

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Groton Community Calendar

### Thursday, May 25

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun; lettuce, tomato 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

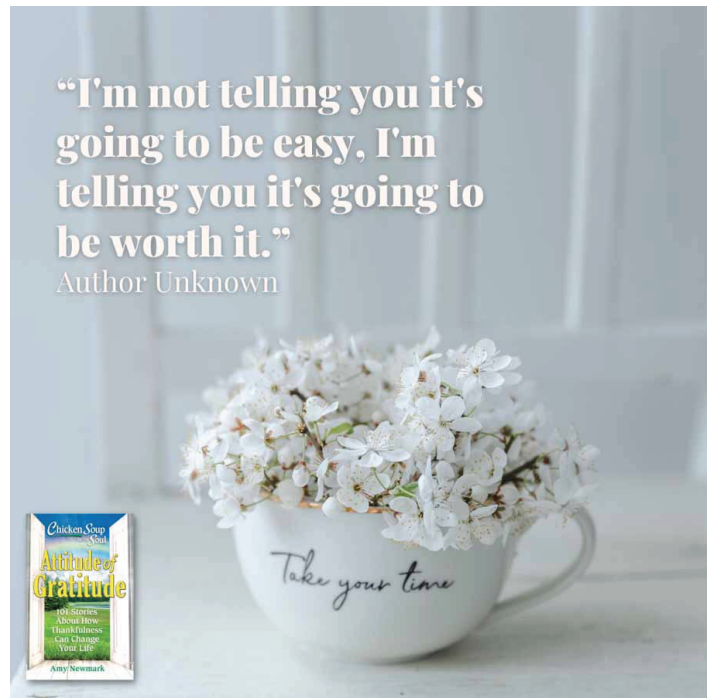
State Track Meet in Sioux Falls  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

### Sunday, May 28

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

## Groton Daily Independent

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



"I'm not telling you it's going to be easy, I'm telling you it's going to be worth it."

Author Unknown

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.

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

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

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

Legion Baseball: at Watertown (DH), 5 p.m.

Jr. Teeners: Huron at Groton, DH, 5 p.m.

### Wednesday, May 31

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, cauliflower,

## OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.  
© 2023 Groton Daily Independent



## Weber Landscaping Greenhouse Now Open!

620 West Third Ave., Groton

M-F  
10-6  
Saturday  
10-4  
Sunday  
12-4





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## The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

### World in Brief

of Staff.

Fulgence Kayishema, a Hutu militiaman accused of committing war crimes in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, has been arrested in South Africa after decades as one of Africa's most-wanted fugitives.

Richard Barnett, who was pictured sitting in former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office with his feet propped on her desk during the January 6 Capitol riot, has been sentenced to four and a half years in prison.

Germany has entered a recession after official data showed that the economy contracted in the first quarter of 2023, its second consecutive quarter of growth decline.

Canada and Saudi Arabia have agreed to resume diplomatic relations and appoint new ambassadors, ending a 2018 dispute over human rights that saw the kingdom expel the Canadian ambassador and damaged trade.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin said his troops have begun their retreat from the embattled city of Bakhmut. He said they will completely withdraw by June 1 and give way to regular Russian units.

### WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

The second reading of gross domestic product (GDP) will likely show that the U.S. grew at 1.1% in the first quarter. Initial jobless claims and pending home sales figures are also on the calendar, from 8:30 a.m. ET.

Investors will watch for the third-quarter earnings report from Costco Wholesale Corp for clues on the health of the retail industry and the spending power of customers. The Zacks Consensus Estimate pegged the company's revenues at \$54.57 billion, a growth of nearly 4% from the prior reported results.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will release this year's Atlantic Hurricane Season Outlook during a morning press conference. Hurricane season begins on June 1.

A candlelight vigil will take place tonight in Minneapolis to remember George Floyd on the third anniversary of his death.

Tributes are pouring in for Tina Turner, known as the "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll," who died in Switzerland at the age of 83 after a long illness.

A political stalemate over debt ceiling talks is pushing the country to the brink as House Republicans prepare to leave town for a long weekend, days before the U.S. risks an unprecedented default on its debt obligations.

President Joe Biden has picked Air Force Chief General Charles Q. Brown Jr., a history-making fighter pilot with experience in the Pacific, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs

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## Off to the State Track Meet

The Groton Area State Track and Field Qualifiers headed to Sioux Falls Wednesday afternoon. In back, left to right, are Assistant Coach Aaron Helvig, Keegen Tracy, Cole Simon, Ryder Johnson, Andrew Marzahn, Teylor Diegel and Lane Tietz; in the middle row, left to right, are Blake Pauli, Faith Traphagen, Emma Kutter, Taryn Traphagen, Aspen Johnson, Rylee Dunker, Korbin Kucker and Head Coach Shaun Wanner; in front, left to right, are Assistant Coach Carla Tracy, Kennedy Hansen, Ashlynn Warrington, Jerica Locke, Kella Tracy, Laila Roberts and Assistant Coach Lynette Grieve. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Blake Pauli and Cole Simon pose for a photo before leaving for the state track meet. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**Chris Khali was the first one at the Groton Swimming Pool Wednesday morning to sign up his children for swimming lessons and to get a season pass. His early arrival earned him the first pass given out for the season. Assistant Manager Tricia Keith along with Aspen Johnson are pictured getting everything organized for Khali. The pool is scheduled to open on Saturday.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

**GDILIVE.COM**



**Groton Memorial Day Program at Noon  
on Monday, May 29th**

**Free Viewing Sponsored by Groton  
American Legion Post #39**



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## Baseball groundskeepers keeping up with city property mowing

It has been a challenging year for trying to get all of the mowing around town done. The City of Groton has been lucky to have this group of baseball groundskeepers doing double duty with maintaining all of the city property around town. Aaron Severson is still doing farm work and Ryan Groeblichoff, Braxton Imrie and Dillon Abeln have all been in school yet so they are working after school/work into the evening hours. Tate Larson has been helping a lot during the day time as he is the only one available since he just graduated. The crew have been working at the cemetery trying to get that ready for Memorial Day. Brian Gravatt, who maintains the cemetery, has been limited with time due to school making up snow days in Webster where he is a bus driver. On top of that, baseball crew maintain the baseball fields, soccer field, skating rink, city park, pool and community center lots as the full time employees are busy with other projects. Thank you guys for your hard work. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**Tasha Dunker, Brynlee Dunker and Vicki Walter are getting a cemetery plat ready for Memorial Day. The plats include Glenn Sperry and Becky Diegel. (Photo by Paul Kosel)**

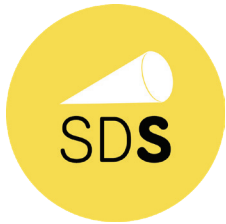


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Flags hang still in the early morning hours in downtown Groton. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Ducks become flashpoint in growing debate over resident vs. nonresident hunting

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 24, 2023 4:37 PM



**Alex Russo, the owner of a hunting lodge and guiding service in rural Hecla, points to the habitat improvements he and his team have made over the years.** (Joshua Haiar/

South Dakota Searchlight)

HECLA — Alex Russo never intended to start a hunting lodge and guiding service. But he was honorably discharged from the Marines about a decade ago after serving overseas and suffering knee and back injuries.

“Honestly, what I want to be doing is over there, serving with my brothers,” Russo said.

Russo always had a love for the outdoors and realized opening a hunting business would allow him to pursue his passion. He now owns 320 acres near Hecla, in northeastern South Dakota, where hunters come from around the country and pay his business \$3,750 apiece to shoot ducks for three days in some of the country’s best habitat.

But as Russo and other hunter-entrepreneurs like him have found success, a concern has taken flight among some duck hunters. They say the growing influence of hunting guides and outfitters on wildlife management decisions is threatening the integrity of the state’s duck hunting traditions.

Some in-state hunters argue that efforts to attract more out-of-state hunters are jeopardizing the state Department of Game, Fish, and Parks’ other responsibilities to conserve public resources, support sustainable hunting practices, and provide public hunting access to South Dakota residents.

John Cooper, a former head of GF&P, said private hunting operations don’t have to take into account the importance of managing wildlife as a public resource, the value of hunting outside of its economic impact, or the importance of cooperating with Canada and Mexico to ensure the proper management of migratory wildlife.

“And they’re certainly not interested in science-based decision-making, because what they care about is getting heads in beds – ticket sales,” Cooper said.

Russo countered that some in-state hunters’ concerns are exaggerated. Some revenue from waterfowl hunting license sales – and all revenue from the required federal Duck Stamp – goes toward conserving waterfowl habitats. And given a decline in the number of people duck hunting, Russo said the revenue generated from nonresidents is helping make up for the funding GF&P and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are losing.

The number of South Dakotans hunting ducks has declined from a peak of about 30,000 in 1998 to about 15,000 in 2021. Meanwhile, the number of nonresident hunters, which is subject to license caps, has fluctuated between 3,800 and 4,700 since 2012.

Russo blames the declining numbers on societal trends. He said kids would rather scroll social me-



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dia than hunt. At the same time, he said, fewer resident hunters are taking the time to build face-to-face relationships with landowners who could grant them access to land.

"Cell phones and lack of face to face relationships are the problem," Russo said.

Resident hunters blame additional factors for the decline. In 2017, Game, Fish and Parks surveyed waterfowl hunters. Over 70% of respondents reported being "very concerned" about a loss of hunting opportunities due to a loss of wetlands. One of the culprits is "drain tile" – perforated pipes in the soil to drain unwanted water, like seasonal wetlands, allowing farmers to plant more corn and other crops.

Additionally, some hunters say needing to get properly licensed and learn the rules of how, what, when and where to shoot ducks is a barrier to entry for people who did not grow up hunting.

## Recent changes, uproar

The concerns of resident hunters flared up during a recent meeting of the GF&P Commission, a citizen panel appointed by the governor. The commission unanimously approved 100 more nonresident licenses to be used on private land in two areas of the northeastern corner of the state, and another 200 licenses to be shared among residents and nonresidents in a large area outside the northeast. Nobody testified in favor of the changes, and written comments opposed them by a ratio of 7 to 1.

"It's about the process," said Zach Hunke, with the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, an approximately 3,000-member advocacy and lobbying group for resident hunters.

Concerns about the process began after GF&P Secretary Kevin Robling met with Alex Russo prior to the proposal's public introduction. Russo said department leaders told him about the proposal and told him the commission supported it. But Russo said "there was no dealmaking" between him and the GF&P.

Hunke said there is nothing wrong with Russo meeting with the department, but Hunke said the department failing to bring all stakeholders to the table is wrong.

"We didn't get to give our input," Hunke said.

Russo said the department and commission were already aware of the South Dakota Wildlife Federation's opposition to more nonresident waterfowl licenses – pointing out that the Wildlife Federation has a monthly meeting with department leadership.

"The group has been opposing this issue since I can remember," Russo said. "Everyone knows their view on this."

GF&P did not reply to South Dakota Searchlight questions about the proposal.

During the public commission meeting, GF&P Wildlife Director Tom Kirschenmann said, "We don't bring together stakeholder groups" for every licensing proposal.

STATEWIDE DUCK SEASON PARTICIPATION, 1980-2021



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**A duck hunter sits amid cattails and reeds along a publicly conserved wetland south of Madison.** (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

Searchlight)

has utilized the authority to increase nonresident duck licenses.

## **Game, Fish, Parks & privatized hunting**

A few hundred more licenses for nonresidents may sound inconsequential among the nearly 20,000 resident and nonresident licenses sold, but "it's a slippery slope for us," said Mitch Richter, a lobbyist for the South Dakota Wildlife Federation, in public testimony about the license change.

George Vandel, a former GF&P wildlife biologist and Wildlife Federation board member, said people do not have to look far to see why privatized hunting's growing influence is cause for concern.

"There are a whole lot of South Dakotans who feel like they've lost pheasant hunting to out-of-staters," Vandel said.

Vandel said the rise of private hunting operations led to pen-raised pheasants being released and killed by the hundreds of thousands every year. He said the practice guarantees visiting hunters the opportunity to shoot a pheasant, but it erodes the traditional hunting ethic of stalking wild game.

"The state sold out pheasant hunting, no doubt about that," Alex Russo said. But he added that, unlike pheasants, ducks are still a wild, limited natural resource with population numbers tethered mostly to habitat quality and weather conditions. Therefore, he said his business model supports science-based decisions.

"It's not like I want to see unlimited nonresident license sales," Russo said. "My business relies on there being a healthy waterfowl population out there. Some people do not get that."

Additionally, Russo points out that while the state has control of the number of licenses that can be sold, the number of ducks a licensed hunter can shoot is controlled by the federal government.

## **The access issue**

Russo said some resident hunters are upset about losing access to land they previously hunted on.

In the past, many northeastern South Dakota landowners allowed local hunters onto their land for free, if they asked. However, as more licenses have been allocated to nonresidents, more landowners have found a financial opportunity in renting specific areas of their land for exclusive hunting rights.

While some residents, like Cooper, call the change "privatization of a public wildlife resource," Russo said the decision is within a landowner's rights.

"Renting out land for hunting can provide additional income for the landowner, which they can use for various purposes," Russo said. "It's not good or bad that that happens. It just is what it is."

South Dakota's next duck season runs from September to January.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This story has been updated to reflect a correction. The originally published version of the*

Cooper told South Dakota Searchlight the issue is too contentious to bypass stakeholder input.

"It erodes trust with the public," he said.

## **A contentious history**

Out-of-state duck hunters have been controversial in South Dakota for more than 75 years. When World War II veterans returned to South Dakota and found nonresident duck hunters littered across their favorite hunting spots, they pressured the Legislature to take action.

In 1947, the Legislature banned nonresidents from duck hunting, but the ban was repealed in 1970. Debates ensued, ultimately resulting in a gradual increase in nonresident waterfowl hunting licenses.

And in 2014, the Legislature removed legal limits on nonresident licenses and passed control of licensing decisions to the GF&P Commission. That law also prohibits the commission from increasing license numbers by more than 5% of the previous year's allocation.

The recent decision was the first time the commission



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story incorrectly stated the amount that Alex Russo's business charges hunters.

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.

## COMMENTARY

### Noem, DeSantis and pugnacity as a political strategy

DANA HESS

It's apparent there are some journalists in Sioux Falls who are being punished. These are the reporters and anchors assigned to the morning shows that start at 5 a.m. and drag on for hours until the network talkathons start. With so many hours of airtime to fill, these local early morning shows play the same "top stories" over and over.

A recent top story was about Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis visiting Iowa. South Dakotans probably only know DeSantis from the headlines he generates. He formally launched his candidacy for president on Wednesday. He doesn't get along with Disney. He gets bent out of shape whenever someone says "gay" in the classroom.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem probably knows DeSantis better than the rest of us do, given that they're both the chief executives of their states and she's also mentioned as a possible candidate for the Republican nomination for president.

If she was keeping track of a potential rival and watching morning news coverage, it's likely that Noem was dismayed — not about DeSantis getting so much airtime in her state or his campaign being so much further along than hers. What would cause that dismay was the fact that DeSantis has appropriated a campaign slogan that would be perfect for Noem.

Plastered on the walls of one of the Iowa venues DeSantis visited was his campaign slogan: Never Back Down. This slogan would serve Noem well, too, as it's difficult to remember the last time she backed down from anything or anyone.

Maybe being pugnacious is supposed to attract voters. It certainly has worked well so far for Noem as she continues her second four-year term as governor and cultivates a reputation as a possible presidential candidate.

Noem has never backed down when it comes to questions about how she uses the state airplane. Legislators from both parties have brought unsuccessful bills designed to settle, once and for all, the question of whether the state airplane is being used for political purposes rather than state business.

Noem's executive branch minions who rose in opposition to these bills generally had two arguments. One argument says that keeping track of who was flying on the plane and where they were going would mean an onerous amount of paperwork. The other argument says that the paperwork already exists showing who's on the plane and how it's being used. In every case, Noem has been able to rely on the Republican majority to have her back and kill bills that would allow South Dakotans to know how the airplane they paid for is being used.

During the pandemic, Noem crowed about how South Dakota was staying open for business. She was adamant that state government was not going to put any restrictions on businesses or individuals. As she



**Florida Governor-elect Ron DeSantis sits next to President Donald Trump and South Dakota Governor-elect Kristi Noem during a meeting in the Cabinet Room at the White House on Dec. 13, 2018, in Washington, D.C.** (Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

touted her policies and how good they were, South Dakota drew the attention of journalists. They looked with skepticism on Noem's policies and used pandemic data to point out that South Dakota's freedom policies caused it to lead the league in per capita coronavirus deaths. These reporters, according to Noem, had left-leaning political agendas and were purposely reading the data in a way that skewed its meaning.

There was no quit in Noem's defense of the way she handled her daughter's attempts to get a real estate appraiser's license. There were no ethical concerns for the governor as she had her daughter present at a meeting with the official in charge of the appraiser program and the secretary of labor. Even after a report from the Republican-controlled Government Operations and Audit Committee said that the governor's daughter received preferential treatment, Noem continued to dispute that she had done anything wrong.

Noem's hard-charging attitude that never allows her to admit she may be in the wrong has earned her fans in South Dakota and polished her national image. Noem's tactics fit well in today's political arena, where compromise is seen as a sign of weakness. For today's national politicians, the best way to control the narrative is by shouting louder than the other fellow and always insisting that your interpretation of facts or events is the only one that matters. If she does run for president, Noem should fit right in.

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

## Biden student debt relief plan revoked in U.S. House vote

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 24, 2023 5:27 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House on Wednesday voted to overturn the Biden administration's one-time student debt relief plan that is currently on hold awaiting a Supreme Court decision expected within weeks.

Before the 218-203 vote on the resolution, the the White House said President Joe Biden would veto it, arguing that the U.S. Department of Education has the legal authority to execute the one-time cancellation of up to \$20,000 in federal student loan debt for borrowers who qualify, and that overturning the policy "would weaken America's middle class." Two Democrats voted with all the Republicans who were present (including Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota). Those Democrats are Jared Golden of Maine and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington state.

"This resolution is an unprecedented attempt to undercut our historic economic recovery, and would deprive more than 40 million hard-working Americans of much-needed student debt relief," the White House said in a statement. "Americans should be able to have a little more breathing room as they recover from the economic strains associated with the COVID-19 pandemic."

The Congressional Review Act resolution now goes to the Senate, where once it's sent to its relevant committee, any senator can make a non-debatable motion to consider it for a floor vote. The CRA procedural tool that can be used to overturn agency actions needs just 51 votes to pass, unlike the usual 60 votes required to defeat a filibuster.

Congressional Republicans have relentlessly attacked and lambasted the Biden plan as a "bailout," and already voted to block student debt relief under a bill last month to raise the debt ceiling along with spending cuts.

But the separate resolution voted on Wednesday forced vulnerable Democrats up for reelection in 2024 to take a public stance on the issue.



**Activists call on President Biden to not resume student loan payments and to cancel student debt, near the White House on Dec. 15, 2021, in Washington, D.C.** (Paul Morigi/

Getty Images for We, The 45 Million)



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Introduced by Rep. Bob Good, Republican of Virginia, the resolution would also require the Department of Education to go back and charge borrowers billions in back interest from the pause on student loan repayments first implemented by the Trump administration in 2020 due to the coronavirus and extended several times.

"Student loan cancellation doesn't actually make the debt go away. It simply shifts the cost from the student loan borrower to hardworking American taxpayers," Good said on the House floor during Wednesday's debate.

## Tied up in court

The Supreme Court soon will issue a ruling on the fate of the debt forgiveness program, but during oral arguments in February, the majority conservative wing of the court seemed skeptical that the Department of Education could implement a program without explicit congressional approval that would cost more than \$400 billion over 30 years.

The debt relief program was initially halted by an appeals court in late October following an emergency request from Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds of Iowa, and Republican attorneys general in Nebraska, Arkansas, Missouri, South Carolina and Kansas.

They argued that the president does not have the authority to wipe out debt, and it should be left to Congress to make that decision.

While the GOP has objected to the policy since the Biden administration made its announcement last year, congressional Republicans could only take action after a non-partisan congressional watchdog agency — the Government Accountability Office — concluded in March that the policy is subject to the Congressional Review Act.

The chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee, Republican Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina, said during Wednesday's debate that student debt cancellation is "regressive."

Foxx said that Congress should instead be working on lowering the cost of college, and "not dumping hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars on well-off college graduates to make the problem worse."

She's held several hearings about the administration's student debt relief policy.

The Biden administration program would forgive up to \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for single adults making under \$125,000 a year, or under \$250,000 for married couples.

Borrowers who received Pell Grants are eligible for an additional \$10,000 in forgiveness of federal student loans.

Of those 26 million borrowers who applied for the program that launched in October, 16 million have been approved, according to the Department of Education.

The Federal Reserve estimates that more than 43 million Americans have student loan debt, which amounts to \$1.76 trillion.

Rep. Tim Walberg, a Michigan Republican, said Wednesday that the policy is a "slap in the face for those who pay their bills or did not go to college."

But pushing back against claims that only the wealthy would benefit, Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, an Oregon Democrat, said that 90% of the relief would go to borrowers who earn less than \$75,000.

"This may be news to my colleagues, who continue to misrepresent that student debt relief will be a bailout for the rich," she said.

Rep. Bobby Scott of Virginia, the top Democrat on the House Education and Workforce Committee, argued that student debt relief benefits every congressional district, regardless of political party.

"There are many challenges we have in higher education that demand our attention. Rising costs of higher education. The student debt crisis. The eroded value of the Pell Grant. Mental health issues. The list goes on," he said.

