net Freedoms, a prominent internet rights group, more than 610,000 web pages were blocked or removed by authorities in 2022 -– the highest annual total in 15 years — and 779 people faced criminal charges over online comments and posts, also a record.

A major factor was a law, adopted a week after the invasion, that effectively criminalizes antiwar sentiment, said Net Freedoms head Damir Gainutdinov. It outlaws "spreading false information" about or "discrediting" the army.

Human Rights Watch cited another 2022 law allowing authorities "to extrajudicially close mass media outlets and block online content for disseminating 'false information' about the conduct of Russian Armed Forces or other state bodies abroad or for disseminating calls for sanctions on Russia."

SOCIAL MEDIA USERS 'SHOULDN'T FEEL SAFE'

Harsher anti-extremism laws adopted in 2014 targeted social media users and online speech, leading to hundreds of criminal cases over posts, likes and shares. Most involved users of the popular Russian social media platform VKontakte, which reportedly cooperates with authorities.

As the crackdown widened, authorities also targeted Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Telegram. About a week after the invasion, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter were blocked in Russia, but users of the platforms were still prosecuted.

Marina Novikova, 65, was convicted this month in the Siberian city of Seversk of "spreading false information" about the army for antiwar Telegram posts, fining her the equivalent of over $12,400. A Moscow court last week sentenced opposition activist Mikhail Kriger to seven years in prison for Facebook comments in which he expressed a desire "to hang" Putin. Famous blogger Nika Belotserkovskaya, who lives in France, received a nine-year prison term in absentia for Instagram posts about the war that the authorities claimed spread "fakes" about the army.

"Users of any social media platform shouldn't feel safe," Gainutdinov said.

Rights advocates worry that online censorship is about to expand drastically via artificial intelligence systems to monitor social media and websites for content deemed illicit.

In February, the government's media regulator Roskomnadzor said it was launching Oculus — an AI system that looks for banned content in online photos and videos, and can analyze more than 200,000 images a day, compared with about 200 a day by humans. Two other AI systems in the works will search text materials.

In February, the newspaper Vedomosti quoted an unidentified Roskomnadzor official as lamenting the "unprecedented amounts and speed of spreading of fakes" about the war. The official also cited extremist remarks, calls for protests and "LGBT propaganda" to be among banned content the new systems will identify.

Activists say it's hard to know if the new systems are operating and their effectiveness. Darbinyan, of the internet freedom group, describes it as "horrible stuff," leading to "more censorship," amid a total lack of transparency as to how the systems would work and be regulated.

Authorities could also be working on a system of bots that collect information from social media pages, messenger apps and closed online communities, according to the Belarusian hacktivist group Cyberpartisans, which obtained documents of a subsidiary of Roskomnadzor.

Cyberpartisans coordinator Yuliana Shametavets told AP the bots are expected to infiltrate Russian-language social media groups for surveillance and propaganda.

"Now it's common to laugh at the Russians, to say that they have old weapons and don't know how to fight, but the Kremlin is great at disinformation campaigns and there are high-class IT experts who create extremely effective and very dangerous products," she said.

Government regulator Roskomnadzor did not respond to a request for comment.

EYES ON — AND UNDER — THE STREETS

In 2017-18, Moscow authorities rolled out street cameras enabled by facial recognition technology.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, authorities were able to trace and fine those violating lockdowns.

Vedomosti reported in 2020 that schools would get cameras linked to a facial recognition system dubbed "Orwell," for the British writer of the dystopian novel "1984," with his all-seeing character, "Big Brother."

When protests over the imprisonment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny erupted in 2021, the system was used to find and detain those attending demonstrations, sometimes weeks later. After Putin announced a partial mobilization for Ukraine last year, it apparently helped officials round up draft evaders.

A man who was stopped on the Moscow subway after failing to comply with a mobilization summons said police told him the facial recognition system tracked him down, according to his wife, who spoke to

AP on condition of anonymity because she feared retaliation.

In 2022, "Russian authorities expanded their control over people's biometric data, including by collecting such data from banks, and using facial recognition technology to surveil and persecute activists," Human Rights Watch reported this year.