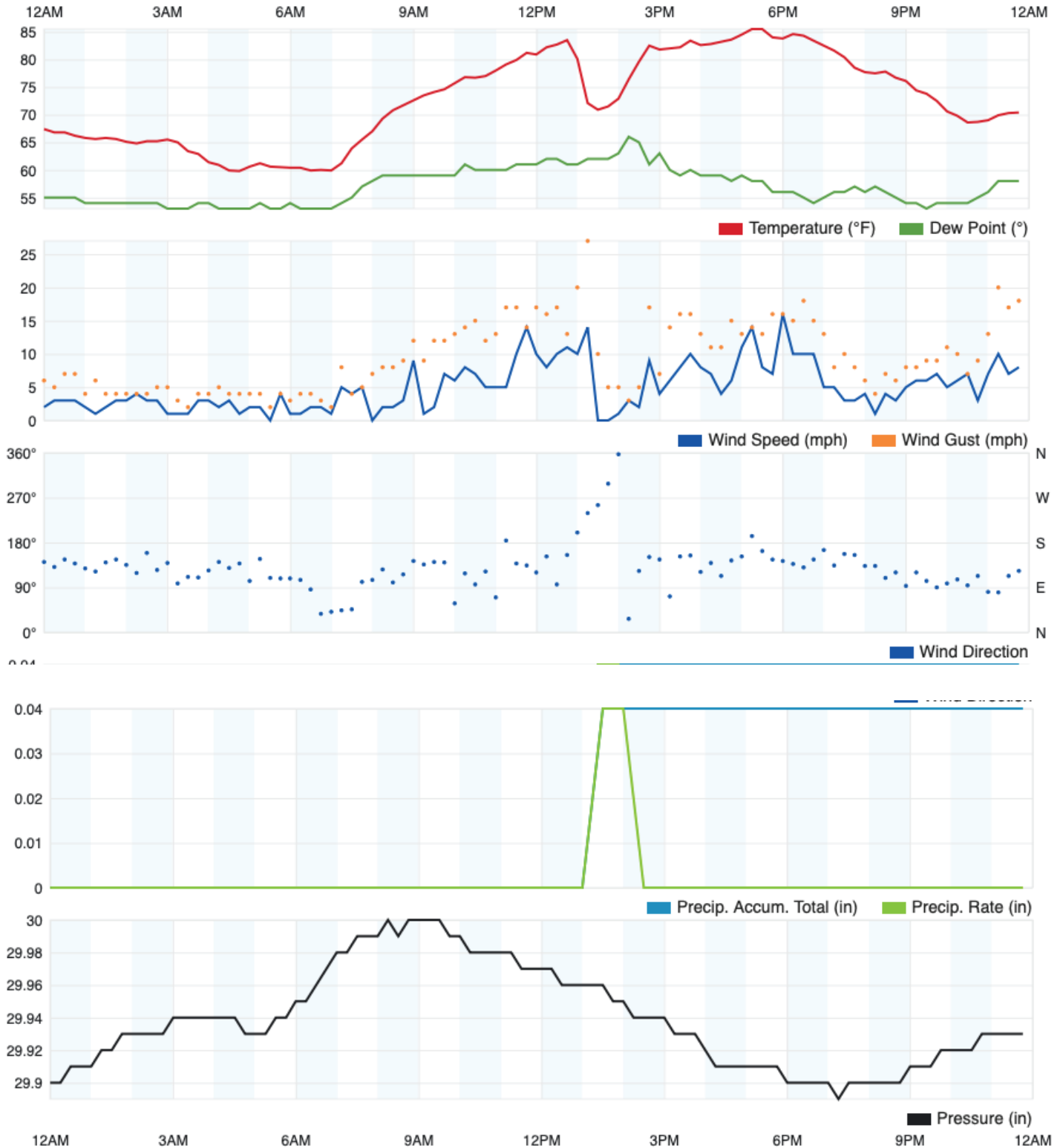
"But instead of addressing these challenges, we are trying to force through a resolution that hurts tens of millions of student borrowers and their families, an average of almost 100,000 (borrowers) in each of our districts."

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

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



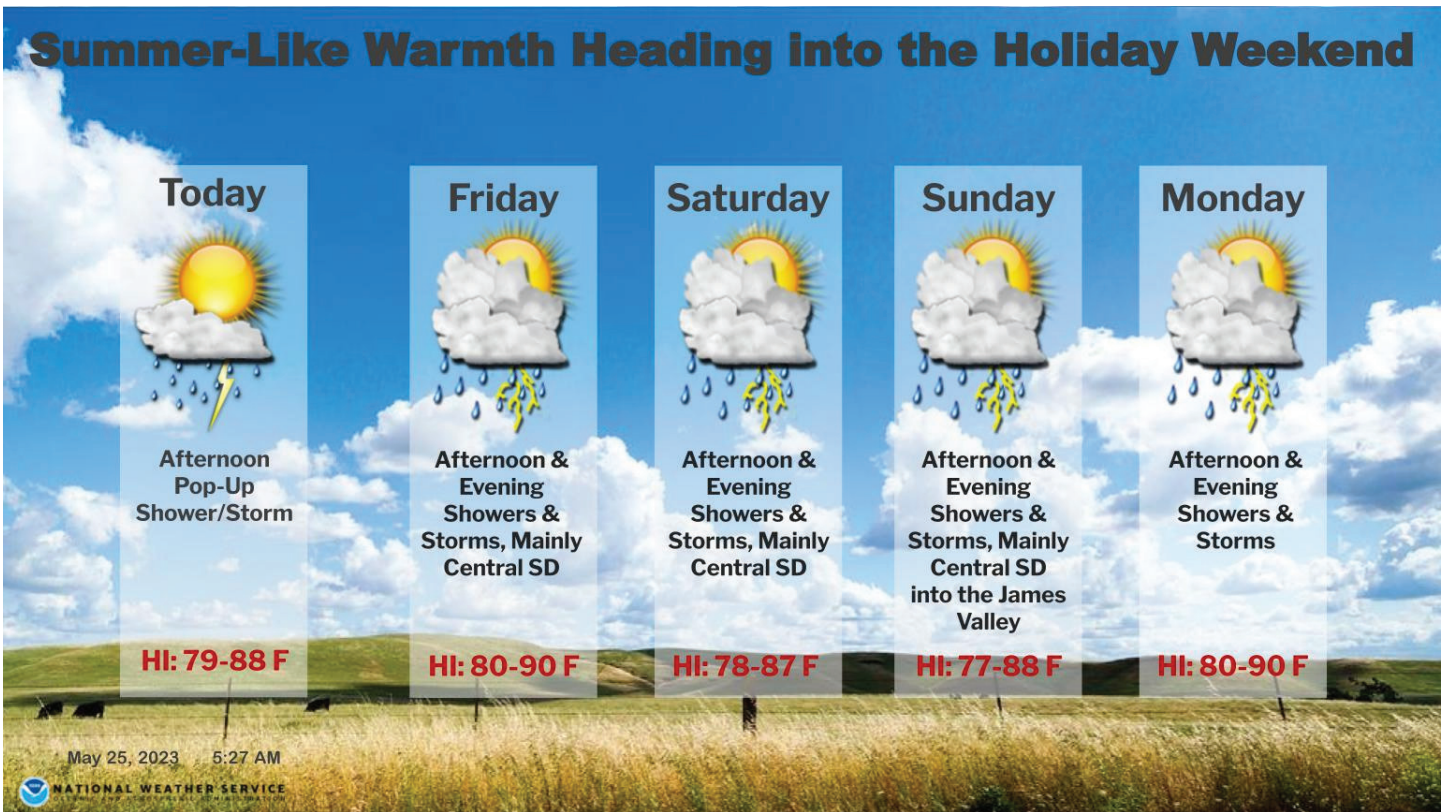







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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Breezy, Sunny then Slight Chance Showers	Breezy, Slight Chance Showers then Mostly Clear	Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Windy	Mostly Sunny and Windy	Slight Chance T-storms and Breezy	Breezy, Slight Chance Showers then Slight Chance T-storms
High: 85 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 84 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 84 °F

## Summer-Like Warmth Heading into the Holiday Weekend



Today	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
				
Afternoon Pop-Up Shower/Storm	Afternoon & Evening Showers & Storms, Mainly Central SD	Afternoon & Evening Showers & Storms, Mainly Central SD	Afternoon & Evening Showers & Storms, Mainly Central SD into the James Valley	Afternoon & Evening Showers & Storms
HI: 79-88 F	HI: 80-90 F	HI: 78-87 F	HI: 77-88 F	HI: 80-90 F

May 25, 2023 5:27 AM  
 NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

The next couple days will continue to feature mainly dry conditions for most locales. A couple of pop up afternoon showers or storm will be possible today. A better chance to see more of this activity will arrive this weekend into early next week. Temperatures will continue to be well above normal for late May.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 86 °F at 5:11 PM

Low Temp: 59 °F at 4:38 AM

Wind: 27 mph at 1:12 PM

Precip: : 0.04

## Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 2018

Record Low: 29 in 1924

Average High: 74

Average Low: 48

Average Precip in May.: 2.70

Precip to date in May.: 2.19

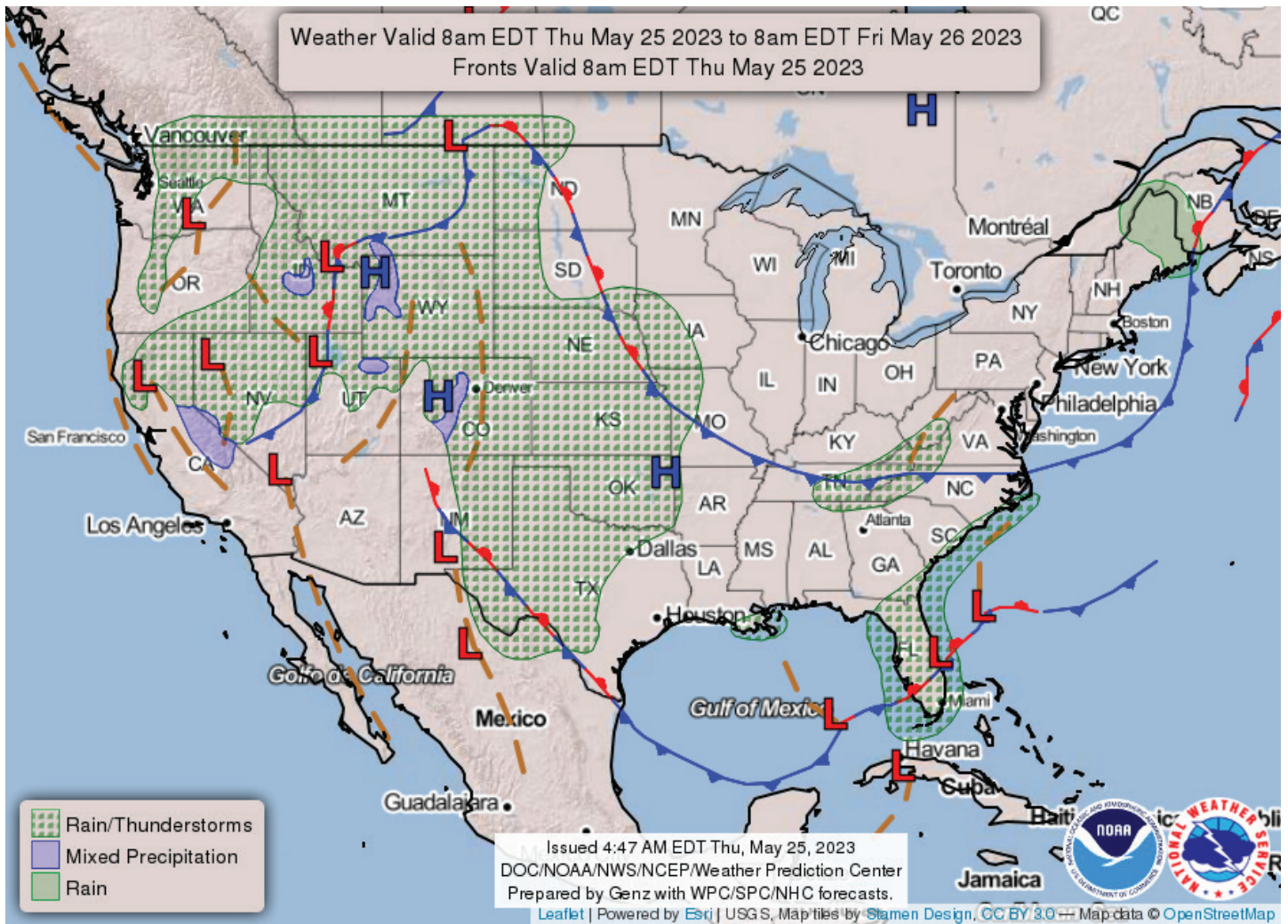
Average Precip to date: 6.67

Precip Year to Date: 7.91

Sunset Tonight: 9:08:28 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:49:25 AM

Day length: 15 hours, 18 minutes





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## Today in Weather History

May 25, 1880: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast through the town of Mitchell. Two men were killed when they ran out the back door of a saloon to reach the cellar entrance. The caulk stone saloon was destroyed along with two homes and several businesses. This tornado was one of the first significant tornadoes on record for the state of South Dakota.

May 25, 1985: During the afternoon hours, thunderstorms developed along the east side of the Black Hills. The storms produced quite a bit of lightning and over the course of 2 hours started 18 small fires in the Black Hills. Fortunately, most of the fires were small and quickly contained. One unfortunate firefighter was struck by lightning as he was helping to extinguish a blaze that burned some 50 acres of grassland and forest. Thankfully, the man lived, but he did suffer several broken bones, burns, and major damage to his ears. The strike was so powerful that a man standing over 150 feet away was dropped to his knees.

1896: An estimated F5 tornado hit Oakwood, Ortonville, and Thomas, Michigan. Forty-seven people were killed, and 100 were injured. Trees were debarked "even to the twigs, as though done by the careful hand of an experienced artisan." Parts of houses were found up to 12 miles away.

1917 - A tornado ripped through southeast Kansas, traveling 65 mph. The average speed was a record for any tornado. (The Weather Channel)

1955: An estimated F5 tornado moved north and NNW through the heart of Blackwell, Oklahoma. About 400 homes were destroyed, and many were leveled and swept away. About 500 other homes were damaged. The tornado dissipated just over the Kansas border, as the Udall, Kansas tornado was forming to the east. The Blackwell tornado was accompanied by unusual electrical activity, with up to 25 discharges per second recorded on sferics equipment. The funnel was said to glow and have "arcs" of glowing light. The Udall, Kansas tornado was estimated to be an F5 as well. Over half of the population of Udall was killed or injured as the tornado completely devastated a large portion of town. Seventy-five people were killed, and many of the 270 injuries were serious.

1975: On Raccoon Lake, Indiana, lightning struck the motor of a speedboat and traveled up the control wires, killing the driver. The 38-year-old man was knocked into the water by the bolt. His wife and two children, also in the boat, were not injured.

1988 - Unseasonably cool weather prevailed in the Upper Midwest. Marquette, MI, reported a record low of 26 degrees. Thunderstorms in the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 62 mph at Idaho Falls, ID, and produced 4 inches of rain in less than four hours in northern Buffalo County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a strong cold front produced severe weather from Oklahoma to Ohio through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned nine tornadoes, and there were 155 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Hail three and a half inches in diameter was reported at Dittmer, MO, and thunderstorm winds gusting to 90 MPH caused twenty million dollars damage at Rockville IN. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Evening thunderstorms spawned four tornadoes in Kansas and Missouri, and there were three dozen reports of large hail or damaging winds. Thunderstorms produced hail two inches in diameter at Cole Camp, and wind gusts to 72 mph at Rosebud. Heavy thunderstorm rains produced flash flooding in central Missouri. Flood waters swept through Washington State Park southwest of Saint Louis, and nearly one hundred persons had to be rescued from water as much as twenty feet deep. The flood waters swept away a number of vehicles, some were carried as much as four miles away. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2008: A rare, large and destructive EF5 tornado created a 43-mile long path across Butler and Black Hawk counties in Iowa. This tornado killed eight people, injured dozens and caused several millions of dollars in damage. The tornado was nearly three-quarters of a mile wide as it moved through the southern end of Parkersburg. A third of the town was affected by devastating damage with nearly 200 homes destroyed. This storm produced the first EF5 tornado in Iowa since 6/13/1976 and only the third EF5 tornado to occur in the United States in the past ten years.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### ALWAYS ROOM FOR MORE

Whenever I hear the word "gain," I think it is related to "weight," especially my weight. There are very few mornings that I do not step on the scale to get my "daily report" on what I ate yesterday. Most nutritionists do not recommend such a program. But, my hope to see the arrow pointing downward remains steadfast.

A gain or increase can be good or bad, exciting or depressing, encouraging or discouraging, depending on what the gain refers to. If we depend on the stock market, a gain can be a good thing. But, if we see a gain in our debt, it can be disturbing. Our gains or losses, for the most part, are usually in the physical or material realm.

Solomon speaks of a particular type of "gain" - of being able to achieve some "things" that will last as long as we live. These "gains," these valuable lessons are available and offered to us in Proverbs. Our "attaining" more of God's wisdom, or "life gains" is very important for all Christians because we are constantly challenged to "grow" throughout Scripture, and Proverbs provides this path for us if we want to grow.

The word used for "wisdom" in this verse also means skillfulness - applying knowledge that comes from God to our lives every day. If we do so, we will "do the right things the right way."

When we go one step further, we come to the fact that it is possible to develop decision-making skills that are God-honoring and enable us to establish life-principals that will bring us success. God's proverbs can guide us through life, help us in our relationships with others, lead to good practices in business, enrich our homes, and bless God and others.

Prayer: Lord, You've left us "no excuses" on how we are to live life if we are Christians. Thanks for the directions on how to live a successful life! Now, give us courage! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: For gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight. Proverbs 1:2



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



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## 2023 Community Events

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

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## The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.23.23

3 10 22 65 66 19

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$169,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 38  
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.24.23

1 23 24 35 43 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$3,150,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 38  
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.24.23

1 25 26 46 47 18

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 8 Mins 53  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.24.23

6 14 16 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$72,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 38  
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.24.23

7 25 29 40 45 12

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

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 37  
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.24.23

12 21 44 50 58 26

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$211,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 37  
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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## News from the Associated Press

Head of Russian private army Wagner says his forces are handing control of Bakhmut to Moscow  
By SUSIE BLANN and ELISE MORTON Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The head of the Russian private military contractor Wagner claimed Thursday that his forces have started pulling out of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine and handing over control to the Russian military, days after he said Wagner troops had captured the ruined city.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, Wagner's millionaire owner with longtime links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, said in a video published on Telegram that the handover would be completed by June 1. There was no immediate comment from the Russian defense ministry.

It was not possible to independently verify whether Wagner's pullout from the bombed-out city has begun after a nine-month battle that killed tens of thousands of people.

Ukraine's deputy defense minister said Thursday that Wagner units have been replaced with regular troops in the suburbs but Wagner fighters remain inside the city. Ukrainian forces still have a foothold in the southwestern outskirts, Deputy Minister of Defense Hanna Maliar said.

Prigozhin's Bakhmut triumph delivered a badly needed victory for Putin, whose invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has lost momentum and now faces the possibility of a Ukrainian counteroffensive using advanced weapons supplied by Kyiv's Western allies.

Top Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak said Thursday that Ukraine's counteroffensive was already underway, cautioning that it should not be anticipated as a "single event" starting "at a specific hour of a specific day."

Writing on Twitter, Podolyak said that "dozens of different actions to destroy Russian occupation forces" had "already been taking place yesterday, are taking place today and will continue tomorrow."

Prigozhin has a long-running feud with the Russian military leadership, dating back to Wagner's creation. He has also built a reputation for inflammatory — and often unverifiable — headline-grabbing statements that he later backtracked on.

During the 15-month war in Ukraine, he has repeatedly and publicly chastised Russia's military leadership, accusing them of incompetence and failure to properly provision his troops as they spearheaded the battle for Bakhmut.

Wagner's involvement in the capture of Bakhmut has added to Prigozhin's standing, which he has used to set forth his personal views about the conduct of the war.

"Prigozhin is ... using the perception that Wagner is responsible for the capture of Bakhmut to advocate for a preposterous level of influence over the Russian war effort in Ukraine," the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said.

His frequent critical commentary about Russia's military performance is uncommon in Russia's tightly controlled political system, in which only Putin can usually air such criticism.

His flat statement of what he would do over the next week in Bakhmut came a day after he again broke with the Kremlin line on Ukraine. He said its goal of demilitarizing the country has backfired, acknowledged Russian troops have killed civilians and agreed with Western estimates that he lost more than 20,000 men in the battle for Bakhmut.

Meanwhile, Russian unleashed a barrage of Iranian-made Shahed 36 drones against Kyiv in its 12th nighttime air assault on the Ukrainian capital this month but the city's air defenses shot down all of them, Ukrainian authorities said Thursday.

The Kremlin's forces also launched 30 airstrikes and 39 attacks from multiple rocket launchers as well as artillery and mortar attacks across Ukraine, the Ukrainian military said.

At least one civilian was killed and 13 others were wounded in Ukraine on Wednesday and overnight, the Ukrainian presidential office said Thursday.

In Russia, meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry announced Thursday that five Swedish diplomats are to be



expelled from the country.

According to the statement, the decision is a response to Stockholm's "openly hostile step" to declare five employees of Russian foreign missions in Sweden "personae non grata" in April.

Moscow additionally announced its decision to close its consulate in Goteborg in September, as well as its "withdrawal of consent" to the activities of the Swedish consulate in St. Petersburg.

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

## After Typhoon Mawar battered Guam, 'what used to be a jungle looks like toothpicks'

By GRACE GARCES BORDALLO and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

HAGATNA, Guam (AP) — Many residents of Guam were without power and utilities Thursday after Typhoon Mawar tore through the remote U.S. Pacific territory the night before and ripped roofs off homes, flipped vehicles and shredded trees.

There were minor injuries reported but no fatalities, according to the governor's office.

The central and northern parts of the island received more than 2 feet (60 centimeters) of rain as the eyewall passed. The island's international airport flooded and the swirling typhoon churned up a storm surge and waves that crashed through coastal reefs and flooded homes.

"We are waking up to a rather disturbing scene out there across Guam. We're looking out our door and what used to be a jungle looks like toothpicks — it looks like a scene from the movie 'Twister,' with trees just thrashed apart," said Landon Aydlett, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"Most of Guam is dealing with a major mess that's gonna take weeks to clean up," he added.

The strongest typhoon to hit the territory of roughly 150,000 people since 2002, Mawar briefly made landfall around 9 p.m. Wednesday as a Category 4 storm at Andersen Air Force Base on the northern tip of the island, weather service officials said.

The scope of the damage was difficult to ascertain early on, with power and internet failures making communication on the far-flung island difficult. Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero said in a video message late Thursday morning that roads were passable, but residents should avoid driving and stay home due to ongoing strong winds.

"We have weathered the storm," Leon Guerrero said, adding that "the worst has gone by."

As the typhoon crept slowly over the island, it sent solar panels flying and crumbled part of a hotel's exterior wall to the ground, according to videos posted on social media. At what felt like its peak intensity, the winds screeched and howled like jets, and water swamped some homes.

Leah del Mundo spent the night with her family in their concrete home in Chalan Pago, in central Guam. She told The Associated Press they tried to sleep but were awakened "by violent shaking of the typhoon shutters and the whistling strong winds."

"It's not our first rodeo," she said via text message. "We've been through worse. But we brace ourselves for the cleanup, repairs, restoration afterwards."

Winds peeled back the roof of Enrique Baza's mother's house in Yona, allowing water to damage everything inside.

"My mom's house didn't escape," he said, adding that his mother stayed with him in his concrete home during the storm.

He drove around in a pickup truck looking for supplies to repair his mother's roof, but most stores were without power and only accepting cash. Many wooden or tin homes he passed were badly beaten or collapsed.

"It's kind of a shock," he said.

In Tumon, on Guam's northeastern shore, winds tore a granite countertop from a hotel's outdoor bar and tossed it into the air. Guests scrambled to stack chairs to brace the doors, and windows buckled and

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creaked.

"It was like a freight train going on outside," said Thomas Wooley, who recounted how wind and rain pushed through the aluminum shutters of his family's concrete home overlooking Tumon Bay. When day broke, he found their outdoor china cabinet toppled and its contents shattered on the ground. A chainsaw-wielding relative helped clear downed branches.

"We've got tons of work to do," Wooley said. "It's going to take a few days to clean it up."

Guam's weather service office in Tiyan said it would shut down operations in the morning for workers to get home to families and assess damage at their homes. Counterparts in the Honolulu office took over their duties.

In a sign of how much help Guam might need, the Navy ordered the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group to head to the island to assist in the recovery effort, according to a U.S. official. The Nimitz, along with the USS Bunker Hill, a cruiser, and the USS Wayne E. Meyer, a destroyer, were south of Japan and expected to arrive in Guam in three or four days, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss ship movements not yet made public.

Guam is about 3,800 miles (6,115 kilometers) west of Hawaii and 1,600 miles (1,575 kilometers) east of the Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

By Thursday night, Mawar was centered 195 miles (314 kilometers) northwest of Guam and 210 miles (338 kilometers) west of Rota, Guam's neighbor to the north, moving west-northwest at 8 mph (13 kph).

Power was also knocked out for all of Rota, the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. said late Wednesday. The island has about 2,500 residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The storm strengthened to 165 mph (266 kph) winds Thursday and regained its status as a super typhoon, according to the weather service. Mawar, a Malaysian word that means "rose," was forecast to maintain this intensity for the next two days.

After moving away from Guam, the storm is expected to track generally northwest over a large, empty of expanse of ocean for days, and it could threaten Taiwan next week.

Guam is a crucial hub for U.S. forces in the Pacific, with about 6,800 service members assigned to the island, according to the Pentagon. Military officials evacuated personnel, dependents and employees, sent ships out to sea and moved aircraft off the island or secured them in protective hangars.

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Kelleher reported from Honolulu. AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein in Kensington, Maryland, and Associated Press writers Lolita C. Baldor and Sarah Brumfield in Washington, Audrey McAvoy in Honolulu, Mark Thiessen in Anchorage, Alaska, Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles, and Ed Komenda in Seattle contributed.

## Pressure building on Team Penske to get Indianapolis 500 results

By DAVE SKRETTA AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Will Power and Scott McLaughlin joined Josef Newgarden behind a table draped in a checked flag Wednesday, the trio of IndyCar drivers the very definition of focus. Their eyes were trained on the project before them, fingers nearly twitching.

Anticipating the start, all three dove into the work, moments before the emcee yelled, "Go!"

That sums up the competitive atmosphere at Team Penske, though, that at a community event days before the Indianapolis 500, all three drivers angled for a head start — Let's be honest, they cheated — against a bunch of elementary school kids. They were in a race to build an IndyCar out of some masking tape and cardboard, and those couple of extra seconds counted.

Just like they do at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

It's there, at the historic oval owned by Roger Penske, that his team has struggled with time lately. Power only qualified 12th for Sunday's race to match the best starting position of any Team Penske driver since 2019, the year before "The Captain" purchased the speedway. McLaughlin will start a row back in 14th and Newgarden another row back in 17th place.

Ahead are all four cars from Arrow McLaren and both from A.J. Foyt Racing, two other Chevrolet-powered



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teams.

"There's no place to hide. We're just not fast enough," Newgarden admitted. "I feel terrible for our team because I am front and center of being able to witness the amount of work that's gone into this place. It's not from a shortage of effort. We're obviously missing something else. I don't know what we're missing, but I know we're missing it."

The team's race performance has been a little better.

Newgarden finished fifth in 2020 and led the race a year ago before finishing 13th. In between, Simon Pagenaud finished third behind this year's pole sitter Alex Palou and Helio Castroneves, who spent the majority of his career with Penske and won three Indy 500s there before capturing his record-tying fourth in 2021 with Meyer Shank Racing.

"When you look at the past few years, you've got to start up front, when you look at who's won the race and where they have started from," said Team Penske president Tim Cindric, who will be inducted into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame on Friday. "It's much tougher in the race to get to the front from the back."

From the middle of the pack, too.

There appears to be no single reason why Team Penske has been a tick off the past few years, though its recent Indy 500 results have curiously coincided with the addition of aeroscreens in IndyCar to improve driver safety.

In 2019, the last year before their introduction, Power qualified second, Pagenaud third and Newgarden fourth. Pagenaud wound up winning an 18th Borg-Warner Trophy for the team while Newgarden and Power also finished in the top five.

"I think Indy, there's a lot of recipes that can work here, and I think our approach of trying to get the details right has always been true at this team," Newgarden said. "I don't think we're going to change that. But sometimes there's different elements that we may not look at the right way, and we go back and we look at them again and say, 'Can we look at them differently?' I think that has been a core thing for us, just trying to reassess every little detail in the way that we're examining it."

Trouble is that everyone else is likewise examining every little detail.

The spec chassis produced by Dallara has remained largely unchanged since 2012. So have the engine specs. And that has given smaller, underfunded teams time to close the engineering gap on teams like Penske that have far more resources.

"It's been stable for so long that everybody is figuring it out, which makes it tighter across the board," said four-time Indy 500 winner Rick Mears, who drove nearly his entire career for Penske and now serves as a team advisor.

"It's probably the easiest time to get into the series and be competitive with the cars, and being able to establish yourself, get the right people," Mears continued, "because you're getting the same blocks everybody is playing with. Now it is figuring out how to stack them. As people learn how to stack them, it gets tighter and tighter."

That was evident the day after pole qualifying, when Power went to the top of the speed chart in practice.

"All these teams turn up, they just improve every year, and the car doesn't change. So there's a ceiling," Power said. "I feel like we have good horsepower, and I think we're in good shape. A lot of people are extremely good, a lot of teams. It's almost going to be a day of no mistakes in the pits and just keeping out of trouble on track to give yourself a shot at the end."

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

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## Expect big crowds for the summer travel season -- and big prices, too

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

The unofficial start of the summer travel season is here, with airlines hoping to avoid the chaos of last year and travelers scrounging for ways to save a few bucks on pricey fares and hotel rooms.

Some travelers say they will settle for fewer trips than they hoped to take, or they will drive instead of fly. Others are finding different money-saving sacrifices.

Stephanie Hanrahan thought she'd save money by planning ahead for her daughter's birthday trip to Disney World in Florida. Instead, it ended up costing the same as the Dallas-area family's trip for four to California last summer, so now her husband and son are staying home.

"We just had to grit our teeth," said Hanrahan, a writer and speaker who also runs a nonprofit, as she and daughter Campbell waited for their flight last week at Dallas Love Field.

The number of people going through U.S. airports hit pandemic-era highs last weekend, and those records are almost certain to be broken over the Memorial Day holiday.

AAA predicts that 37 million Americans will drive at least 50 miles (80 kilometers) from home this weekend, an increase of more than 2 million from Memorial Day last year but still below pre-pandemic numbers in 2019. The Transportation Security Administration expects to screen 10 million travelers between Friday and Monday, a 14% increase over the holiday in 2022 and slightly more than in 2019.

With more travel comes more expense. The average rate for a U.S. hotel room last week was \$157 a night, up from \$150 in the same week last year, according to hotel data provider STR. And the average daily rate for other short-term rentals such as Airbnb and Vrbo rose to \$316 last month, up 1.4% from a year ago, according to AirDNA, which tracks the industry.

There is a bit of good news for drivers, however: The national average for a gallon of regular was \$3.56 at midweek, down from \$4.60 at this time last year, according to AAA. Renting a car is also cheaper than a year ago, when some popular destinations ran out of vehicles. Travel company Expedia said larger inventories let the companies rent more cars at lower prices.

For air travelers, airline industry officials say carriers have fixed problems that contributed to a surge in flight cancellations and delays last summer, when 52,000 flights were nixed from June through August. Airlines have hired about 30,000 workers since then, including thousands of pilots, and they are using bigger planes to reduce flights but not the number of seats.

"I don't have the hubris to tell you exactly how the summer is going to go, but we have prepared and we have a robust plan for it," said Andrew Watterson, chief operating officer at Southwest Airline, which struggled at times over the summer of 2022 and suffered an epic meltdown around Christmas, canceling nearly 17,000 flights.

David Seymour, the chief operating officer of American Airlines, said his staff has fine-tuned a system it uses to predict the impact of storms on major airports and devise a plan for recovering from disruptions. He said it is reducing cancellations.

"It's going to be a solid summer for us," Seymour said.

In a report released last month, the Government Accountability Office blamed airlines for an increase in flight cancellations as travel recovered from the pandemic. It also said airlines are taking longer to recover from disruptions such as storms.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg says the government will hold airlines responsible to treat passengers fairly when the carriers cause cancellations or long delays. But just like the airlines, the Federal Aviation Administration — the agency that manages the nation's air traffic — has had its own staffing shortages and occasional technology breakdowns that have snarled air travel.

The FAA resorted to nudging airlines to reduce flights in the New York City area this summer, and it opened new flight paths over the East Coast to reduce bottlenecks.

"It's going to be an ordeal — it's always an ordeal to travel in the summer," said travel analyst Henry Harteveldt, "but the airlines have done a lot to improve their ability to operate well this summer."



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Airlines hope that limiting the number of flights will improve reliability and reduce delays. So far, it seems to be working. About one in every 70 U.S. flights have been canceled this year — half the rate of a year ago and lower than in 2019.

Limiting the number of flights also keeps prices above pre-pandemic levels.

A provider of travel data, Hopper, predicts that average domestic airfares will peak next month at \$328 for a round-trip ticket, which is down from last summer's record of \$400 but 4% higher than in 2019.

There are some last-minute deals on domestic flights, Hopper found, but international fares are their highest in more than five years, with prices to Europe up 50% from a year ago.

The same thing is happening within Europe, as airlines hold the line on capacity at a time of strong travel demand.

"There is no expectation of seeing cheaper fares in Europe in the next seven or eight months," says John Grant, an analyst for OAG, a U.K.-based travel-data provider.

For the travel industry, the big question is how long consumers can keep paying for airline tickets and accommodations while they try to deal with stubborn high inflation, news about layoffs and bank failures, and fear of a recession.

Industry executives say consumers are favoring the experience of travel over other types of spending, but some analysts see cracks in the strong demand for travel that began in early 2022.

Bank of America analysts say data from their credit and debit card customers showed a slowdown in spending in April, as card use fell below year-before levels for the first time since February 2021. They say spending on hotels, which rebounded relatively early from the pandemic, dipped this spring, while the late-recovering cruise industry is still steaming ahead — card spending on cruises rose 37% last month, although from very low levels a year ago.

"Travel remains a bright spot relative to other sectors, but we're also seeing signs of moderation in the travel space," said Anna Zhou, an economist for the bank.

## Damage to Russian-occupied dam submerges Ukrainian reservoir island community

By LORI HINNANT and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

LYSOHIRKA, Ukraine (AP) — The rising waters came as a relief at first, for both the tiny community living on the islands in the southern Kakhovka Reservoir and for everyone who had feared the low levels risked a meltdown at the nearby Russian-occupied nuclear power plant.

Since mid-February, the water level in the reservoir has steadily increased, according to data from Theia, a French geospatial analytical organization. An Associated Press analysis of satellite imagery showed the water has now risen so high that it's washing over the top of the damaged Russian-occupied dam downstream.

The waves first covered the natural shoreline, then submerged the marsh grasses. Next they came for Lyudmila Kulachok's garden, then Ihor Medyunov's guest room. The wild boars fled for higher ground, replaced by water fowl. Medyunov's four dogs have an ever-smaller patch of grass to roam, and Kulachok serves meals on a picnic table sloshing through the murk in waders.

Ukraine controls five of the six dams along the Dnipro River, which runs from its northern border with Belarus down to the Black Sea and is crucial for the entire country's drinking water and power supply. The last dam — the one furthest downstream in the Kherson region — is controlled by Russian forces.

All of Ukraine's snowmelt and the runoff from rainy spring days winds up here, in the Kakhovka Reservoir, said David Helms, a retired meteorologist who has been monitoring the reservoir levels during the war. Russian forces detonated the sluice gates of the Nova Kakhovka Dam last November during the Ukrainian counteroffensive, although they ended up keeping control of that sliver of the Kherson region.

Now, either deliberately or through neglect, the gates remain closed.

River dams work as systems. The idea is to manage the flow to provide constant water levels that secure both ships on the water and buildings on land, Helms said. This is done mechanically with a combination of locks, turbines and sluice gates — and constant communication among the operators of the individual

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dams.

Because the sluice gates are closed, the water is cresting over the top of the dam but nowhere near as fast as the waters are flowing down the Dnipro. So there is little relief in sight for the handful of people left on the islands. The little community was primarily made up of second homes, but became more permanent with the start of the war, when people sought safety in its isolation.

Their contact with the outside world is now limited to a few food deliveries every week by Ukrainian police boat, because the reservoir is off-limits to any non-official watercraft to protect against sabotage of the basin that supplies about 40% of Ukraine's drinking water.

They listen to the sound of artillery and rocket fire. They joke darkly about needing a mask and snorkel to take cover in the basement.

"Here were onion, garlic, greens. There were peaches, apricots. Everything is dead," said Kulachok, standing knee-deep in water in her vegetable garden. "At first, I cried. But now I understand that my tears don't help."

Fish is about the only thing that is plentiful on the island right now. She caught two swimming in the kitchen as she prepared the traditional borscht soup with chicken parts delivered by police earlier in the week.

"This is a war. Many people lose things in their lives. And then I thank God that all my loved ones are alive," she said. She said her son is a soldier in the eastern town of Bakhmut, the epicenter of the battle against Russia. "He hasn't seen this and I don't know how to show it to him. He will say, 'God, how many years did we work just to end up with this?'"

By early February, the water levels were so low that many across Ukraine and beyond feared a meltdown at the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, whose cooling systems are supplied with water from the reservoir. The spring rains came early and hard, and then combined with the snowmelt.

"The Russians simply aren't actively managing and balancing the water flow," Helms said. He compared it to a bucket with a small hole that is now being filled by a firehose. Eventually the water splashes out over the top "almost like the emergency circuit breaker has been hit."

Satellite images from May 15 showed water washing over the damaged sluice gates, exactly as Helms described.

All of this is invisible and yet obvious to Ihor Medyunov, whose yard is now a small patch of swampy grass. Even the neighbors who came to the island to escape the war have decided the prospect of missiles is preferable to endless floods.

Helms said the water levels are likely to drop slowly during the summer dry season. But that seems a distant future to Medyunov, whose work as a hunting guide ended with the war.

"Now there is nowhere to go," he said. "We will wait for a better time to rebuild, repair. It's really painful."

Evgeniy Maloletka in Lysohirka, Ukraine, and Michael Biesecker in Washington contributed.

## Elon Musk wants to build a digital town square. But his debut for DeSantis had a tech failure.

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Elon Musk wants to turn Twitter into a "digital town square," but his much-publicized Twitter Spaces kickoff event, with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis announcing his run for president, struggled with technical glitches and a near half-hour delay Tuesday.

The billionaire Twitter owner said the problems were due to "straining" servers because so many people were trying to listen to the audio-only event. But even at their highest, the number of listeners listed topped out at around 420,000, far from the millions of viewers that televised presidential announcements attract.

"There's so many people," said host David Sacks amid the disruptions. "We've got so many people here that we are kind of melting the servers, which is a good sign."

After it concluded without further disruptions, Musk, DeSantis and Sacks played off the event as a suc-



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cess, with Sacks quipping "it's not how you start, it's how you finish — and we finished really strong."

Musk a day earlier dubbed the event a historic first for Twitter, saying it would be "the first time something like this is happening on social media." The webcast was scheduled to start at 6 p.m. ET but nearly 30 minutes passed with users getting kicked off, hearing microphone feedback and enduring other technical problems before it finally began. The audience remained under 500,000.

DeSantis opponents had a field day with the delayed announcement.

"Glitchy. Tech issues. Uncomfortable silences. A complete failure to launch. And that's just the candidate!" said Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for former President and current candidate Donald Trump.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democrat from New York, tweeted, "We had more people join when I played Among Us," referencing the popular video game.

Twitter has suffered a host of technical issues since Musk took over and fired or laid off roughly 80% of its staff — including engineers tasked with keeping the site running. A day before the DeSantis event, speaking at The Wall Street Journal's CEO Council Summit in London, Musk expressed confidence about Twitter's future and said he is "going to start adding people to the company" but gave no further details.

Musk bought Twitter last fall for \$44 billion. Since then, he has upended the platform's verification system, loosened its content moderation policies in line with his views as a "free speech absolutist," spread misinformation and engaged with far-right figures, all the while working to attract jittery advertisers back to the platform to turn it profitable. His grand vision, he has said repeatedly, is to eventually turn Twitter into an "everything app" for everyone — a digital town square where people can hear from world leaders and politicians without the need for traditional media as a go-between.

But he seems to mainly be courting conservatives and Republicans lately, referring to Democrats and liberals as infected by the "woke mind virus" and reinstating extremist accounts that were banned by Twitter's previous administration.

Wednesday's campaign launch event with DeSantis continued the trend — though it remains to be seen whether the platform can become a go-to destination for mainstream politicians when it continues to show evidence of instability. For instance, the word "DeSaster" was trending on Twitter Wednesday evening as users mocked the botched campaign launch.

In the world of traditional media and politics, a glitchy half-hour delay and an audience in the hundreds of thousands rather than millions, Wednesday's Twitter Spaces event might look like a failure. But in Silicon Valley, failure is often spun as positive, even essential in developing new products and improving existing ones. Twitter Spaces — which Twitter launched in 2020 to compete with the then-popular audio chat site Clubhouse — is generally not used for audiences in the hundreds of thousands, so in some ways it was not a surprise that the event was marred with technical problems.

"It's much worse for DeSantis than it is for Musk," said Jo-Ellen Pozner, a business professor at Santa Clara University, noting that just a month ago Musk's SpaceX launched a rocket that exploded minutes after its launch from Texas. After the explosion, Musk called it "an exciting test launch of Starship! Learned a lot for next test launch in a few months" in a tweet.

"It is clearly a difficult situation for DeSantis, who wants to project competence, who wants to forestall criticism," she said. "Musk has an easier out by just saying that 'this was the first time we tried it, it didn't work out perfectly, but next time we'll do much better,' in the classic Silicon Valley approach to failing fast and learning more."

Pozner said it remains an "open question" how Twitter is going to be valued as a broad digital platform down the line.

"I think will depend on, you know, how he and the top management react to this and how they spin it," she said.

After DeSantis logged off, Musk and Sacks extended an open invitation to any other presidential candidate who wants to do a Twitter Spaces event. Whether or not they get any takers could signal what the future holds for Twitter as a "public square."

## Trump and DeSantis' rivalry intensifies as Florida governor formally enters 2024 presidential race

By JILL COLVIN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ron DeSantis' entry into the 2024 White House race against former President Donald Trump sets up a clash of the Republican Party's two leading figures as the Florida governor attempts to topple a man who has dominated the GOP for the last seven years.

Trump, who has established himself as the clear front-runner for the Republican nomination, has spent the months since he launched his own campaign working to hobble the once-ascendant DeSantis, whom he and his team have long viewed as his most serious challenger. DeSantis so far has tried to remain above the fray, ignoring Trump's escalating attacks on everything from his record to his personality.

"The campaign is about to get a lot more intense. He can't just lay low in Tallahassee signing bills," said GOP strategist Alex Conant of DeSantis' strategy. "Now he has to hit the campaign trail, take media questions and punch back at his opponents."

But DeSantis, during a series of events Wednesday night launching his campaign, took only veiled swipes at his chief rival without mentioning him by name. It is a strategy reminiscent of 2016, when Trump's army of Republican rivals failed to go after the candidate directly for fear of alienating his supporters and assumed — wrongly — that he would flame out on his own.

"There is no substitute for victory. We must end the culture of losing that has infected the Republican Party in recent years," DeSantis said on a Twitter Spaces debut that was plagued by technical difficulties. "We must look forward, not backwards," he added.

In an interview later with Fox News, he said he believed all candidates should participate in the planned GOP primary debates, which Trump has threatened to boycott. "Nobody's entitled to anything in this world," he said.

The rollout made clear that, at least for the time being, DeSantis intends to leave the dirty work of attacking Trump to his allies, who see openings that they plan to exploit, particularly on policy.

Now that he's officially in the race, DeSantis' well-funded super PAC is poised to intensify its attacks against the former president. His team plans to focus on policy differences between the two Republicans, making the case that Trump has "lurched left" on some issues — most notably, abortion.

"We're going to amplify him and his voice, and when necessary, contrast with the former president. But right now that contrast is really one is lurching left and one is fighting," said David Polyansky, senior adviser to the pro-DeSantis super PAC Never Back Down.

DeSantis' team believes Trump is particularly vulnerable with Republican primary voters on abortion. Although the former president appointed the Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*, he has drawn the ire of anti-abortion activists by refusing to say whether he supports a federal ban on the procedure.

While Trump has openly suggested that Republican candidates' hard-line stances led to GOP losses in last fall's midterms, DeSantis has leaned in even further on the issue, signing a six-week abortion ban in Florida — before most women know they are pregnant.