Maksimova, the activist who repeatedly gets stopped on the subway, filed a lawsuit contesting the detentions, but lost. Authorities argued that because she had prior arrests, police had the right to detain her for a "cautionary conversation" — in which officers explain a citizen's "moral and legal responsibilities."

Maksimova says officials refused to explain why she was in their surveillance databases, calling it a state secret. She and her lawyer are appealing the court ruling.

There are 250,000 surveillance cameras in Moscow enabled by the software — at entrances to residential buildings, in public transportation and on the streets, Darbinyan said. Similar systems are in St. Petersburg and other large cities, like Novosibirsk and Kazan, he said.

He believed the authorities want to build "a web of cameras around the entire country. It sounds like a daunting task, but there are possibilities and funds there to do it."

'TOTAL DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE'

Russia's efforts often draw comparisons with China, where authorities use digital surveillance on a vast scale. Chinese cities are blanketed by millions of cameras that recognize faces, body shapes and how people walk to identify them. Sensitive individuals are routinely tracked, either by cameras or via their cellphones, email and social media accounts to stifle any dissent.

The Kremlin seems to want to pursue a similar path. In November, Putin ordered the government to create an online register of those eligible for military service after efforts to mobilize 300,000 men to fight in Ukraine revealed that enlistment records were in serious disarray.

The register, promised to be ready by fall, will collect all kinds of data, "from outpatient clinics to courts to tax offices and election commissions," political analyst Tatyana Stanovaya said in a commentary for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

That will let authorities serve draft summonses electronically via a government website used to apply for official documents, like passports or deeds. Once a summons appears online, recipients cannot leave Russia. Other restrictions -– like suspension of a driver's license or a ban on buying and selling property -– are imposed if they don't comply with the summons within 20 days, whether they saw it or not.

Stanovaya believes these restrictions could spread to other aspects of Russian life, with the government "building a state system of total digital surveillance, coercion and punishment." A December law mandates that taxi companies share their databases with the successor agency of the Soviet KGB, giving it access to travelers' dates, destinations and payment.

"The cyber gulag, which was actively talked about during the pandemic, is now taking its real shape," Stanovaya wrote.

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Associated Press writers Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, and Joe McDonald and Beijing contributed.

Father, son sentenced for decadelong, $20 million lottery fraud scheme

BOSTON (AP) — A father and son from Massachusetts have both been sent to prison for running an elaborate lottery fraud scheme designed to enrich themselves and help prize winners avoid paying taxes on their windfall, prosecutors said.

Ali Jaafar, 63, and Yousef Jaafar, 29, both of Watertown, cashed in 14,000 winning lottery tickets over a roughly 10-year period, laundered more than $20 million in proceeds, and then lied on their tax returns to cheat the IRS out of about $6 million, the U.S. attorney's office in Boston announced Monday.

The Jaafars purchased winning lottery tickets at a discount from people who wanted to avoid identification by the state lottery commission, which withholds taxes and outstanding child support payments from payouts.

After purchasing the tickets, using the stores that sold them as go-betweens, the Jaafars claimed the full prize amount. Although they reported the winnings on their tax returns, they also claimed equivalent fake gambling losses as an offset to avoid federal income taxes, prosecutors said.

Ali Jaafar was sentenced to five years in prison. Yousef Jaafar received a sentence of more than four years. They were also ordered to pay $6 million in restitution and forfeit the profits from their scheme.

They were convicted in December of conspiracy to defraud the IRS, conspiracy to commit money laundering, and filing a false tax return.

Mohamed Jaafar, another of Ali Jaafar's sons, pleaded guilty to his role in the scheme in November and awaits sentencing.

The defendants paid the owners of dozens of stores that sell lottery tickets to facilitate the transactions, and the state lottery commission is in the process of revoking or suspending the licenses of more than 40 lottery agents, authorities said.

Today in History: May 24, first major league night game

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, May 24, the 144th day of 2023. There are 221 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 24, 1844, Samuel F.B. Morse transmitted the message "What hath God wrought" from Washington to Baltimore as he formally opened America's first telegraph line.

On this date:

In 1935, the first major league baseball game to be played at night took place at Cincinnati's Crosley Field as the Reds beat the Philadelphia Phillies, 2-1.

In 1937, in a set of rulings, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Social Security Act of 1935.