DeSantis and his backers must tread carefully: In order to win the nomination, he will need to assemble a coalition that includes both Trump critics and supporters. DeSantis risks alienating a large swath of the party if he goes after Trump too forcefully.

Acknowledging the challenge, DeSantis' super PAC plans to steer clear of criticism directly related to Trump's many legal entanglements. The Florida governor himself was stung earlier in the spring when he took a swipe at Trump, instead of defending him, following his New York indictment.

Trump, meanwhile, has spent months relentlessly attacking DeSantis, nicknaming him "Ron DeSanctimonious" and subjecting him to a daily onslaught of criticism on his Truth Social app and in ads.

Trump has repeatedly called out the Florida governor's votes to cut Social Security and Medicare when he served in Congress, arguing his record will make him unelectable in a general election. He has tried



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to undermine DeSantis' success as governor of Florida, claiming the state was "doing GREAT long before Ron DeSanctus got there." And he has pointed to the crime rate in some of the state's large cities and criticized DeSantis' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic — the issue that made DeSantis a conservative star.

Beyond policy, Trump has attacked DeSantis' character — accusing him of being "disloyal" after Trump helped DeSantis win his 2018 gubernatorial primary — and saying he "desperately needs a personality transplant and, to the best of my knowledge, they are not medically available yet."

Trump has also veered into deeply personal attacks, suggesting that DeSantis "might face allegations from "a woman, even classmates that are 'underage' (or possibly a man!)"

Trump's allied super PAC, Make America Great Again Inc., has already spent millions on anti-DeSantis ads, and the group has no plans to change its strategy, given the fact that it has been treating DeSantis like a candidate for months already.

"Ron DeSantis' failed campaign launch is just another example that he's not ready for this critical moment," said spokesperson Alex Pfeiffer. "Voters don't yet know Ron DeSantis, but they'll find out he has a record of targeting Social Security, trying to raise taxes, and voting against border wall funding."

So far the effort appears to have paid off. Polls suggest Trump's support has only grown since earlier this year, while the appetite for DeSantis as an alternative has faded.

DeSantis' team largely dismisses Trump's early polling advantage given that the Florida governor only just became an official candidate. DeSantis said Wednesday he was prepared for the onslaught he faces.

"You can call me whatever you want. Just call me a winner," DeSantis said on Fox News. "There will be slings and arrows. I'm a big boy. I can take it."

Republican donor Dan Eberhart, who donated millions to Trump but is now supporting DeSantis, argued that Trump's continued attacks make clear the former president still sees DeSantis as a threat.

"Trump's fixation with DeSantis is proof that the Florida governor is a serious contender," he wrote in an email. "The former president spent more money attacking Gov. DeSantis before he was even a candidate than Trump did helping Republicans last cycle. Trump's biggest fear just came true."

Some voters, meanwhile, continue to have trouble reconciling the feud between two men who were once allies.

Wina Fernandez, who lives in Miami, said she'd prefer DeSantis and Trump run together on the same ticket, with DeSantis serving four years as vice president and then running for president in 2028.

"I would just love them as president and vice president. That would be an amazing thing. I would go out to the street and dance," she said.

But if she had to choose, she said, she would choose Trump.

"There's a lot of drama involving Trump. However, he started this movement. He started it all," she said. "DeSantis is young, and he still has time to work on things."

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Associated Press writers Jonathan J. Cooper in Phoenix and Adriana Gomez Licon in Miami contributed to this report.

## **Companies are finding it's not so simple to leave Russia. Others are quietly staying put**

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

When Russia invaded Ukraine, global companies were quick to respond, some announcing they would get out of Russia immediately, others curtailing imports or new investment. Billions of dollars' worth of factories, energy holdings and power plants were written off or put up for sale, accompanied by fierce condemnation of the war and expressions of solidarity with Ukraine.

More than a year later, it's clear: Leaving Russia was not as simple as the first announcements might have made it seem.

Increasingly, Russia has put hurdles in the way of companies that want out, requiring approval by a government commission and in some cases from President Vladimir Putin himself, while imposing painful

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discounts and taxes on sale prices.

Though companies' stories vary, a common theme is having to thread an obstacle course between Western sanctions and outraged public opinion on one side and Russia's efforts to discourage and penalize departures on the other. Some international brands such as Coke and Apple are trickling in informally through third countries despite a decision to exit.

Many companies are simply staying put, sometimes citing responsibility to shareholders or employees or legal obligations to local franchisees or partners. Others argue that they're providing essentials like food, farm supplies or medicine. Some say nothing.

One is Italian fashion chain Benetton, whose store at Moscow's now ironically named Evropeisky Mall — meaning "European" in Russian — was busy on a recent weekday evening, with customers browsing and workers tidying piles of brightly colored clothing. At Italian lingerie retailer Calzedonia, shoppers looked through socks and swimwear. Neither company responded to emailed questions.

For consumers in Moscow, what they can buy hasn't changed much. While baby products store Mothercare became Mother Bear under new local ownership, most of the items in the Evropeisky Mall shop still bear the Mothercare brand.

That's also what student Alik Petrosyan saw as he shopped at Maag, which now owns Zara's former flagship clothing store in Moscow.

"The quality hasn't changed at all, everything has stayed the same," he said. "The prices haven't changed much, taking into account the inflation and the economic scenarios that happened last year."

"Overall Zara — Maag — had competitors," Petrosyan said, correcting himself, "but I wouldn't say that there are any now with whom they could compete equally. Because the competitors who stayed are in a higher price segment, but the quality doesn't match up."

The initial exodus from Russia was led by big automakers, oil, tech and professional services companies, with BP, Shell, ExxonMobil and Equinor ending joint ventures or writing off stakes worth billions. McDonald's sold its 850 restaurants to a local franchisee, while France's Renault took a symbolic single ruble for its majority stake in Avtovaz, Russia's largest carmaker.

Since the initial wave of departures, new categories have emerged: companies that are biding their time, those struggling to shed assets and others attempting business as usual. Over 1,000 international companies have publicly said they are voluntary curtailing Russian business beyond what's required by sanctions, according to a database by Yale University.

But the Kremlin keeps adding requirements, recently a "voluntary" 10% departure tax directly to the government, plus an understanding that companies would sell at a 50% discount.

Putin recently announced that the government would take over the assets of Finnish energy company Fortum and Germany's Uniper utility, barring a sale with an eye to offsetting any Western moves to seize more Russian assets abroad.

Danish brewer Carlsberg announced its intention to divest its Russia business — one of Russia's largest brewing operations — in March 2022 but faced complications clarifying the impact of sanctions and finding suitable buyers.

"This is a complex process, and it has taken longer than we originally hoped for" but now is "almost completed," said Tanja Frederiksen, global head of external communications.

She called the Russia business a deeply integrated part of Carlsberg. Separating it has involved all parts of the company and more than 100 million Danish kroner (\$14.8 million) in investment in new brewing equipment and IT infrastructure, Frederiksen said.

Another beer giant, Anheuser-Busch InBev, is trying to sell a stake in a Russian joint venture to Turkey-based partner Anadolu Efes and has forgone revenue from it.

Companies are lost in "a Bermuda Triangle between EU sanctions, U.S. sanctions and Russia sanctions," said Michael Harms, executive director of the German Eastern Business Association.

They must find a partner not sanctioned by the West. In Russia, major business figures are often people who are "well connected with the government," Harms said. "For one thing, they have to sell at a large

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described the runoff as a referendum on the direction of the strategically located NATO country, which is at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and has a key say over the alliance's expansion.

"This is an existential struggle. Turkey will either be dragged into darkness or light," Kilicdaroglu said. "This is more than an election. It has turned into a referendum."

In a bid to sway nationalist voters ahead of Sunday's runoff, the normally soft-mannered Kilicdaroglu (pronounced KEH-lich-DAHR-OH-loo) shifted gear and hardened his stance, vowing to send back millions of refugees if he is elected and rejecting any possibility of peace negotiations with Kurdish militants.

The social democrat had previously said he planned to repatriate Syrians within two years, after establishing economic and safety conditions conducive to their return.

He has also repeatedly called on 8 million people who stayed away from the polls in the first round to cast votes in the make-or-break runoff.

Erdogan scored 49.5% of the vote in the first round. Kilicdaroglu received 44.9%.

At 69, Erdogan is already Turkey's longest-serving leader, having ruled over the country as prime minister since 2003 and as president since 2014. He could remain in power until 2028 if reelected.

Under Erdogan, Turkey has proven to be an indispensable and sometimes troublesome NATO ally.

It vetoed Sweden's bid to join the alliance and purchased Russian missile-defense systems, which prompted the United States to oust Turkey from a U.S.-led fighter-jet project. Yet together with the U.N., Turkey also brokered a vital deal that allowed Ukraine to ship grain through the Black Sea to parts of the world struggling with hunger.

This week, Erdogan received the endorsement of the nationalist third-place candidate, Sinan Ogan, who garnered 5.2% of the vote. The move was seen as a boost for Erdogan even though Ogan's supporters are not a monolithic bloc and not all of his votes are expected to go to Erdogan.

Erdogan's nationalist-Islamist alliance also retained its hold on parliament in legislative elections two weeks ago, further increasing his chances for reelection as many voters are likely to want to avoid a split government.

On Wednesday, the leader of a hard-line anti-migrant party that had backed Ogan threw its weight behind Kilicdaroglu after the two signed a protocol pledging to send back millions of migrants and refugees within the year.

Kilicdaroglu's chances of turning the vote around in his favor appear to be slim but could hinge on the opposition's ability to mobilize voters who did not cast ballots in the first round.

"It's not possible to say that the odds are favoring him, but nevertheless, technically, he stands a chance," said professor Serhat Guvenc of Istanbul's Kadir Has University.

If the opposition can reach the voters who previously stayed home, "it may be a different story."

In Istanbul, 45-year-old Serra Ural accused Erdogan of mishandling the economy and said she would vote for Kilicdaroglu.

She also expressed concerns over the rights of women after Erdogan extended his alliance to include Huda-Par, a hard-line Kurdish Islamist political party with alleged links to a group that was responsible for a series of gruesome killings in the 1990s. The party wants to abolish mixed-gender education, advocates for the criminalization of adultery and says women should prioritize their homes over work.

"We don't know what will happen to women tomorrow or the next day, what condition they'll be in," she said. "To be honest Huda-Par scares us, especially women."

Mehmet Nergis, 29, said he would vote for Erdogan for stability.

Erdogan "is the guarantee for a more stable future," Nergis said. "Everyone around the world has already seen how far he has brought Turkey."

He dismissed the country's economic woes and expressed confidence that Erdogan would make improvements.

Erdogan's campaign has focused on rebuilding areas that were devastated by the earthquake, which leveled cities and left more 50,000 dead in Turkey. He has promised to build 319,000 homes within the year.

In the parliamentary election, Erdogan's alliance won 10 out of 11 provinces in the region affected by the



quake despite criticism that his government's initial disaster response was slow.

"Yes, there was a delay, but the roads were blocked," said Yasar Sunulu, an Erdogan supporter in Kahramanmaraş, the quake's epicenter. "We cannot complain about the state ... It gave us food, bread and whatever else needed."

He and his family members are staying in a tent after their house was destroyed.

Nursel Karci, a mother of four living in the same camp, said she too would vote for Erdogan.

Erdogan "did all that I couldn't," she said. "He clothed my children where I couldn't clothe them. He fed them where I couldn't ... Not a penny left my pocket."

Erdogan has repeatedly portrayed Kilicdaroglu as colluding with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, after the opposition party leader received the backing of the country's pro-Kurdish party.

During a rally in Istanbul, Erdogan broadcast a faked video purporting to show a PKK commander singing the opposition's campaign song to hundreds of thousands of his supporters. On Monday, Erdogan doubled down on the narrative, insisting that the PKK has thrown its support to Kilicdaroglu whether the video is "faked or not."

"Most analysts failed to gauge the impact of Erdogan's campaign against Kilicdaroglu," Guvenc said. "This obviously did strike a chord with the average nationalist-religious electorate in Turkey."

"Politics today is about building and sustaining a narrative which shadows the reality," he added. "Erdogan and his people are very successful in building narratives that eclipse realities."

## **What about those who can't flee fighting in Sudan? Many face danger and despair**

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Mahmoud almost never leaves his small apartment in east Khartoum. Electricity has been out for most of the past month, so he swelters in the summer heat. When he does venture out to find food, he leaves his mobile phone behind because of looters in the street. Otherwise, he hunkers down in fear, worried that an artillery shell could burst into his home.

Exhausted, confused and unable to escape the conflict-ravaged Sudanese capital, the young research technician tries blocking out the reality of his surroundings.

"I am reading my book collection for a second time," he said. One work helping him get by: "Models of the Mind," a 2021 neuroscience book about how mathematics help explain the workings of the brain.

Since the conflict broke out last month, more than 1.3 million people have fled their homes to escape Sudan's fighting, going elsewhere in the country or across the borders. But Mahmoud and millions of others remain trapped in Khartoum and its sister cities of Bahri and Omdurman, unable to leave the central battleground between Sudan's military and the Rapid Support Forces paramilitary.

For them, every day is a struggle to find food, get water and charge their phones when electricity is cut off. All the while, they must avoid the fighters and criminals in the streets who rob and brutalize pedestrians, loot shops and storm into homes to steal whatever of value they can find.

Dollars have become hard to find and dangerous to hold, a target for looters. Amazingly, Bankak, the banking app of the Bank of Khartoum, continues to function most of the time. It has become a lifeline for many, allowing users to transfer money and make payments electronically.

Mahmoud uses the app to pay the one shop owner he visits to stock up on canned goods. During weeks when electricity was out, the shop owner still gave him what he needed and let him pay later. A technology company that Mahmoud worked for before the fighting puts 30,000 Sudanese pounds — around \$50 — on his app account every few weeks.

That transfer allows him to keep eating. "If I have money in my bank account and Bankak is operating, everything will be good," he said. Like others who spoke to The Associated Press, Mahmoud asked to be identified only by his first name for fear of reprisals.

Since April 15, the Sudanese army, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah Burhan, and the RSF, commanded by Gen. Mohamed Hamden Dagalo, have been locked in a violent power struggle that has turned the once sleepy

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Khartoum into an urban battlefield. More than 800 civilians have been killed, according to the Sudan Doctor's Union.

On Monday a week-long cease-fire began, the conflict's seventh, with fighting easing across parts of the city. But gunbattles and bombardments still continue despite the pledge made by both forces in Saudi Arabia. Residential areas and hospitals have been pounded by army airstrikes, while RSF troops have commandeered homes and turned them into bases.

The more immediate danger is often the armed men and looters in the streets. Waleed, another resident of east Khartoum, said he has had several terrifying encounters. In one case, he saw around 30 RSF fighters, some who looked no older than 15, tormenting a passerby, waving their weapons at him and demanding he lie on the ground, then shouting at him to stand up.

"They were playing with him like a puppet," Waleed said.

Many can't afford to leave. Mahmoud wants to get to Ethiopia, then to Portugal where he been offered a position as a research technician. But he doesn't have the \$2,500 he estimates the trip will cost him. Waleed said he can't leave for medical reasons.

Others say they have no choice but to stay and work. One of the many women who sell tea in the streets of Khartoum, Tana Tusafi, a single mother from Ethiopia, says her four children depend on her. "I have no one to provide for me, so I have to work," she said.

The dangers are unpredictable. Mahmoud said that last week RSF fighters in a neighboring building started shooting at his apartment block, believing an army sniper could be there after seeing lights inside. Mahmoud said he had to confront the troops and convince them his block was only filled with civilians.

Another resident, Fatima, said her brother disappeared after having coffee with friends on May 13. That first evening when he didn't come home, "I thought he might have stayed over at his friend's house," Fatima said.

On Monday, Khalid finally returned. For eight days, he had been detained and interrogated by the RSF, Fatima said.

The Missing Person Initiative, an online tracker where people can report missing loved ones, said it has reports of at least 200 people unaccounted for in the capital region. It said it has received multiple reports of individuals being detained by the paramilitary.

Darker still is the growing number of rape and sexual assault allegations. According to Hadrhreen, a community-led health and crisis group, there have been at least 10 confirmed rape cases in the capital area. Seven were committed by RSF soldiers, it said, while the three others were by unknown attackers within RSF-held areas.

The reports of sexual violence harken back to the Darfur conflict of the early 2000s, during which the Janjaweed militia was accused of widespread rapes and other atrocities. Many of its fighters were later folded into the RSF. They were again accused of raping dozens of women when they broke up a pro-democracy protest camp in Khartoum in 2019.

In this landscape of fear, those who remain in the city find ways to get by. Some store owners operate out of their homes, hoping to hide from the looters.

Waleed said only one remaining bakery serves his neighborhood and two others. Each customer registers their name beforehand

"If you were lucky and registered your name at 7 o'clock in the morning you might get your bread at 12 noon," Waleed said. He too survives because of Bankak, on money that his family in Saudi Arabia puts into his account.

During the first weeks of May, there was no electricity in his neighborhood, so Waleed relied on a nearby mosque with a generator to charge his phone. But no electricity meant no running water.

"We roamed around with buckets to trying to find people who have electric generators who can activate their water pumps," he said. Last week, the electric company restored power in his area.

Most of the city's hospitals have also shut down, many of them damaged in bombardments or ground fighting. Since May 11 alone, there have been 11 attacks on humanitarian facilities in the capital, the

World Health Organization reported. Community action groups, led in part by a grassroots pro-democracy network known as the Resistance Committees, have banded together to help treat Khartoum's sick and deliver medicines.

Hadeel Abdelsayed, a trainee doctor at one community clinic, said patients have died because they did not have enough oxygen. The clinic was eventually evacuated due to intense shelling.

Mahmoud, the researcher, said that if he can somehow secure the funding, he will try to make his escape to Ethiopia. But time is against him.

"My passport will expire in 10 weeks, so I will have to leave before then."

## Indiana doctor faces discipline hearing over 10-year-old Ohio girl's abortion

By TOM DAVIES Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — An Indiana board is set to hear allegations Thursday that an Indianapolis doctor should face disciplinary action after she spoke publicly about providing an abortion to a 10-year-old rape victim from neighboring Ohio.

The Medical Licensing Board's hearing comes after Indiana's Republican attorney general accused Dr. Caitlin Bernard of violating state law by not reporting the girl's child abuse to Indiana authorities. She's also accused of breaking federal patient privacy laws by telling a newspaper reporter about the girl's treatment.

Bernard and her attorneys maintain that the doctor followed Indiana's child abuse reporting requirements as the girl's rape was already being investigated by Ohio authorities. Bernard's lawyers also say she didn't release any identifying information about the girl that would break privacy laws.

The Indianapolis Star cited the girl's case in a July 1 article that sparked a national political uproar in the weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last June, putting into effect an Ohio law that prohibited abortions after six weeks of pregnancy. Some news outlets and Republican politicians falsely suggested Bernard fabricated the story, until a 27-year-old man was charged with the rape in Columbus, Ohio.

Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita's complaint asked the licensing board to impose "appropriate disciplinary action" but doesn't specify a requested penalty.

The Indiana board — made up of six doctors and one attorney appointed by Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb — could vote whether to impose any penalties Thursday after hearing what is expected to be several hours of testimony. State law gives the board wide latitude, allowing it to issue reprimand letters or suspend, revoke or place on probation a doctor's license.

Amid the wave of attention to the girl's case last summer, Rokita, who is stridently anti-abortion, told Fox News he would investigate Bernard's actions, calling her an "abortion activist acting as a doctor."

"This case is about two things — and two things only — patient privacy and this doctor's failure to protect this child," he said in a statement this week.

Ohio's law imposing a near-ban on abortion was in effect for about two months before being put on hold as a lawsuit against it plays out.

Bernard unsuccessfully tried to block Rokita's investigation last fall, although an Indianapolis judge wrote that Rokita made "clearly unlawful breaches" of state confidentiality laws with his public comments about investigating the doctor before filing the medical licensing complaint against her.

Bernard lawyer Kathleen DeLaney has called the complaint against the doctor "baseless attacks" done at taxpayer expense.

"Rokita's actions set a dangerous precedent imperiling the provision of lawful patient care," DeLaney has said.



## Tina Turner, 'Queen of Rock 'n' Roll' whose triumphant career made her world-famous, dies at 83

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tina Turner, the unstoppable singer and stage performer who teamed with husband Ike Turner for a dynamic run of hit records and live shows in the 1960s and '70s and survived her horrifying marriage to triumph in middle age with the chart-topping "What's Love Got to Do With It," has died at 83.

Turner died Wednesday, after a long illness in her home in Küsnacht near Zurich, according to her manager. She became a Swiss citizen a decade ago.

Few stars traveled so far — she was born Anna Mae Bullock in a segregated Tennessee hospital and spent her latter years on a 260,000 square foot estate on Lake Zurich — and overcame so much. Physically battered, emotionally devastated and financially ruined by her 20-year relationship with Ike Turner, she became a superstar on her own in her 40s, at a time when most of her peers were on their way down, and remained a top concert draw for years after.

"How do we say farewell to a woman who owned her pain and trauma and used it as a means to help change the world?" Angela Bassett, who played Turner in the 1993 biopic "What's Love Got to Do With It," said in a statement.

"Through her courage in telling her story, her commitment to stay the course in her life, no matter the sacrifice, and her determination to carve out a space in rock and roll for herself and for others who look like her, Tina Turner showed others who lived in fear what a beautiful future filled with love, compassion, and freedom should look like.

With admirers ranging from Mick Jagger to Beyoncé to Mariah Carey, the "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll" was one of the world's most popular entertainers, known for a core of pop, rock and rhythm and blues favorites: "Proud Mary," "Nutbush City Limits," "River Deep, Mountain High," and the hits she had in the '80s, among them "What's Love Got to Do with It," "We Don't Need Another Hero" and a cover of Al Green's "Let's Stay Together."

Her trademarks included a growling contralto that might smolder or explode, her bold smile and strong cheekbones, her palette of wigs and the muscular, quick-stepping legs she did not shy from showing off. She sold more than 150 million records worldwide, won 12 Grammys, was voted along with Ike into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1991 (and on her own in 2021 ) and was honored at the Kennedy Center in 2005, with Beyoncé and Oprah Winfrey among those praising her. Her life became the basis for a film, a Broadway musical and an HBO documentary in 2021 that she called her public farewell.

Until she left her husband and revealed their back story, she was known as the voracious on-stage foil of the steady-going Ike, the leading lady of the "Ike and Tina Turner Revue." Ike was billed first and ran the show, choosing the material, the arrangements, the backing singers. They toured constantly for years, in part because Ike was often short on money and unwilling to miss a concert. Tina Turner was forced to go on with bronchitis, with pneumonia, with a collapsed right lung.

Other times, the cause of her misfortunes was Ike himself.

As she recounted in her memoir, "I, Tina," Ike began hitting her not long after they met, in the mid-1950s, and only grew more vicious. Provoked by anything and anyone, he would throw hot coffee in her face, choke her, or beat her until her eyes were swollen shut, then rape her. Before one show, he broke her jaw and she went on stage with her mouth full of blood.

Terrified both of being with Ike and of lasting without him, she credited her emerging Buddhist faith in the mid-1970s with giving her a sense of strength and self-worth and she finally left in early July 1976. The Ike and Tina Turner Revue was scheduled to open a tour marking the country's bicentennial when Tina snuck out of their Dallas hotel room, with just a Mobil credit card and 36 cents, while Ike slept. She hurried across a nearby highway, narrowly avoiding a speeding truck, and found another hotel.

"I looked at him (Ike) and thought, 'You just beat me for the last time, you sucker,'" she recalled in her memoir.

Turner was among the first celebrities to speak candidly about domestic abuse, becoming a heroine to

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discount or almost give assets away, and then they go to people whom politically we don't like — people who are close to the regime."

The 10% exit tax mandated by Russia is particularly tricky. American companies would have to get permission from the Treasury Department to pay it or run afoul of U.S. sanctions, said Maria Shagina, a sanctions expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Berlin.

Hundreds of companies quietly decided not to leave.

In a rare, frank explanation, Steffen Greubel, CEO of German cash and carry firm Metro AG, said at this year's shareholder meeting that the company condemns the war "without any ifs, ands or buts."

However, the decision to stay was motivated by a responsibility for 10,000 local employees and is "also in the interest of preserving the value of this company for its shareholders," he said.

Metro gets around 10% of its annual sales from Russia — more than 2.9 billion euros (\$3.1 billion).

Meanwhile, shelves are just as full as before the war at Globus superstores, a Germany-based chain with some 20 locations operating in Moscow.

A closer look reveals that most Western beer brands have vanished, and many cosmetic brands have jumped in price by some 50% to 70%. There are more vegetables from Russia and Belarus, which cost less. Procter & Gamble products are still abundant — despite the company's withdrawal from Russia.

Globus says it has "drastically" cut new investment but kept its stores open to ensure food supply for people, noting that food has not been sanctioned and citing "the threat of confiscation of considerable asset value through a forced nationalization as well as severe consequences in criminal law for our local management."

Similarly, Germany's Bayer AG, which supplies medicine, agricultural chemicals and seeds, argues that doing some business in Russia is the right move.

"Withholding essential healthcare and agriculture products from the civilian populations — like cancer or cardiovascular treatments, health products for pregnant women and children as well as seeds to grow food — would only multiply the war's ongoing toll on human life," the company said in a statement.

Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, head of the Yale database, said leaving was the only valid business decision, citing research showing company share prices rising afterward.

"The companies that have pulled out have been rewarded for pulling out," he said. "It is not good for shareholders to be associated with Putin's war machine."

Marianna Fotaki, professor of business ethics at Warwick Business School, says business is "not just about the bottom line. ... You don't want to be an accomplice to what is a criminal regime."

Even if competitors stay, she said, "following the race to the bottom" is not the answer.

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This story has been corrected to show that the name of the head of the Yale database was misspelled. He's Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, not Jeffrey Sonnenberger.

## Turkish voters weigh final decision on next president, visions for future

By SUZAN FRASER and AYSE WIETING Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Two opposing visions for Turkey's future are on the ballot when voters return to the polls Sunday for a runoff presidential election that will decide between an increasingly authoritarian incumbent and a challenger who has pledged to restore democracy.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a populist and polarizing leader who has ruled Turkey for 20 years, is well positioned to win after falling just short of victory in the first round of balloting on May 14. He was the top finisher even as the country reels from sky-high inflation and the effects of a devastating earthquake in February.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of Turkey's pro-secular main opposition party and a six-party alliance, has campaigned on a promise to undo Erdogan's authoritarian tilt. The 74-year-old former bureaucrat has

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battered women and a symbol of resilience to all. Ike Turner did not deny mistreating her, although he tried to blame Tina for their troubles. When he died, in 2007, a representative for his ex-wife said simply: "Tina is aware that Ike passed away."

Ike and Tina fans knew little of this during the couple's prime. The Turners were a hot act for much of the 1960s and into the '70s, evolving from bluesy ballads such as "A Fool in Love" and "It's Going to Work Out Fine" to flashy covers of "Proud Mary" and "Come Together" and other rock songs that brought them crossover success.

They opened for the Rolling Stones in 1966 and 1969, and were seen performing a lustful version of Otis Redding's "I've Been Loving You Too Long" in the 1970 Stones documentary "Gimme Shelter." Bassett and Laurence Fishburne gave Oscar-nominated performances in "What's Love Got to Do with It," based on "I, Tina," but she would say that reliving her years with Ike was so painful she couldn't bring herself to watch the movie.

Ike and Tina's reworking of "Proud Mary," originally a tight, mid-tempo hit for Creedence Clearwater Revival, helped define their sexual aura. Against a background of funky guitar and Ike's crooning baritone, Tina began with a few spoken words about how some people wanted to hear songs that were "nice and easy."

"But there's this one thing," she warned, "you see, we never ever do nothing nice and easy.

"We always do it nice — and rough."

But by the end of the 1970s, Turner's career seemed finished. She was 40 years old, her first solo album had flopped and her live shows were mostly confined to the cabaret circuit. Desperate for work, and money, she even agreed to tour in South Africa when the country was widely boycotted because of its racist apartheid regime.

Rock stars helped bring her back. Rod Stewart convinced her to sing "Hot Legs" with him on "Saturday Night Live" and Jagger, who had openly borrowed some of Turner's on-stage moves, sang "Honky Tonk Women" with her during the Stones' 1981-82 tour. At a listening party for his 1983 album "Let's Dance," David Bowie told guests that Turner was his favorite singer.

"She was inspiring, warm, funny and generous," Jagger tweeted Wednesday. "She helped me so much when I was young and I will never forget her."

More popular in England at the time than in the U.S., she recorded a raspy version of "Let's Stay Together" at EMI's Abbey Road studios in London. By the end of 1983, "Let's Stay Together" was a hit throughout Europe and on the verge of breaking in the states. An A&R man at Capitol Records, John Carter, urged the label to sign her up and make an album. Among the material presented was a reflective pop-reggae ballad co-written by Terry Britten and Graham Lyle and initially dismissed by Tina as "wimpy."

"I just thought it was some old pop song, and I didn't like it," she later said of "What's Love Got To Do With It."

Turner's "Private Dancer" album came out in May 1984, sold more than eight million copies and featured several hit singles, including the title song and "Better Be Good To Me." It won four Grammys, among them record of the year for "What's Love Got to Do With It," the song that came to define the clear-eyed image of her post-Ike years.

"People look at me now and think what a hot life I must have lived — ha!" she wrote in her memoir.

Even with Ike, it was hard to mistake her for a romantic. Her voice was never "pretty," and love songs were never her specialty, in part because she had little experience to draw from. She was born in Nut-bush, Tennessee in 1939 and would say she received "no love" from either her mother or father. After her parents separated, she moved often around Tennessee and Missouri, living with various relatives. She was outgoing, loved to sing and as a teenager would check out the blues clubs in St. Louis, where one of the top draws was Ike Turner and his Kings of Rhythm. Tina didn't care much for his looks the first time she saw him, at the Club Manhattan.

"Then he got up onstage and picked up his guitar," she wrote in her memoir. "He hit one note, and I thought, 'Jesus, listen to this guy play.'"

Tina soon made her move. During intermission at an Ike Turner show at the nearby Club D'Lisa, Ike



was alone on stage, playing a blues melody on the keyboards. Tina recognized the song, B.B. King's "You Know I Love You," grabbed a microphone and sang along. As Tina remembered, a stunned Ike called out "Giirrrlll!" and demanded to know what else she could perform. Over her mother's objections, she agreed to join his group. He changed her first name to Tina, inspired by the comic book heroine Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, and changed her last name by marrying her, in 1962.

In rare moments of leniency from Ike, Tina did enjoy success on her own. She added a roaring lead vocal to Phil Spector's titanic production of "River Deep, Mountain High," a flop in the U.S. when released in 1966, but a hit overseas and eventually a standard. She was also featured as the Acid Queen in the 1975 film version of the Who's rock opera "Tommy." More recent film work included "Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome" and a cameo in "What's Love Got to Do with It."

Turner had two sons: Craig, with saxophonist Raymond Hill; and Ronald, with Ike Turner. (Craig Turner was found dead in 2018 of an apparent suicide). In a memoir published later in 2018, "Tina Turner: My Love Story," she revealed that she had received a kidney transplant from her second husband, former EMI record executive Erwin Bach.

Turner's life seemed an argument against marriage, but her life with Bach was a love story the younger Tina would not have believed possible. They met in the mid-1980s, when she flew to Germany for record promotion and he picked her up at the airport. He was more than a decade younger than her — "the prettiest face," she said of him in the HBO documentary — and the attraction was mutual. She wed Bach in 2013, exchanging vows at a civil ceremony in Switzerland.

"It's that happiness that people talk about," Turner told the press at the time, "when you wish for nothing, when you can finally take a deep breath and say, 'Everything is good.'"

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This story has been corrected to reflect that Turner died Wednesday.

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Associated Press Writer Hilary Fox contributed to this report.

## State lawmakers want children to fill labor shortages, even in bars and on school nights

By HARM VENHUIZEN Associated Press/Report for America  
MADISON, Wis. (AP) — As the federal government cracks down on child labor violations, some state lawmakers are embracing legislation to let children work longer hours and in more hazardous occupations.

The legislators, mostly Republicans, argue that relaxing child labor laws could ease nationwide labor shortages.

But child welfare advocates worry the measures represent a coordinated push to scale back hard-won protections for minors.

"The consequences are potentially disastrous," said Reid Maki, director of the Child Labor Coalition, which advocates against exploitative labor policies. "You can't balance a perceived labor shortage on the backs of teen workers."

Lawmakers proposed loosening child labor laws in at least 10 states over the past two years, according to a report published last month by the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute. Some bills became law, while others were withdrawn or vetoed.

Legislators in Wisconsin, Ohio and Iowa are actively considering relaxing child labor laws to address worker shortages. Employers have struggled to fill open positions after a spike in retirements, deaths and illnesses from COVID-19, decreases in legal immigration and other factors.

Wisconsin lawmakers back a proposal to allow 14-year-olds to serve alcohol in bars and restaurants. If passed, Wisconsin would have the lowest such limit nationwide, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

The Ohio Legislature is on track to pass a bill allowing students ages 14 and 15 to work until 9 p.m. dur-

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ing the school year with their parents' permission. That's later than federal law allows, so a companion measure asks the U.S. Congress to amend its own laws.

Under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act, students that age can only work until 7 p.m. during the school year. Congress passed the law in 1938 to stop children from being exposed to dangerous conditions and abusive practices in mines, factories, farms and street trades.

Republican Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed a law in March eliminating permits that required employers to verify a child's age and their parent's consent. Without work permit requirements, companies caught violating child labor laws can more easily claim ignorance. Other measures to loosen child labor laws have been passed into law in New Jersey, New Hampshire and Iowa.

Iowa Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a law last year allowing teens aged 16 and 17 to work unsupervised in child care centers. The state Legislature approved a bill this month to allow teens of that age to serve alcohol in restaurants. It would also expand the hours minors can work. Reynolds, who said in April she supports more youth employment, has until June 3 to sign or veto the measure.

Republicans dropped provisions from a version of the bill allowing children aged 14 and 15 to work in dangerous fields including mining, logging and meatpacking. But it kept some provisions that the Labor Department say violate federal law, including allowing children as young as 14 to briefly work in freezers and meat coolers, and extending work hours in industrial laundries and assembly lines.

Teen workers are more likely to accept low pay and less likely to unionize or push for better working conditions, said Maki, of the Child Labor Coalition, a Washington-based advocacy network.

"There are employers that benefit from having kind of docile teen workers," Maki said, adding that teens are easy targets for industries that rely on vulnerable populations such as immigrants and the formerly incarcerated to fill dangerous jobs.

The Department of Labor reported in February that child labor violations had increased by nearly 70% since 2018. The agency is increasing enforcement and asking Congress to allow larger fines against violators.

It fined one of the nation's largest meatpacking sanitation contractors \$1.5 million in February after investigators found the company illegally employed more than 100 children at locations in eight states. The child workers cleaned bone saws and other dangerous equipment in meatpacking plants, often using hazardous chemicals.

National business lobbyists, chambers of commerce and well-funded conservative groups are backing the state bills to increase teen participation in the workforce, including Americans for Prosperity, a conservative political network and the National Federation of Independent Business, which typically aligns with Republicans.

The conservative Opportunity Solutions Project and its parent organization, Florida-based think tank Foundation for Government Accountability, helped lawmakers in Arkansas and Missouri draft bills to roll back child labor protections, The Washington Post reported. The groups, and allied lawmakers, often say their efforts are about expanding parental rights and giving teenagers more work experience.

"There's no reason why anyone should have to get the government's permission to get a job," Republican Arkansas Rep. Rebecca Burkes, who sponsored the bill to eliminate child work permits, said on the House floor. "This is simply about eliminating the bureaucracy that is required and taking away the parent's decision about whether their child can work."

Margaret Wurth, a children's rights researcher with Human Rights Watch, a member of the Child Labor Coalition, described bills like the one passed in Arkansas as "attempts to undermine safe and important workplace protections and to reduce workers' power."

Current laws fail to protect many child workers, Wurth said.

She wants lawmakers to end exceptions for child labor in agriculture. Federal law allows children 12 and older to work on farms for any amount of time outside of school hours, with parental permission. Farm workers over 16 can work at dangerous heights or operate heavy machinery, hazardous tasks reserved for adult workers in other industries.

Twenty-four children died from work injuries in in 2021, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Around half of deadly work incidents happened on farms, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office covering child deaths between 2003 and 2016.

"More children die working in agriculture than in any other sector," Wurth said. "Enforcement isn't going to help much for child farm workers unless the standards improve."

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

## Chirping sounds lead airport officials to bag filled with smuggled parrot eggs

By FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

LOXAHATCHEE, Fla. (AP) — The 24 bright green baby parrots began chirping and bobbing their heads the second anyone neared the large cages that have been their homes since hatching in March.

The Central American natives, seized from a smuggler at Miami International Airport, are being raised by the Rare Species Conservatory Foundation — a round-the-clock effort that includes five hand feedings a day in a room filled with large cages.

At just 9 weeks old, these parrots have already survived a harrowing journey after being snatched from their nests in a forest. They are almost fully feathered now and the staff has started transitioning them from a special formula to a diet of food pellets and fruit.

"You ready to meet the children?" asked Paul Reillo, a Florida International University professor and director of the foundation, as he led visitors Friday into a small building tucked behind a sprawling house in Loxahatchee, a rural community near West Palm Beach.

"They are hand-raised babies," he said, as the chicks squawked and looked inquisitively at the visitors. "They've never seen mom and dad; they've been raised by us since they hatched."

It was the hatchlings' faint chirping inside a carry-on bag at the Miami airport that brought them to the attention of a U.S. Customs and Border Protection officer. The passenger, Szu Ta Wu, had just arrived on TACA Airlines flight 392 from Managua, Nicaragua, on March 23, and was changing flights in Miami to return home to Taiwan, according to a criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court in Miami.

Officers stopped Wu at a checkpoint. He was asked about the sound coming from his bag, which Reillo later described as a "sophisticated" temperature controlled cooler.

Wu reached in and pulled out a smaller bag and showed the officer an egg, the complaint said. The officer then looked inside and saw more eggs and a tiny featherless bird that had just hatched.

He told the officer there were 29 eggs, and that he did not have documentation to transport the birds, according to the complaint.

Wu was arrested, and on May 5 pleaded guilty to charges of smuggling birds into the United States. He faces up to 20 years in prison when he's sentenced Aug. 1.

A lawyer who could speak on his behalf was not listed on court records, but Wu told investigators through a Mandarin interpreter that a friend had paid him to travel from Taiwan to Nicaragua to pick up the eggs. He denied knowing what kind of birds they were.

The officer took the bag and contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. By then, eight of the birds had already hatched or were in the process of hatching.

It didn't take long for federal officials to reach out to Reillo.

"They didn't know what these things were and wanted my advice on it," Reillo said. Baby parrots are featherless, so it's difficult to properly identify them.

He helped set up a makeshift incubator in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's aviary at the airport in a mad dash to save the now-hatching parrots.

The next day, Dr. Stacy McFarlane, a USDA veterinarian who initially tended to the birds and eggs at the airport, and other officials, delivered the baby parrots and remaining eggs to Reillo's conservatory.



"At that point we were off to the races," he said. "We've got all these eggs, the chicks are hatching, the incubator's running and by the time it was all said and done, we hatched 26 of the 29 eggs, and 24 of the 26 chicks survived."

USDA regulations required the birds to be quarantined for 45 days, meaning that Reillo and his team had to scrub down when entering and leaving the room.

But they still weren't sure which of the 360 varieties of parrots they were dealing with.

A forensics team at Florida International extracted DNA samples from the eggshells and the deceased birds to identify the species. They discovered the 24 surviving parrots were from eight or nine clutches and included two species — the yellow naped Amazon and the red-lored Amazon.

Both birds are popular in the trafficking and caged-bird industries because they are pretty and have a nice temperament, Reillo said.

The trafficking pipeline out of Central America is well established and has gone on for years, he said.

"In fact, the biggest threat to parrots globally is a combination of habitat loss and trafficking," Reillo said, adding that about 90% of eggs are poached for illegal parrot trade.

BirdLife International lists the yellow-naped Amazon as "critically endangered" with a population in the wild of between 1,000 and 2,500. The red-lored Amazon is also listed as having a decreasing population.

"The vast majority of these trafficking cases end in tragedy," Reillo said. "The fact that the chicks were hatching the first day of his travel from Managua to Miami tells you that it's extremely unlikely that any of them would have survived had he actually gotten all the way to his destination in Taiwan. That would have been another 24 to 36 hours of travel."

Reillo is now faced with the challenge of finding a permanent home for the birds, which can live 60 to 70 years, or longer. He said he's working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services on a plan "to have the birds fly free and help restore their species in the wild."

"Parrots live a long time. They are sentient creatures. They're highly intelligent, very social, and these guys deserve a chance," he said. "The question will be where will they wind up? What is their journey going to be? It's just beginning."

## **Aging America: Baby boomers push nation's median age higher as fewer children are born**

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The United States grew older, faster, last decade.

The share of residents 65 or older grew by more than a third from 2010 to 2020 and at the fastest rate of any decade in 130 years, while the share of children declined, according to new figures from the most recent census.

The declining percentage of children under age 5 was particularly noteworthy in the figures from the 2020 head count released Thursday. Combined, the trends mean the median age in the U.S. jumped from 37.2 to 38.8 over the decade.

America's two largest age groups propelled the changes: more baby boomers turning 65 or older and millennials who became adults or pushed further into their 20s and early 30s. Also, fewer children were born between 2010 and 2020, according to numbers from the once-a-decade head count of every U.S. resident. The decline stems from women delaying having babies until later in life, in many cases to focus on education and careers, according to experts, who noted that birth rates never recovered following the Great Recession of 2007-2009.

"In the short run, the crisis of work-family balance, the lack of affordable childcare, stresses associated with health care, housing, and employment stability, all put a damper on birth rates by increasing uncertainty and making it harder to decide to have and raise children," said Philip Cohen, a sociologist at the University of Maryland.

There are important social and economic consequences to an aging population, including the ability of working-age adults to support older people through Social Security and Medicare contributions. The Cen-

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sus Bureau calculates a dependency ratio, defined as the number of children plus the number of seniors per 100 working-age people. While the dependency ratio decreased for children from 2010 to 2020, it increased for seniors by 6.8 people.

At the top end of the age spectrum, the number of people over 100 increased by half, from more than 53,000 people to more than 80,000. The share of men living into old age also jumped, benefitting from a century of vaccines and antibiotic developments, improvements in surgery and better treatment of diseases, said Thomas Perls, a professor of medicine at Boston University.

"Many more people who have the genetic makeup and environmental exposures that increase one's chances of getting to 100, but who would have otherwise died of what are now readily reversible problems, are able to fulfill their survival destiny," Perls said.

The Census Bureau released two earlier data sets from the 2020 census in 2021: state population figures used to decide how many congressional seats each state gets and redistricting numbers used to draw political districts. Thursday's data release was delayed by almost two years because of pandemic-related difficulties gathering the information and efforts by the Census Bureau to implement a new, controversial privacy protection method that uses algorithms to add intentional errors to obscure the identity of any given respondent.

This was the first census since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage in 2015, and it showed same-sex households made up 1.7% of coupled households. Since the census didn't ask about sexual orientation, it didn't capture LGBTQ+ people who are single or don't live with a partner or spouse.

The median age varied widely by race and ethnicity. Non-Hispanic whites were the oldest cohort, with a median age of 44.5. Hispanics were the youngest, with a median age of 30; and a quarter of all children in the U.S. were Hispanic. Black Americans who weren't Hispanic, had a median age of 35.5. The number was for 37.2 for Asians.

Utah, home to the largest Mormon population in the U.S., was the youngest state, with a median age of 31.3, a function of having one of the nation's highest birthrates. The District of Columbia's median age of 33.9 was a close second due to the large number of young, working-age adults commonly found in urban areas. North Dakota was the only state where the median age declined, from 37 to 35.8, as an influx of young workers arrived to work in a booming energy sector.

Maine was the oldest state in the U.S., with a median age of 45.1, as more baby boomers aged out of the workforce. Puerto Rico had a median age in the same range, at 45.2, as an exodus of working-age adults left the island after a series of hurricanes and government mismanagement. Older adults in four states — Florida, Maine, Vermont and West Virginia — made up more than a fifth of those states' populations.