In 1941, the German battleship Bismarck sank the British battle cruiser HMS Hood in the North Atlantic, killing all but three of the 1,418 men on board.

In 1961, a group of Freedom Riders was arrested after arriving at a bus terminal in Jackson, Mississippi, charged with breaching the peace for entering white-designated areas. (They ended up serving 60 days in jail.)

In 1962, astronaut Scott Carpenter became the second American to orbit the Earth as he flew aboard Aurora 7.

In 1974, American jazz composer and bandleader Duke Ellington, 75, died in New York.

In 1976, Britain and France opened trans-Atlantic Concorde supersonic transport service to Washington.

In 1980, Iran rejected a call by the World Court in The Hague to release the American hostages.

In 1994, four Islamic fundamentalists convicted of bombing New York's World Trade Center in 1993 were each sentenced to 240 years in prison.

In 1995, former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson died in London at age 79.

In 2006, "An Inconvenient Truth," a documentary about former Vice President Al Gore's campaign against global warming, went into limited release.

In 2011, Oprah Winfrey taped the final episode of her long-running talk show.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama addressed the sexual assault epidemic staining the military, telling U.S. Naval Academy graduates to remember their honor depended on what they did when nobody was looking and said the crime had "no place in the greatest military on earth." British fighter jets intercepted a Pakistan International Airlines Boeing 777 carrying more than 300 people from Pakistan and diverted it to an isolated runway at London-Stansted Airport, where two British passengers who had allegedly threatened to destroy the plane were arrested. Toronto Mayor Rob Ford denied that he smoked crack cocaine and said he was not an addict after a video purported to show him using the drug.

Five years ago: After a Justice Department briefing, Rep. Adam Schiff, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said there was no evidence to support claims that there was a government spy in President Donald Trump's campaign. The president abruptly canceled a planned summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un, blaming "open hostility" from North Korea. (A week later, Trump announced that the summit would take place in mid-June.) Trump granted a rare posthumous pardon to boxing's first black heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, more than 100 years after what many see as a racially-charged conviction for violating the Mann Act by traveling with his white girlfriend. The president signed into law a measure loosening restraints for banks imposed after the 2008 financial crisis. A gunman was shot and killed by two bystanders after opening fire at an Oklahoma City restaurant and wounding three patrons. Jerry Maren, the last surviving Munchkin from the 1939 film "The Wizard of Oz," died at a San Diego nursing home; he was 99.

One year ago: An 18-year-old gunman opened fire at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, killing 19 children and two teachers. The gunman, Salvador Ramos, a former student at the school, was also killed. It was the deadliest shooting at a U.S. grade school since the attack in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, almost a decade earlier. Russia's invasion of Ukraine reached the three-month mark, with Moscow bogged down in what increasingly appeared to be a war of attrition, with no end in sight and few successes on the battlefield. An Iraqi man living in Ohio was arrested on a charge of plotting to assassinate former President George W. Bush.

Today's Birthdays: Actor-comedian-impressionist Stanley Baxter is 97. Jazz musician Archie Shepp is 86. Comedian Tommy Chong is 85. Singer Bob Dylan is 82. Actor Gary Burghoff is 80. Singer Patti LaBelle is 79. Actor Priscilla Presley is 78. Country singer Mike Reid is 76. Actor Jim Broadbent is 74. Actor Alfred Molina is 70. Singer Rosanne Cash is 68. Actor Cliff Parisi is 63. Actor Kristin Scott Thomas is 63. Actor John C. Reilly is 58. Actor Dana Ashbrook is 56. Actor Eric Close is 56. Actor Carl Payne is 54. Rock musician Rich Robinson is 54. Former MLB pitcher Bartolo Colon is 50. Actor Dash Mihok is 49. Actor Bryan Greenberg is 45. Actor Owen Benjamin is 43. Actor Billy L. Sullivan is 43. Actor-rapper Jerod Mixon (aka Big Tyme) is 42. Rock musician Cody Hanson (Hinder) is 41. Dancer-choreographer-singer Mark Ballas is 37. Country singer Billy Gilman is 35. Rapper/producer G-Eazy is 34. Actor Brianne Howey is 34. Actor Cayden Boyd is 29.