Sumter County, Florida, home of the booming retirement community The Villages, had the highest median age among U.S. counties, at 68.5; while Utah County, home to Provo, Utah, and Brigham Young University, had the lowest at 25.9.

As one of the youngest baby boomers, Chris Stanley, 59, already lives in The Villages. She said her mission in later life is to let younger generations know they can affect change despite perhaps not having the same economic opportunities she did.

"I want to impart the urgency that I feel," she said. "They can make it better."

While people 65 and older made up 16.8% of the 331 million residents in the U.S. in 2020, the share was still significantly lower than it was in countries like Japan, Italy and Greece, where the age cohort makes up between more than a fifth and more than a quarter of the population. However, their share of the U.S. population will continue to grow as baby boomers age.

"In the long run, immigration is the only way the United States is going to avoid population decline," Cohen said.

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Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP

## Tkachuk sends Panthers to Stanley Cup Final, after topping Hurricanes 4-3 for sweep

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — Matthew Tkachuk delivered for Florida, again. Sergei Bobrovsky denied Carolina, again.

The wait is over: After 27 years, the Florida Panthers — a hockey punchline no more — are again going to play for the game's grandest prize.

Tkachuk got his second goal of the game with 4.9 seconds left, lifting the Panthers past the Carolina Hurricanes 4-3 and into the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 1996 after sweeping the Eastern Conference final.

The Panthers will play either Vegas or Dallas for the Stanley Cup starting sometime next week; Vegas currently leads the Western Conference title series 3-0.

"This was pure joy," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said.

Bobrovsky stopped 36 shots to cap his stellar series — four games, four one-goal wins, three of them basically in sudden death, a .966 save percentage after stopping 174 of the 180 shots he faced. The first two wins were in overtime, and this one may as well have been.

The Panthers scored 10 goals in the series, and Bobrovsky ensured those were all they needed. They were the No. 8 seed, the last team in, the longest of long shots — which is consistent with their history, after not winning a single playoff series in 26 years, a drought that ended last season.

And now, beasts of the East. Tkachuk arrived last summer saying he wanted to bring Florida a Cup. He's four wins away.

"It's amazing," Bobrovsky said. "We showed the resilience ... and we're lucky to have Chucky on our side. He knows how to score big goals."

NHL Senior Vice President Brian Jennings was the one tasked with presenting the Prince of Wales Trophy. After some photos, Aleksander Barkov — the captain who had two assists, one of them on the game-winner — grabbed it, and skated it away. Some teams touch it. Some don't. A few of the Panthers did, but Barkov didn't pass it around.

That'll wait for the big prize.

"It's hard to explain right now. Everything just happened so quick," Barkov said. "It means a lot. It definitely does. ... It hasn't been easy and nobody said it's going to be easy."

Added Tkachuk: "We earned that thing, and definitely didn't do it the easy way. We earned it."

Ryan Lomberg and Anthony Duclair had the other goals for Florida, which swept a series for the first time in franchise history.

Jordan Staal — his brothers Eric and Marc play for the Panthers — took a tripping penalty with 57 seconds left in regulation, setting up the power-play that Tkachuk finished off after getting into the slot and beating Frederik Andersen to set off a wild celebration.

"Eastern Conference champions," Florida defenseman Aaron Ekblad said. "It's really cool. No doubt about it. But you know, at the end of the day, we have our eyes on something different."

Toy rats — the Panthers' tradition, a nod to the unwanted locker room guests from Florida's old arena in 1996 — sailed down from the stands, and the goal needed to survive an official review. But the rats were picked up, the goal was deemed good, and 27 years of waiting was officially over 4.9 seconds later.

Jesper Fast seemed like he might have saved the season for Carolina, getting a tying goal with 3:22 left in regulation. Paul Stastny and Teuvo Teravainen had the first two goals of the night for the Hurricanes, while Brady Skjei and Jordan Martinook each had two assists. Andersen stopped 21 shots.

"Everyone's going to say, 'You got swept.' That's not what happened," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I watched the game. I'm there. I'm cutting the games. We're in the game. We didn't lose four games. We got beat, but we were right there. This could have went the other way. It could have been four games the other way."

That wasn't sour grapes. He was right. A bounce here, a bounce there, a Bobrovsky not here, a Bobrovsky



not there, and this series could have gone much differently.

But Bob was his best. Tkachuk was clutch, over and over. And Florida is as close to a Cup as it has ever been; the Panthers were swept by Colorado in the 1996 final.

Towels waved, strobe lights flashed, and the fans wasted no time letting the Panthers know that they were ready to a clincher.

Tkachuk made it 2-0 on the power play midway through the first. Carolina — a 113-point, division-championship-winning team in the regular season — made it 2-1 later in the first on Stastny's goal, and Teravainen tied it early in the second.

Lomborg's goal midway through the second gave Florida the lead again. It stayed that way until Fast got the equalizer with 3:22 left, and then Tkachuk finished it off — getting the Panthers to the title round in his first season.

"It's been unbelievable since July since I got here," Tkachuk said. "And hopefully we can cap off this amazing year."

## AROUND THE RINK

Panthers general manager Bill Zito was announced earlier Wednesday as a finalist for NHL GM of the year. ... Tkachuk's two goals gave him 21 points in the playoffs — extending his Florida single-season postseason record, which was 17 by Dave Lowry in 1996. ... Slavin was quickly ruled out for the remainder of the game after Bennett's hit, with what the Hurricanes said was "an upper-body injury." Slavin wobbled as he tried to get to his feet. ... Miami Dolphins coach Mike McDaniel — who has also been a regular at Miami Heat games during their playoff run this spring — banged the drum before the game. When done, without a mic to drop, he simply dropped the mallet instead.

## TWO-GOAL EDGE

Tkachuk's goal midway through the opening period put Florida up 2-0 — and marked the first time, in nearly 14 periods of play to that point, that a team had a two-goal lead in this series. Every bit of action came with the score tied or someone up by one in the first 272 minutes (including all the overtimes) of the series.

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

## Air Force fighter pilot tapped by Biden to be next Joint Chiefs chairman has history of firsts

By TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Air Force fighter pilot about to be nominated as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff got his callsign by ejecting from a burning F-16 fighter jet high above the Florida Everglades and falling into the watery sludge below.

It was January 1991, and then-Capt. CQ Brown Jr. had just enough time in his parachute above alligator-full wetlands for a thought to pop into his head. "Hope there's nothing down there," Brown said in an interview at the Aspen Security Forum last year.

He landed in the muck, which coated his body and got "in his boots and everything." Which is how the nominee to be the country's next top military officer got his callsign: "Swamp Thing."

Brown, now a four-star general and the Air Force chief, will be nominated by President Joe Biden on Thursday. If confirmed, Brown would replace Army Gen. Mark Milley, whose term ends in October. Biden is scheduled to unveil Brown as his pick during a Rose Garden event on Thursday afternoon.

The callsign reveal was a rare inner look into Brown, who keeps his cards close to his chest. He's spent much of his career being one of the Air Force's top aviators, one of its few Black pilots and often one of the only African Americans in his squadron.

To this day, his core tenets are to "execute at a high standard, personally and professionally," Brown said this month at an Air Force Association conference in Colorado. "I do not play for second place. If I'm in, I'm in to win — I do not play to lose."

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He's been many firsts, including the Air Force's first Black commander of the Pacific Air Forces, and most recently its first Black chief of staff, making him the first African American to lead any of the military branches.

If confirmed, he would be part of another first — the first time the Pentagon's top two posts were held by African Americans, with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin the top civilian leader. Brown would not be the first African American to be chairman, the Pentagon's top military post; that distinction went to the late Army Gen. Colin Powell.

Brown, 60, has commanded the nation's air power at all levels. Born in San Antonio, he is from a family of Army soldiers. His grandfather led a segregated Army unit in World War II and his father was an artillery officer and Vietnam War veteran. Brown grew up on several military bases and states, which helped instill in him a sense of mission.

His nomination caps a four-decade military career that spans his commission as a distinguished ROTC graduate from Texas Tech University in 1984 to his White House nomination this week. He was widely viewed within military circles as the frontrunner for the chairmanship, with the right commands and a track record of driving institutional change, attributes seen as needed to push the Pentagon onto a more modern footing to meet China's rise.

For the past two years Brown has pressed "Accelerate, Change or Lose" within the Air Force. The campaign very much has China in mind, pushing the service to shed legacy warplanes and speed its efforts to counter hypersonics, drones and space weapons, where the military's lingering Cold War-era inventory does not match up.

In person, Brown is private, thoughtful and deliberate. He is seen as a contrast to Milley, who has remained outspoken throughout his tenure, often to the ire of former President Donald Trump and Republican lawmakers.

"He's not prone to blurt out something without some serious thought in his own mind, some serious kind of balancing of the opportunities or options," said retired Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Moseley, who knows Brown from when Brown worked for him as a member of the Air Staff.

Brown has more than 3,000 flying hours and repeat assignments to the Air Force Weapons School — an elite aerial fighting school similar to the Navy's TOPGUN. Only about 1% of Air Force fighter pilots are accepted, Moseley said.

When Brown had to eject from the burning F-16 in 1991, after the fuel tank broke off mid-flight, he said the timing couldn't have been worse.

"I was a bit frustrated because it happened just before the selection for weapons school," he said at the Aspen forum. He said he had to apply three times before he got in, noting that it's "pretty competitive."

But he rose to the top there, too, earning a spot as an instructor, "which is like 1% of the 1%," Moseley said.

Brown returned to the weapons school as its commandant. By then it had expanded from fighter-only exclusivity to teaching combined airpower operations, with tankers, bombers and cargo planes.

Brown saw that the school "required a different approach and attitude," said retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Bill Rew. Earlier commandants had tried to institute a new mantra, "Humble, Approachable, Credible," but it had not taken root.

Under Brown the cultural shift took hold and remains in place today, said Rew, who was one of Brown's instructors at the weapons school and wing commander during Brown's time as commandant.

"It takes a certain kind of leadership, that doesn't force cultural change on people but explains it and motivates them on why that change is important," Rew said.

In June 2020, Brown was just a week from being confirmed by the Senate to serve as chief of staff of the Air Force when he felt the need to speak out on George Floyd's murder.

It was risky and inopportune time for the general to draw public attention and pull back the curtain on his private thoughts. But he did so anyway, after discussions with his wife and sons about the murder, which convinced him he needed to say something.

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In a June 2020 video message to the service titled "Here's What I'm Thinking About," Brown described how he'd pressured himself "to perform error-free" as a pilot and officer his whole life, but still faced bias. He said he'd been questioned about his credentials, even when he wore the same flight suit and wings as every other pilot.

It's been 30 years since Powell became the first Black chairman, serving from 1989 to 1993. But while African Americans make up 17.2% of the 1.3 million active-duty service members, only 9% of officers are Black, according to a 2021 Defense Department report.

"I'm thinking about my mentors and how I rarely had a mentor that looked like me," Brown said in the video.

"I'm thinking about how my nomination provides some hope, but also comes with a heavy burden — I can't fix centuries of racism in our country, nor can I fix decades of discrimination that may have impacted members of our Air Force.

"I'm thinking about how I can make improvements, personally, professionally and institutionally," so all airmen could excel.

His decision to speak out did not cost him. His Senate confirmation vote was 98-0.

But like the brief moment in Aspen, the personal video message was a rarity. After confirmation, he lowered his public profile again, and got to work.

## **Flying drones and chasing data, Indigenous women in Guyana join fight against climate change**

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

RUBY VILLAGE, Guyana (AP) — A small group of Indigenous women in northern Guyana are the latest weapon in the fight against climate change in this South American country where 90% of the population lives below sea level.

Armed with drones, the women are scanning mangrove forests for illegal cutting and expect to soon start collecting soil samples and mangrove litter to measure the carbon held in remote coastal ecosystems that have long been out of reach for scientists. Such data could nudge the government to create policies and programs to protect critical areas.

"We are merging traditional knowledge and scientific research to get all this information that we need but never had before and couldn't afford to get," said Annette Arjoon-Martins, head of Guyana's Marine Conservation Society.

The women's work is considered key for Guyana, a small nation about the size of Britain that has a 285-mile-long (459 kilometers) coastline whose coastal plains lie an average of 6 feet (2 meters) below sea level. The coastline depends on a centuries-old sea defense system created by the Dutch during the colonial era. It includes a 280-mile (450-kilometer) seawall and relies on dozens of workers who set alarms night and day to manually open and close sluice gates known as "kokers" that prevent the Atlantic Ocean from flooding Guyana.

By the mid-1990s, the Inter-American Development Bank already was advising Guyana to relocate communities inland since most of its 791,000 people live along the coast, and much of its economic activity and agriculture are based there. But people have been reluctant to leave.

A World Bank report has cautioned that "the impact of rising sea levels and intensified storm surges in Guyana would be among the greatest in the world, exposing 100% of the country's coastal agriculture and 66.4% of coastal urban areas to flooding and coastal erosion."

The community of Almond Beach in northern Guyana was forced to relocate several years ago after the ocean swallowed line after line of palm trees and began to lap at the school and other infrastructure, Arjoon-Martins said. Some 280 people once lived there; barely three dozen remain after a swath of land slipped underwater, she said.

Environmentalists say the work of the young Amerindian women will help them understand the challenges Guyana faces and what it can do to fight climate change as it prepares to become one of the world's



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largest offshore oil producers.

By the end of the year, the women hope to start collecting data on how much carbon the coastal ecosystems around their villages are storing.

"We've never done a blue carbon baseline in Guyana before," Arjoon-Martins said. "We want to quantify how much carbon this entire landscape stores, not just the trees."

Knowing the baseline would help boost protection of that area and possibly lead to similar programs like the low-carbon development strategy launched in 2009 to protect Guyana's forests, which cover nearly 90% of the country. That year, Norway signed a deal to provide \$250 million in funding to ensure that Guyana's 18 million hectares of forest remain intact. In December, Hess Corporation agreed to buy \$750 million worth of carbon credits to protect those forests.

The indigenous women are gathering data and images at a crucial moment: Guyana is in the midst of an oil boom expected to make it the world's fourth-largest offshore oil producer, raising concerns about potential oil spills and the oil's contribution to the same climate change that threatens its existence.

An ExxonMobil consortium that includes Hess Corporation and China's CNOOC is producing some 380,000 barrels of oil a day, a number that is expected to jump to 1.2 million by 2027.

Guyana Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo, who helped launch the 2009 low-carbon development strategy when he was president and has long led the fight to protect the country's forests and mangroves, dismissed environmental concerns tied to oil production and greenhouse gas emissions. He called the oil production a "little operation" and criticism from environmentalists as "nonsense."

But environmentalists say they are greatly concerned about potential threats including oil spills.

Earlier this month, a court in Guyana ordered ExxonMobil to set aside sufficient funds in the case of such an event and threatened to suspend the country's Environmental Protection Agency if the oil company does not take out unlimited liability insurance within 30 days. In its ruling, the court accused the EPA of being "derelict, pliant and submissive" in its alleged omissions. The agency appealed and lost.

ExxonMobil has filed its own appeal, saying the court had "failed to recognize" that it and its partners have the ability to meet their financial obligations and that it already has insurance in place.

The concerns add to existing ones including the unlawful cutting of mangroves, fires, illegal construction and fuel pollution in rivers that the Amerindian women are scanning in the Barima-Mora Passage in northern Guyana.

Every three months, they fly their drones to inspect an area of some 47,000 hectares (116,000 acres) that includes 14,000 hectares (35,000 acres) of mangroves — Guyana's largest mangrove forest ecosystem. Mangroves act as a natural buffer against rising sea levels and help protect from coastal erosion. The soil they grow in also absorbs large quantities of carbon that would otherwise contribute to a warming Earth.

"It is me giving back to the environment," said Shakira Yipsam, 19, who leads the drone team and lives in the Amerindian village of Aruka Mouth, located near a river that drains into the Atlantic.

The women's mentor is 22-year-old Sarah Singh, who majored in marine biology and now works with the conservation society. She trained the women for up to eight months as part of a program that pays them roughly \$700 a month. The program targets young women in Amerindian villages because "they're usually the ones who leave school and start a family at an early age and don't really have employment opportunities," Singh said.

Their work builds on previous conservation efforts that included the replanting of seven miles' (11 kilometers') worth of mangroves across Guyana as part of a partnership with the European Union about a decade ago. That replanting led to another nearly 1,000 hectares (2,400 acres) of mangroves that regenerated naturally, Arjoon-Martins said.

Protecting and planting natural buffers like mangroves are key since rising sea levels and coastal flooding are a big concern in Guyana, whose name means "land of many waters." Sea level rise here has been in line with the global average of 4 millimeters a year over the past 30 years, according to Steve Nerem, a sea level rise expert at the University of Colorado.

The narrow coastal strip where most people live and grow crops represents only 5% of Guyana's terri-

tory and is intersected by three large rivers, according to a study published by professors at the University of Western Ontario.

The area has been affected by rainfall patterns that have changed and hit Guyana's rice industry particularly hard, said Ulric Trotz, former deputy director at Belize's Caribbean Community Climate Change Center. "It's leading to flooding, landslides and destruction of crops," he said.

Major flooding events that Trotz attributes to climate change have been reported across Guyana in recent years, including in Mahaicony, southeast of the capital of Georgetown, where saltwater inundated swaths of farmland nearly two years ago, rendering it useless.

The magnitude of the floods, coupled with high tides, overwhelm the sluice gates and colonial-era seawall, but Arjune Lilmohan, 32, said he is not giving up the fight. Like dozens of other workers, he said he sets his alarm in the middle of the night to open and close the koker in his community because it's his responsibility to protect Guyana from the Atlantic Ocean.

"If you sleep on the job, you get flood," he said.

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

## **Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes faces sentencing for seditious conspiracy in Jan. 6 attack**

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes will be sentenced Thursday after a landmark verdict convicting him of spearheading a weeklong plot to keep former President Donald Trump in power, culminating in far-right extremists attacking the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Prosecutors are seeking 25 years behind bars for Rhodes, who will be sentenced in the federal court in Washington that sits less than a mile from the Capitol. He will be the first Jan. 6 defendant convicted of seditious conspiracy to receive his punishment, which will set the standard for a slew of extremists group members' sentencings to come.

Prosecutors say Rhodes remains a threat to American democracy more than two years after he led a plot to forcibly block the transfer of power from Trump to President Joe Biden after Trump lost the 2020 election.

During a court hearing on Wednesday, police officers and congressional staffers at the Capitol on Jan. 6 recounted the physical and emotional trauma they are still suffering after they engaged in hand-to-hand combat with rioters for hours or fled as the mob roamed the halls in search of lawmakers and then-Vice President Mike Pence.

Rhodes, of Granbury, Texas, was found guilty in November of seditious conspiracy alongside Florida chapter leader Kelly Meggs, and four other Oath Keepers were convicted of the rarely used charge during a second trial in January. Three of Rhodes' co-defendants were acquitted of seditious conspiracy but convicted of other crimes.

It was one of the most consequential cases brought by the Justice Department as it has sought to prove that the riot for right-wing extremists like the Oath Keepers was not a spur-of-the-moment protest but the culmination of weeks of plotting to overturn Biden's election victory.

Rhodes' sentencing comes just weeks after former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío was convicted of seditious conspiracy alongside other leaders of his far-right group this month for what prosecutors said was a separate plot to block the transfer of presidential power. The Proud Boys will be sentenced in August and September.

Rhodes' lawyers say he should be sentenced to the 16 months he has already served behind bars since his January 2022 arrest. In seeking leniency for Rhodes, his lawyers cited his military service and told the judge that Rhodes' writings and statements were all "protected political speech." Rhodes' attorneys plan to appeal his conviction.

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Rhodes and Meggs were the first people in nearly three decades to be found guilty at trial of seditious conspiracy. Meggs is expected to be sentenced after Rhodes later Thursday and two other Oath Keepers will be sentenced Friday. Four other defendants convicted of seditious conspiracy will be sentenced next week.

The judge canceled the sentencing hearing scheduled this week for another defendant — Thomas Caldwell of Berryville, Virginia — as the judge weighs whether to overturn the jury's guilty verdict against Caldwell for obstruction and a documents tampering charge.

The convictions were a major blow for the Oath Keepers, which Rhodes founded in 2009 and grew into one of the largest far-right anti-government militia groups. Recruiting past and present members of the military and police officers, the group promotes the belief that the federal government is out to strip citizens of their civil liberties and paints its followers as defenders against tyranny.

Rhodes and the other Oath Keepers said there was never any plan to attack the Capitol or stop Congress from certifying Biden's victory.

The defense tried to seize on the fact that none of the Oath Keepers' messages laid out an explicit plan to storm the Capitol. But prosecutors said the Oath Keepers saw an opportunity to further their goal to stop the transfer of power and sprang into action when the mob began storming the building.

Messages, recordings and other evidence presented at trial show Rhodes and his followers growing increasingly enraged after the 2020 election at the prospect of a Biden presidency, which they viewed as a threat to the country and their way of life. In an encrypted chat two days after the election, Rhodes told his followers to prepare their "mind, body, spirit" for "civil war."

In a conference call days later, Rhodes urged his followers to let Trump know they were "willing to die" for the country. One Oath Keeper who was listening was so alarmed that he began recording the call and contacted the FBI, telling jurors "it sounded like we were going to war against the United States government."

Another man testified that after the riot, Rhodes tried to persuade him to pass along a message to Trump that urged the president not to give up his fight to hold onto power. The intermediary — who told jurors he had an indirect way to reach the president — recorded his meeting with Rhodes and went to the FBI instead of giving the message to Trump. Rhodes told the man during that meeting that the Oath Keepers "should have brought rifles" on Jan. 6.

The longest sentence handed down so far in the more than 1,000 Capitol riot cases 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. Just over 500 of the defendants have been sentenced, with more than half receiving prison time and the remainder getting sentences such as probation or home detention.

Richer reported from Boston.

## McCarthy's Republicans push debt ceiling talks to brink, lawmakers leaving town for weekend

By LISA MASCARO and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are pushing debt ceiling talks to the brink, displaying risky political bravado as they prepare to leave town Thursday for the holiday weekend just days before the U.S. could face an unprecedented default that could hurl the global economy into chaos.

A defiant House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said the debt ceiling standoff was "not my fault" as Republican negotiators and the White House failed to finish out talks. He warned they need more time to try to reach a budget-slashing deal with President Joe Biden.

But it's clear the Republican speaker — who leads a Trump-aligned party whose hard-right flank lifted him to power — is now staring down a potential crisis.

Lawmakers are tentatively not expected back at work until Tuesday, just two days from June 1, when Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said the U.S. could start running out of cash to pay its bills and face



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a potentially catastrophic default.

Fitch Ratings agency placed the United States' AAA credit on "ratings watch negative," warning of a possible downgrade because of what it called the brinkmanship and political partisanship surrounding the debate over lifting the debt ceiling.

"This is a battle between extremism and common sense," said Democratic Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, the minority whip.

The Republicans, she said, "want the American people to make an impossible choice: devastating cuts or devastating debt default."

Weeks of negotiations between Republicans and the White House have failed to produce a deal — in part because the Biden administration never expected to be having to negotiate with McCarthy over the debt limit, arguing it should not be used as leverage to extract other partisan priorities.

McCarthy is holding out for steep spending cuts that Republicans are demanding in exchange for their vote to raise the nation's borrowing limit. The White House has offered to freeze next year's 2024 spending at current levels, but the Republican leader says that's not enough.

"We have to spend less than we spent last year. That is the starting point," said McCarthy, R-Calif.

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. Anxious retirees and social service groups are among those already making default contingency plans.

Even if negotiators strike a deal in coming days, McCarthy has promised lawmakers he will abide by the rule to post any bill for 72 hours before voting — now likely Tuesday or even Wednesday. The Senate, where Democratic Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has vowed to move quickly, would also have to pass the package before it could go to Biden's desk to be signed into law, right before next Thursday's possible deadline.

The contours of a deal have been within reach for days, but Republicans are unsatisfied as they press the White House team for more.

In one potential development, Republicans may be easing their demand to boost defense spending, instead offering to keep it at levels the Biden administration proposed, according to one person familiar with the talks and granted anonymity to discuss them.

The Republicans may achieve their goal of rolling back bolstered funding for the Internal Revenue Service if they agree to instead allow the White House to push that money into other domestic accounts, the person said.

At the White House, press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre blamed Republicans for risking a devastating default that would hit "every single part of the country" as they demand "extreme" spending cuts that would hurt millions of Americans.

She decried what the administration called a "manufactured crisis" set in motion by the GOP.

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 as early as their February meeting that raising revenue from tax hikes was off the table.

Donald Trump, the former president who is again running for office, has encouraged Republicans to "do a default" if they don't get the deal they want from the White House.

Time is short to strike a deal. Yellen said Wednesday that "it seems almost certain" that without a deal the United States would not make it past early June without defaulting. "We are seeing some stress already in Treasury markets," she said at a Wall Street Journal event.

While Biden has ruled out, for now, invoking the 14th Amendment to raise the debt limit on his own, Democrats in the House announced they have all signed on to a legislative "discharge" process that would force a debt ceiling vote. But they need five Republicans to break with their party and tip the majority to set the plan forward.

"Sign the bill!" Democrats yelled on the House floor after Republican Majority Leader Steve Scalise of Louisiana announced the holiday recess schedule.

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Agreement on a 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.

McCarthy and his Republican negotiators said what the Democrats get is a debt ceiling increase — typically something both parties take responsibility for doing.

"The problem is not the White House. The problem is Kevin McCarthy and the extreme Republicans," said Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., the chair of the progressive caucus. "They are the ones holding this economy hostage, that are putting all these cuts on the American people."

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.

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 been lifted.

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

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Associated Press writers Seung Min Kim, Fatima Hussein, Kevin Freking and Darlene Superville contributed to this report.

## Georgia nuclear rebirth arrives 7 years late, \$17B over cost

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

WAYNESBORO, Ga. (AP) — Two nuclear reactors in Georgia were supposed to herald a nuclear power revival in the United States. But the project is seven years late and \$17 billion over budget as Georgia Power Co. announced the first new reactor at its Plant Vogtle could reach full electrical output by Saturday.

They're the first U.S. reactors built from scratch in decades — and maybe the most expensive power plant ever. Georgia electric customers have already paid billions, and state regulators will ultimately decide if they're on the hook for billions more.

Some of the key promises of Vogtle — like building modules offsite and shipping them for cheaper on-site assembly — did not pan out. Construction delays drove Westinghouse Electric Co., a titan of American industrial history, into bankruptcy when the company couldn't absorb overruns.

And the lessons could be important because government officials and some utilities are again looking to nuclear power to alleviate climate change by generating electricity without burning natural gas, coal and oil.

Vogtle's new Unit 3 began generating power in March and is scheduled to reach commercial operation by June. Unit 4 is next door on the same rural Burke County site 25 miles (40 kilometers) southeast of Augusta, along with two older reactors. It's supposed to be finished by early 2024.

Georgia Power and its parent, Atlanta-based Southern Co., say the reactors are a triumph. Chris Womack, before he ascended from Georgia Power to become Southern Co. CEO, told The Associated Press that Vogtle is "absolutely" a success, arguing reliable power and cheap fuel costs will benefit the utility's 2.7 million customers for decades.

"We recognize the upfront cost and some of the challenges that we faced," Womack said in January at Vogtle. "But yeah, this is value. This is value contribution to customers, to the state, to the energy grid, to bringing back the nuclear industry and showing that we can do hard things."

As with Vogtle, supporters of future nuclear plants promise new-and-improved designs can be mass-

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produced at reliable prices. But Vogtle opponents scorn renewed nuclear ambitions.

"I don't see how anybody in their right mind cannot avoid saying 'Well, what evidence do you have?'" said David Schlissel, a utility analyst who testified against Units 3 and 4 after fighting the first two Vogtle reactors in the 1970s. They also finished fabulously late and over budget.

In Georgia, almost every electric customer will pay for Vogtle. Georgia Power currently owns 45.7% of the reactors. Smaller shares are owned by Oglethorpe Power Corp., which provides electricity to member-owned cooperatives, the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia and the city of Dalton. Some Florida and Alabama utilities have also contracted to buy Vogtle's power.

Currently, the owners are projected to pay \$31 billion in capital and financing costs, Associated Press calculations show.

Japan's Toshiba Corp., which then owned Westinghouse, paid \$3.7 billion to the Vogtle owners to walk away from a guarantee to build the reactors at a fixed price after overruns forced electric industry pioneer Westinghouse into bankruptcy in 2017. Add that to Vogtle's price and the total nears \$35 billion.

A U.S. Department of Energy report details Vogtle's other failings: Work began with incomplete designs and managers repeatedly failed to realistically schedule tasks. Experienced workers were in short supply and defective work often had to be redone. Workers quit for other jobs and the COVID-19 pandemic led to high absenteeism.

Calculations show Vogtle's electricity will never be cheaper than other sources Georgia Power could have chosen, even after the federal government reduced borrowing costs by guaranteeing repayment of \$12 billion in loans.

Yet regulators say Vogtle was the right choice.

"Vogtle 3 and 4 will be a success not only for Georgia but for our country the moment that they go into service," said Tricia Pridemore, who chairs the elected Public Service Commission of five Republicans. She argues nuclear power provides clean energy with prices immune from international market swings, and that building Vogtle increased U.S. nuclear engineering know-how.

Customers are already paying. Regulators estimate Georgia Power will collect \$4.1 billion in advance charges, or \$913 for every ratepayer. Some cooperative customers are also paying — nearly \$500 million through March.

Georgia Power's residential customers will begin paying an additional \$3.78 per month as soon as Unit 3 achieves commercial operation. But the final bill won't come until Unit 4 is complete. Commissioners must then decide how much of Georgia Power's spending was prudent while disallowing wasted amounts. Commissioners earlier approved \$5.7 billion as prudent, but Bryan Jacob of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy said "management failures" should be scrutinized.

"Ratepayers shouldn't foot the bill for things that management could have done right in the first place," Jacob said.

Critics fear Georgia Power will profit from mistakes. Staff estimates show Georgia Power could earn an extra \$9.4 billion in profit over 60 years if allowed to charge for all spending. Customers could pay \$35.7 billion overall, \$20.5 billion more than originally projected.

"If they can get away with it, they benefit from screwing up," said Schlissel, the utility analyst.

Pridemore said it may be unfair to penalize Georgia Power for overruns beyond its control, but dismissed complaints about undue profits. "I'm very familiar with the mistakes," Pridemore said, referring to commission monitoring of Vogtle construction.

Womack said Georgia Power won't try to collect for all overruns, promising a "balanced" outcome. Southern Co. has written off \$3.26 billion in Vogtle losses since 2018, suggesting it won't recoup those costs.

"We'll look at the best interests of our customers, but also look at the investments that we've made here and what's good for the company," Womack said.

American utilities have heeded Vogtle's missteps, shelving plans for 24 other reactors proposed between 2007 and 2009. Two half-built reactors in South Carolina were abandoned.

But even opponents of Vogtle say the United States can't achieve carbon-free electricity without nuclear



power. Jacob's group modeled how Southern Co. could achieve zero-carbon generation by 2035.

"It was very difficult for us to make the math work without nuclear," Jacob said.

Reactors can run almost constantly, unlike wind and solar generation, and uranium fuel adds little cost.

"It's one of the first units that come online, because from an operational expense, it's the lowest cost energy that's available," Womack said.

So nuclear proponents are trying again. A multinational partnership including the Tennessee Valley Authority seeks to build scaled-down reactors designed by General Electric and Hitachi. The first small modular reactor, under construction east of Toronto, could be complete by 2028. TVA may build one near Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

"Worldwide we need to double the amount of nuclear capacity, possibly even triple it by 2050 in order to meet our net-zero carbon goals," U.S. Assistant Secretary of Energy Kathryn Huff said in Washington in March, celebrating the partnership.

Some ideas are similar to Vogtle, including standardized designs and parts. Costs are rising for other designs planned for Idaho and Wyoming. Still, supporters believe building smaller reactors will be less daunting.

Jay Wileman, CEO of GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy, acknowledges any nuclear revival must overcome past problems.

"Nuclear has to have a seat at the table, but we've got to earn our seat at the table," Wileman said in March. "And to do that, we've got to be on schedule, on budget, and it's got to be a competitive cost."

But Vogtle observers view those pledges dimly.

"The industry has no track record of being right," Schlissel said.

## Look who's talking: Biden goes quiet in debt-limit talks, while McCarthy can't stop chatting

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — There was Kevin McCarthy, saying the White House was refusing to give on spending as the speaker returned to the Capitol one morning this week. Just a few short hours later, there was McCarthy again, this time telling reporters that the sole concession that Republicans were making to the White House on the debt limit was in fact, raising the debt limit.

As representatives from the White House and the GOP-controlled House race toward a deal that would pave the way for lawmakers to lift the debt limit, one side has been eager to speak publicly about the closed-door talks — trying to shape public perceptions of the negotiations.

It's not the side that typically wields the bully pulpit.

President Joe Biden has made a deliberate decision to go quiet as his team gets down to the wire in the debt-limit talks, according to White House officials. It's his deeply held view that speaking in public about negotiations does nothing to produce an outcome.

The already voluble McCarthy, by contrast, is especially chatty these days, as he aggressively tries to set the terms of the public debate. His own negotiators also engage at length with journalists on the debt-limit talks.

"We have to get an agreement that's worthy of the American people," the speaker told a small clutch of reporters outside the House chamber late Wednesday afternoon, which — by his aides' count — was at least his 12th gaggle or news conference with reporters this week alone.

In comparison, Biden has said little publicly on the standoff since he returned from an international summit earlier this week to deal with the debt disarray in Washington. He spoke for less than three minutes as he opened an Oval Office meeting with McCarthy late Monday afternoon, but aside from that, has not talked in public about the issue.

The primary messaging vehicle for the White House has been press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre's daily news briefings. On Wednesday, she began by highlighting comments from Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., openly saying that Republicans were holding the debt limit "hostage" in talks with the White House.

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"This is a manufactured crisis," said Jean-Pierre, who would not elaborate on any specifics of the ongoing talks during her 46-minute briefing.

But no surrogate can be a substitute for the principal, and Biden, by relinquishing the public megaphone to Republicans this week, risks ceding the narrative over the debt-limit talks. Some Democrats signaled that the White House's current communications strategy was due for an adjustment.

"The president needs to be more forward-leaning in making his case," Rep. Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y., said Wednesday. He continued: "But the media is treating as reasonable a position that is inherently unreasonable. The position that Kevin McCarthy has taken is extreme. He's leveraging the threat of default to export political concession that he could never have achieved through the normal democratic process."

The White House has defended its communications approach, noting that Biden has made his policy priorities clear for months and that by taking a step back from the limelight, he was letting the negotiators have space to maneuver.

"I feel strongly by saying this: The president is certainly not media shy," Jean-Pierre said Wednesday, as she chuckled slightly. The chief spokeswoman for the White House noted that Biden spoke on Monday (albeit briefly) and on Sunday at a news conference in Hiroshima, Japan, and that "the president has been very clear where he stands on what Congress should be doing, which is dealing with the debt limit — something that is their constitutional duty."

Earlier in the debt-limit talks, Biden was not shy about hammering on so-called "MAGA Republicans," most notably holding an event in suburban New York City one day after his first Oval Office meeting with the top four congressional leaders on resolving the standoff.

But this week, the president decided not to speak publicly after he sat down one-on-one with McCarthy because, Biden believed, that would be more productive in trying to get a debt-limit outcome, said one White House official, who requested anonymity to discuss internal West Wing deliberations.

A second White House official also emphasized that Biden did not think it made much sense to be public about negotiations when the talks were productive, but no deal had yet been reached.

"It's my expectation that if Republicans continue to play games with the American economy, threaten default and drive us into a very dangerous situation that we'll begin to hear from the Biden administration, if not the president himself," House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., said Wednesday when asked whether the president himself needed to be more outspoken on the ongoing talks.

Jeffries added: "I have full confidence in the goodness of President Biden, who wants to find a resolution that protects everyday Americans and is engaging in good-faith discussions to try to arrive at that conclusion."

It's also a tale of two different negotiating styles.

Biden's team, all veteran Washington operators who have spent most of their public service careers as senior aides, have been perennially loathe to speak to the press, particularly in the middle of tense and unfinished negotiations. The White House team is being led by Steve Ricchetti, counselor to the president, legislative affairs director Louisa Terrell, and Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young, who spent much of her career as staff director of the House Appropriations Committee.

On the other side, McCarthy's emissaries are Reps. Garret Graves of Louisiana and Patrick McHenry of North Carolina, who are fluent in talking to the press as elected officials and as key allies of the speaker.

"What I'm telling you is that every once in a while, I feel like I'm buying a used car," Graves said of dealing with the White House during one 42-minute gaggle with journalists on Tuesday afternoon, when negotiations seemed to be at a standstill.

Still, there are times when even the most talkative people go quiet. After returning from the White House late Wednesday afternoon from another negotiating session, Graves and McHenry hurried away from reporters pestering them for details — a notable contrast to the past several days.

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Associated Press writer Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

## George Floyd death anniversary: Reckoning with police violence in limbo

By AARON MORRISON and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, and the fervent protests that erupted around the world in response, looked to many observers like the catalyst needed for a nationwide reckoning on racism in policing.

For more than nine minutes, a white officer pressed his knee to the neck of Floyd, a Black man, who gasped, "I can't breathe," echoing Eric Garner's last words in 2014. Video footage of Floyd's May 25, 2020, murder was so agonizing to watch that demands for change came from across the country.

But in the midst of the deadly coronavirus pandemic, economic uncertainty and a divisive U.S. presidential election, 2020 ended without the kind of major police reforms that many hoped, and others feared, would come. Then, 2021 and 2022 also failed to yield much progress.

Now, three years to the day since Floyd's murder, proponents of federal actions — such as banning chokeholds and no-knock warrants, as well as changing the so-called qualified immunity protections for law enforcement — still await signs of change.

"When people casually, and I think too frequently, say that there is some sort of racial reckoning that we're in the midst of, I see no evidence of that," Democratic U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley, of Massachusetts, said during a recent press conference convened by a Black Lives Matter collective.

To be clear, racial justice activists and their champions in elected office haven't slowed down. But the beating death of Tyre Nichols at the hands of Memphis police officers in early January underscored yet again just how long it's taking to achieve meaningful change.

"I don't play with words like 'reckoning,'" Pressley said. "That needs to be something of epic proportion. And we certainly have not seen a response to the lynching, the choking, the brutality, (and) the murder of Black lives."

### SINCE 2020, WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN MINNEAPOLIS?

Soon after Floyd's murder, Minneapolis adopted a number of changes, including bans on chokeholds and neck restraints, and requirements that police try to stop fellow officers from using improper force. Minnesota lawmakers approved statewide police accountability packages in 2020 and in 2021, as well as tight restrictions on no-knock warrants just this month.

The city is still awaiting the results of a federal investigation into whether its police have engaged in a "pattern or practice" of unconstitutional or unlawful policing. A similar investigation by the state Department of Human Rights led to what it called a "court-enforceable settlement agreement" in March to revamp policing in the city.

The federal investigation could lead to a similar but separate agreement with the city called a consent decree. Police in several other cities already operate under such oversight for civil rights violations.

Activists say that Minneapolis has started to make critical changes, but that the work necessary to transform policing must continue.

### WHAT EVENTS ARE HAPPENING IN THE CITY THIS WEEK?

Activists plan to mark the anniversary in Minneapolis with a candlelight vigil Thursday night at George Floyd Square, the corner where Floyd died. A festival at the square Saturday will celebrate change in Minneapolis.

### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OFFICERS?

Derek Chauvin, the white officer who killed Floyd, and the three other officers who failed to stop Chauvin at the scene, are all in prison. Chauvin was sentenced in state court to 22 1/2 years for second-degree murder. Two of the three other officers pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting manslaughter and received shorter terms, while the third officer was convicted of that count by a judge and awaits sentencing.

Chauvin also pleaded guilty to a federal civil rights charge, admitting that keeping his knee on Floyd's neck resulted in his death. In that case, he received a concurrent sentence of 21 years. The three others were also convicted of violating Floyd's rights and got much shorter sentences.



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## HAVE THE PROTESTS IMPACTED POLICE BRUTALITY CASES?

Around the world, protests against racial violence and police brutality erupted after Floyd's murder, reigniting the Black Lives Matter movement. Videos circulated on social media of U.S. police using tear gas and less-lethal munitions like rubber bullets, which fueled calls for accountability. That accountability so far has largely come in the form of settlements in lawsuits.

New York City found 146 officers had committed misconduct at protests including excessive force and violence like one officer who drove a car into protesters. Independent reviews in Philadelphia, Minneapolis and Los Angeles also found those departments had mishandled their responses.

In some cities, a handful of officers were fired. Some have even faced criminal charges: In Austin, Texas, 19 officers were charged in a grand jury indictment. But few have been convicted.

Minneapolis has agreed to millions of dollars in settlements with people who alleged they were victims of excessive police force during unrest that followed Floyd's killing, which included the burning of a police station. But few officers faced disciplinary action over their conduct.

## WHAT ABOUT CALLS TO DEFUND THE POLICE?

There were immediate cries to defund the police — and instead fund public housing, infrastructure and mental health services. But Minneapolis voters rejected a ballot measure that had its roots in the movement to defund the police. It failed even in some heavily Black neighborhoods.

An AP review of police funding found that some municipalities made modest cuts that fell far short of activists' calls.

## IS FEDERAL LEGISLATION STILL STALLED?

In 2020, the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, a piece of federal legislation, showed some signs of promise. It would ban chokeholds and no-knock warrants, like the one that enabled Louisville police to kill Breonna Taylor. It would also create a database listing officers who were disciplined for gross misconduct, among other measures.

The following year, the House passed it but the Senate failed to reach a consensus. However, in the most recent State of the Union address, attended by Nichols' parents, President Joe Biden renewed his call on Congress to pass the bill.

Pressley, the Massachusetts congresswoman, joined a press conference last Friday with Black Lives Matter Grassroots, a national collective of chapters and local activists, to promote the Ending Qualified Immunity Act. Every year since 2020, Pressley has reintroduced the measure.

## WHAT ABOUT THE FLOYD FAMILY?

Over the last three years, George Floyd's family members have appeared at rallies and spoken out against police violence. Within days of his brother's death, Philonise Floyd testified at a congressional hearing about police reform.

While relatives and reform advocates urged for legislation changes, George Floyd's youngest daughter, Gianna Floyd, met Biden at the White House in 2021. A photo of a Marine holding the door for the 7-year-old went viral.

New York City-based Terrence Floyd, who became an activist after his brother's murder, planned to hold the third-annual memorial event at a Harlem church on Thursday evening. He has supported get-out-the-vote efforts and promoted music paying tribute to his brother.

"You have to have the faith that it will happen, because it didn't happen overnight for Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X. It didn't happen overnight for Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Jesse Jackson," he said about meaningful social change. "You can't expect it to happen overnight for us, but it will happen."

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Morrison reported from New York. Associated Press writer Claudia Lauer contributed to this story from Philadelphia.

## DEA's failure to punish distributor blamed in opioid crisis raises revolving door questions

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, has said losing its license would effectively shut it down and have a "catastrophic" effect on patients in 29 states.

In a statement to AP, the company said it has invested millions of dollars in compliance systems, executives and advisors. "If DEA attempts to revoke our license for previous actions, the company will vigor-

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ously appeal and seek a stay in federal court," it said. "We are confident we will achieve an outcome that safeguards the supply chain for all of our healthcare partners and the communities they serve."

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 since the Biden nominee came into office nearly two years ago 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. DEA spokesperson Christina Pryor declined to comment, but a person familiar with Milione's work said he recused himself from issues related to Morris & Dickson after returning to the DEA in 2021. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about DEA officials' recusals.

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 Dorman 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, Amerisource-Bergen 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."

Goodman reported from Miami. Contact AP's global investigative team at [Investigative@ap.org](mailto:Investigative@ap.org).

## **Bolivia's Catholic Church acknowledges being 'deaf' to sex abuse victims**

By CARLOS VALDEZ Associated Press

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — Leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Bolivia acknowledged Wednesday that the church had been deaf to the suffering of victims of sexual abuse, commenting as a pedophilia scandal involving priests is rocking the country.

In a statement, the Andean nation's Catholic bishops said that "as a church, we are facing a painful moment ... because we are certain that we have been directly or indirectly involved in the deep pain caused to innocent victims."

The statement comes amid the fallout from the case involving a late Spanish Jesuit priest, Alfonso Pedrajas. According to a private diary accessed by the Spanish newspaper *El País*, Pedrajas allegedly abused dozens of minors in Catholic boarding schools in Bolivia in the 1970s and 1980s. He died of cancer in 2009.

Earlier this week, Jordi Bertemeu, one of the Vatican's top sex crimes investigators, arrived in Bolivia.

The bishops said that while "we know there is no way to compensate for the damage caused, we are committed to do everything possible to ... seek a reparation, with the support of professionals who provide assistance and help heal wounds and scars."

The Prosecutor's Office initiated an investigation — which remains confidential — and has called on the victims to testify. New cases of sexual abuse have been uncovered as a result of this probe and one priest was sent to pre-trial detention for three months earlier this month.

Bolivian President Luis Arce sent a letter to Pope Francis earlier this week, requesting that the church release any documents about sexual abuse by priests in Bolivia.

In the letter, Arce calls on church authorities to "move from pronouncements to concrete actions to prevent impunity."

In their statement, the Bolivian bishops said the church would set up two commissions to "determine responsibilities." They promised to provide updates, saying they would "contribute to a transparent investigation" by the justice system.

The Jesuit Society in Bolivia previously apologized to victims and pledged to support the investigation while denouncing Pedrajas' superiors for an alleged cover-up. Many of the people singled out are no longer in office or have died.

## **As Typhoon Mawar hit, these identical twin meteorologists kept Guam informed**

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — As Typhoon Mawar aimed its fury at Guam, residents facing terrifying winds and crashing waves from the strongest typhoon to hit the U.S. Pacific territory in decades had identical twin meteorologists to keep them informed — and to provide the outside world with a glimpse of the chaos unfolding on the remote island.

The National Weather Service's Guam office employs Landon Aydlett as its warning coordination meteorologist. His brother Brandon Aydlett is the science and operations officer.

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Together, the 41-year-olds tag-teamed Facebook Live broadcasts watched by thousands as Typhoon Mawar approached with maximum sustained winds of 140 mph (225 kph), wreaking havoc as residents lost power, internet and water service.

Their colorful descriptions of the Category 4 storm painted a picture as they both took turns describing trees snapped like toothpicks, thrashing winds, nearly 2 feet (0.6 meters) of torrential rain and "whiteout conditions" outside the office where they holed up with other colleagues for nearly 48 hours.

"Reassure your children. It's going to be a little bit scary as we go later into the night," Brandon Aydlett said in a Facebook Live update as the island was in the throes of the typhoon on Wednesday. "You can hear the sounds: The winds are howling, things are breaking. Just be together, talk to each other and things will slow down toward midnight and continuing into Thursday morning."

Earlier, his brother explained to viewers of another live update that the weather was about to get worse. "We're starting to hear the low rumbles in the building here at the National Weather Service," Landon Aydlett said. "Our doors are rattling. We hear little whistles through the windows, little cracks in the doors. We're getting those effects here as we're nearing typhoon force conditions."

He told The Associated Press in a brief telephone interview Thursday morning local time that working with his brother is like working with his best friend. They never planned to work together, he said.

"But the jobs fell in our laps, and we followed our heart and our passion for the work," Aydlett said. "And somehow we both ended up in Guam."

The brothers are from Elizabeth City, North Carolina, a small farming town in the Outer Banks about an hour south of Norfolk, Virginia. Brandon Aydlett came to Guam first, more than 13 years ago, and his brother arrived a half-year later.

The brothers like to go hiking and paddleboarding. Brandon Aydlett enjoys running. Landon Aydlett — who at Thursday's final briefing sported a necklace of small white shells gifted to him after a 2018 typhoon — prefers to lift weights. Last year they broke two Guinness world records by building the world's largest and tallest toy timber tower as part of a Habitat for Humanity fundraiser. The "Tower for Humanity" raised \$20,000 for the Guam chapter of the charity.

Landon Aydlett said he's heard about spouses working together in National Weather Service offices, but never about other twins.

Guam is an island of about 150,000 people about 3,900 miles (6,275 kilometers) west of Hawaii and 1,600 miles (2,600 kilometers) east of Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

The weather service office issues forecasts for Guam as well as several islands to the north — Saipan, Tinian and Rota — that are part of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, another U.S. territory. The Guam office also forecasts weather for the nearby independent Pacific island nations of the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Palau.

On Thursday, in their final live update as the storm began to subside, they kept passing the informational baton back and forth. It would be their last update from Guam, Landon Aydlett said, after nearly 48 hours together in the forecasting office.

"I don't know what my house is looking like right now," he said. "I'll find out very soon, but we will ride it out together. We are one Guam. We are one Marianas. Stay sheltered and stay safe."

## **Biden picks history-making Air Force fighter pilot to serve as next Joint Chiefs chairman**

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden will announce Thursday that he is tapping Air Force Gen. CQ Brown Jr., a history-making fighter pilot with deep knowledge of China, to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Brown's confirmation would mean that, for the first time, both the Pentagon's top military and civilian positions would be held by African Americans. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the first Black Pentagon

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chief, has been in the job since the beginning of the administration. The only other Black person to serve as Joint Chiefs chairman was Army Gen. Colin Powell.

The nomination has been long expected. If confirmed by the Senate, Brown would replace Army Gen. Mark Milley, whose term ends in October, as the nation's next top military officer. The president plans to unveil Brown as his pick during a Rose Garden event Thursday afternoon.

Biden saw Brown as the right person for the job because of his work modernizing the U.S. fleet of aircraft and its nuclear arsenal and his years of experience in shaping U.S. defenses to meet China's rise, a senior administration official said. He's also been deeply involved in the Pentagon's efforts to equip Ukraine with billions of dollars in U.S. weaponry as Kyiv tries to fend off Russia's 15-month old invasion.

Brown, 60, has commanded at every possible level in the Air Force and in joint commands, including in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. He also helped build and lead the U.S. air campaign against the Islamic State militant group.

Brown is a career F-16 fighter pilot with more than 3,000 flight hours and command experience at all levels. He has broken barriers throughout his career. He served as the military's first Black Pacific Air Forces commander, where he led the nation's air strategy to counter China in the Indo-Pacific as Beijing rapidly militarized islands in the South China Sea and tested its bomber reach with flights near Guam.

Three years ago he became the first Black Air Force chief of staff, the service's top military officer, which also made him the first African American to lead any of the military branches.

For the last year Brown has been widely viewed as the frontrunner to replace Milley, as the Pentagon shifts from preparing for the major land wars of the past to deterring a potential future conflict with Beijing.

That effort could depend heavily upon the military's ability to rapidly meet China's rise in cyberwar, space, nuclear weapons and hypersonics, all areas Brown has sharply focused on for the last several years as the Air Force's top military leader, in order to modernize U.S. airpower for a 21st century fight.

Brown's confirmation, however, could be delayed. Alabama Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville has been blocking military nominations due to his objections over the Pentagon's policy that provides travel funds and support for troops and dependents to seek a range of reproductive health care, including abortions, if they are based in states where they are now illegal.

The Joint Chiefs chairman is the highest-ranking officer in the country and serves as the senior military adviser to the president, the defense secretary and the National Security Council. The chairman commands no troops and is not formally in the chain of command. But the chairman plays a critical role in all major military issues, from policy decisions to advice on major combat operations, and leads meetings with all the joint chiefs who head the various armed services.

As Air Force chief, Brown has pushed to modernize U.S. nuclear capabilities, including the soon-to-fly next-generation stealth bomber, and led the effort to shed aging warplanes so there's funding to move forward with a new fleet of unmanned systems. He's also supported the development of the U.S. Space Force, which received many of its first Guardians and capabilities from the Air Force.

—  
Associated Press writer Aamer Madhani contributed reporting.

## **Amanda Gorman's poem for Biden's inauguration banned by Florida school**

By FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A poem written for President Joe Biden's inauguration has been placed on a restricted list at a South Florida elementary school after one parent's complaint.

In a Facebook post on Tuesday, poet Amanda Gorman vowed to fight back. Her poem, "The Hill We Climb" was challenged by the parent of two students at Bob Graham Education Center in Miami Lakes, along with several books.

"I'm gutted," she wrote. "Robbing children of the chance to find their voices in literature is a violation of their right to free thought and free speech."



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Gorman, who at 17 became the country's National Youth Poet Laureate, said she wrote the poem "The Hill We Climb," so "all young people could see themselves in a historical moment," and that she's received countless letters and videos from children who were inspired to write their own poems.

She became an international sensation at Biden's inauguration, where she was the youngest poet to read at the ceremony since Robert Frost was invited to John F. Kennedy's in 1961.

In "The Hill We Climb," Gorman references everything from Biblical scripture to "Hamilton," and at times echoes the oratory of Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. With urgency and assertion she begins by asking, "Where can we find light/In this never-ending shade?" and used her own poetry and life story as an answer.

She said she planned to share a message of hope for Biden's inauguration without ignoring "the evidence of discord and division." She had completed a little more than half of the poem before Jan. 6 and the siege of the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump.

The poem and books are still available in the media center for middle school-aged children, Ana Rhodes, a spokesperson for the Miami-Dade school district, said in a statement.

While book bans are not new, they are happening much more frequently, especially in Florida — where Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis has championed policies that allow the censorship of books some have deemed inappropriate for children in schools, causing national uproar.

DeSantis, who entered the 2024 presidential race Wednesday, has leaned heavily into cultural divides on race, sexual orientation and gender as he gains support from conservative voters who decide Republican primary elections.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre condemned the decision to ban Gorman's poem, saying Biden and his administration stands with her.

"The President was proud to have Ms. Gorman, the youngest inaugural poet, speak at his inauguration," she said.

"Banning books is censorship, period," she added. "It limits American freedom — Americans' freedom — and we should all stand against that type of act."

Yecenia Martinez, principal of the K-8 school, which is part of the Miami-Dade public school system, did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment about the poem's ban. The school is named after Bob Graham, a former Democratic governor and U.S. senator from Florida.

Daily Salinas, the parent who objected to the poem and books, told the Miami Herald she's not "for eliminating or censoring any books." Salinas said she wants materials to be appropriate. It was not immediately clear what she objected to in Gorman's poem.

After her complaint, a materials review committee made up of three teachers, a library media specialist, a guidance counselor and the principal, determined one of the books in question was balanced and age appropriate, and would remain available for all students, the newspaper reported.

The other four were deemed "better suited" or "more appropriate" for middle school students. The books were to remain in the middle school section of the media center, the review concluded.

"And let's be clear: most of the forbidden works are by authors who have struggled for generations to get on the bookshelves," Gorman's post said. "The majority of these censored works are by queer and non-white voices."

## DeSantis launches GOP presidential campaign in Twitter announcement plagued by glitches

By STEVE PEOPLES, ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis launched his 2024 presidential campaign on Wednesday with firm words but a disastrous Twitter announcement that did little to counter criticism that the 44-year-old Republican may not be ready to take on former President Donald Trump.

While he tried to project confidence, DeSantis' unusual decision to announce his campaign in an online conversation with Twitter CEO Elon Musk ultimately backfired. The audio stream crashed repeatedly, mak-

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ing it virtually impossible for most users to hear the new presidential candidate in real time.

"American decline is not inevitable — it is a choice. And we should choose a new direction — a path that will lead to American revitalization," DeSantis said on the glitchy stream, racing through his conservative accomplishments. "I am running for president of the United States to lead our great American comeback."

While his critics in both parties delighted in the rocky start, DeSantis' announcement marks a new chapter in his extraordinary rise from little-known congressman to two-term governor to a leading figure in the nation's bitter fights over race, gender, abortion and other divisive issues.

DeSantis' path to the Republican presidential nomination will not be easy.

He enters the race looking up at Trump in early polls while facing serious questions about his far-right policies, his campaign-trail personality and his lack of relationships across the Republican ecosystem. He has generated significant interest among GOP primary voters by casting himself as a younger and more electable version of the 76-year-old former president.

He did not mention Trump even once in his discussion with Musk that ultimately spanned more than an hour. But he said he was ready to fight.

"Buckle up when I get in there, because the status quo is not acceptable," DeSantis said.

The ultimate Republican nominee is expected to face Democratic President Joe Biden on the general election ballot in November 2024.

DeSantis joins a field that also includes former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. Former Vice President Mike Pence is also considered a likely presidential candidate but has not yet announced a bid.

In choosing Twitter on Wednesday evening, DeSantis tried to take a page out of the playbook that helped turn businessman-TV celebrity Trump into a political star, but it didn't go as planned.

The online event started off with technical glitches that Musk said were due to "straining" servers because so many people were trying to listen to the audio-only event. More than 20 minutes passed beyond the scheduled start time with users getting kicked off, hearing microphone feedback and hold music and dealing with other technical problems.

DeSantis' Republican opponents were merciless.

"Failed soft launch? Check. Failed announcement? Double check. We look forward to Ron DeSantis' failed campaign," said Mark Harris, the lead strategist for Haley's super PAC.

Trump went further: "Wow! The DeSanctus TWITTER launch is a DISASTER! His whole campaign will be a disaster. WATCH!" he wrote on his social media site.

Still, DeSantis' campaign said it raised \$1 million online in the first hour after the announcement.

"We had a huge audience," DeSantis said in a subsequent interview on Fox News when asked about the technical difficulties. "It was the biggest they ever had. It did break the Twitter space. We're really excited about the enthusiasm."

DeSantis, who likely would not have become the Florida governor without Trump's endorsement, has adopted the former president's fiery personality, his populist policies and even some of his rhetoric and mannerisms.

Yet DeSantis has one thing his rival does not: a credible claim that he may be more electable than Trump, who faces multiple legal threats, including criminal charges in New York, and who presided over Republican losses in three consecutive national elections.

DeSantis, just six months ago, won his reelection in Florida by a stunning 19 percentage points — even as Republicans in many other states struggled. He also scored several major policy victories during the Republican-controlled Legislature's spring session.

"We need to win again," DeSantis said on Fox. "As Republicans, we've got to dispense with this culture of losing."

Aware of DeSantis' draw, Trump has been almost singularly focused on undermining his political appeal for months, attacking him at every opportunity. Trump and his team believe that DeSantis may be Trump's only legitimate threat for the nomination.

But the kitchen-sink attacks and nicknames won't be DeSantis' only hurdle.

He is a political heavyweight in Florida and a regular on Fox News, but allies acknowledge that most primary voters in other states don't know him well.

Despite his lengthy resume, friends and foes alike note that DeSantis struggles to display the campaign-trail charisma and quick-on-your-feet thinking that often defines successful candidates at the national level. He has gone to great lengths to avoid unscripted public appearances and media scrutiny while governor, which is difficult, if not impossible, as a presidential contender.

The Florida governor spent much of the day behind closed doors.

In an example of his level of media avoidance, his official Twitter account for governor posted a photo Wednesday afternoon of a bill signing surrounded by dozens of bikers for legislation to help reduce motorcycle accidents in Florida. Reporters were not notified of the event ahead of time.

Late Wednesday, DeSantis' office announced that he signed a broad election law bill that contains a provision allowing him to run for president without resigning his post as governor, exempting himself from a state rule known as "resign to run."

Would-be supporters also worry that DeSantis has refused to invest in relationships with party leaders or fellow elected officials, raising questions about his ability to build the coalition he would ultimately need to beat Trump. By contrast, Trump has scooped up an army of endorsements in key states, including Florida.

Beyond the primary, DeSantis' greatest longer-term challenge may rest with the far-right policies he enacted as governor as an unapologetic leader in what he calls his "war on woke."

The Florida governor sent dozens of immigrants from Texas to Martha's Vineyard off the Massachusetts coast to draw attention to the influx of Latin American immigrants trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. He signed and then expanded the 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.

DeSantis also signed a law this year allowing Florida residents to carry concealed firearms without a permit. He pushed new measures that critics warn would weaken press freedoms. He also took control of a liberal arts college that he believed was indoctrinating students with leftist ideology.

The governor's highest-profile political fight has come against the Florida entertainment giant Disney, which publicly opposed his "Don't Say Gay" law. In retaliation, DeSantis seized control of Disney World's governing body and installed loyalists who are threatening to take over park planning.

"We will never surrender to the woke mob and we will leave woke ideology in the dustbin of history," he said once the Twitter stream started working.

Peoples reported from New York. Izaguirre reported in Tallahassee, Florida. AP writers J.J. Cooper in Phoenix and Barbara Ortutay in San Francisco contributed.

## **3 ex-officers indicted in death of Black man seen on video being shocked with stun guns**

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

JACKSON, Mississippi. (AP) — A Mississippi grand jury has indicted two former police officers on murder charges and another ex-officer on a manslaughter charge in the death of a Black man seen on video being pinned down and repeatedly shocked with stun guns during a New Year's eve arrest.

Officials in the state capital of Jackson released body camera footage Wednesday that showed then-officers Avery Willis, Kenya McCarty and James Land struggling to handcuff Keith Murriel as he was apparently stunned numerous times over 10 minutes.

The officers had tackled Murriel while arresting him for allegedly trespassing at a hotel shortly before midnight on Dec. 31, 2022, authorities said.



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McCarty and Willis have been charged with second-degree murder, and Land with manslaughter, court records showed. All three were placed on administrative leave after the incident. McCarty was fired in February, and Willis and Land in April.

McCarty and Willis are Black, and Land is white, according to Melissa Faith Payne, a city spokesperson. Payne said she did not know whether any of the officers had attorneys as of Wednesday who could comment for them.

The video shows McCarty kneeling with her knee on Murriel's back before Murriel flips around, and the three officers attempt to lock his hands behind his back. The 41-year-old man is seen pleading with officers to stop shocking him with stun guns.

After handcuffing Murriel, officers then laid the man horizontally on the back seat of a patrol vehicle, the video showed. He died after being taken into custody.

Willis' body camera footage showed him talking to another officer after the encounter.

"I hope (he) is asleep. Because if he's asleep, it'll be a good ride," Willis said, using a racial slur to refer to Murriel. "It was funny seeing (his) feet in the air."

Jackson Mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba said at Wednesday's news conference that the city was now releasing body camera footage because a Mississippi Bureau of Investigation probe of the death had been completed. The officers — all ex-members of the Jackson Police Department, or JPD — were indicted on May 12.

"We believe we have seen actions that are excessive, disheartening and tragic," Lumumba said. "And we believe that is not representative of the vision of public safety that not only this administration wants to put forward, but we believe the men and women of JPD want to put forward."

The city released the footage less than one week after former Jackson Chief James Davis announced his retirement. After Murriel's death, Davis initially said the man had a "medical emergency." Lumumba said Davis' departure was not related to the incident.

Acting Police Chief Joseph Wade pledged transparency in speaking with reporters at Wednesday's appearance.

"I would ask the citizens of Jackson to continue to support the dedicated, hard-working men and women of the Jackson Police Department who put their lives on the line every single day," he said. "We will continue to have accountability measures in place, not only from the bottom up but from the top down as we move forward."

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Michael Goldberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mikergoldberg>.

## Target on the defensive after removing LGBTQ+-themed products

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO and DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Target once distinguished itself as being boldly supportive of the LGBTQ+ community.

Now that status is tarnished after it removed some LGBTQ+-themed products and relocated Pride Month displays to the back of stores in certain Southern locations in response to online complaints and in-store confrontations that it says threatened employees' well-being.

Target faces a second backlash from customers upset by the discount retailer's reaction to aggressive, anti-LGBTQ+ activism, which has also been sweeping through Republican state legislatures. Civil rights groups chided the company on Wednesday for caving to anti-LGBTQ+ customers who tipped over displays and expressed outrage over gender-fluid bathing suits.

"Target should put the products back on the shelves and ensure their Pride displays are visible on the floors, not pushed into the proverbial closet," Human Rights Campaign president Kelley Robinson said in a statement. "That's what the bullies want."

The uproar over Target's Pride Month marketing — and its response to critics — is just the latest example

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of how companies are struggling to cater to different groups of customers at a time of extreme cultural divides, particularly around transgender rights.

Bud Light is still dealing with the fallout from its attempt to broaden its customer base by sending transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney a beer can with her face on it, which Mulvaney then displayed in an Instagram post, igniting the backlash. Bud Light's parent company is tripling its U.S. marketing spending this summer as it tries to restore lost sales.

In Florida, Disney has been engaged in a legal battle with Gov. Ron DeSantis since expressing opposition to the state's classroom limits on discussing gender identity and sexual orientation.

Allen Adamson, the co-founder and managing partner of the marketing firm Metaforce, said Target should have thought through the potential for backlash and taken steps to avoid it, like varying the products it sells by region.

"The country is far less homogenous than it ever was," he said. "For any brand, it's not 'one size fits all' anymore."

Shares of Target, which is based in Minneapolis, fell nearly 3% on Wednesday.

According to a 2021 Gallup poll, 21% of people in Generation Z identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, compared with 3% of Baby Boomers. Gallup has also found that younger consumers are most likely to want brands to promote diversity and take a stand on social issues.

"Pulling back is the worst thing that they could have done," said Jake Bjorseth, who runs trndsttrs, an agency helping brands understand and reach Gen Z customers. "Not to expect potential backlash is to not understand what (LGBTQ+) members go through on a daily basis."

"Once they fold to the more extreme edges of the issue, then they've lost their footing," Adamson added. "If you can change a big brand just by knocking over a display, then they are on the defense, and you never win on the defense."

Target has long been seen as a trailblazer among retailers in the way it embraced LGBTQ+ rights and customers. It was among the first to showcase themed merchandise to honor Pride Month, which takes place in June, and it has been out front in developing relationships with LGBTQ+ suppliers.

It has also faced backlash. In 2016, when a national debate exploded over transgender rights, the company declared that "inclusivity is a core belief at Target" and said it supported transgender employees and customers using whichever restroom or fitting room "corresponds with their gender identity."

But even after being threatened with boycotts by some customers, Target announced months later that more stores would make available a single-toilet bathroom with a door that could be locked.

As recently as last year, law enforcement agencies were brought in to monitor a social media threat from a young Arizona man who said he was "leading the war" against Target for its Pride Month merchandise, and he encouraged others to take action.

But the company is operating in an even more politicized environment now.

There are close to 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills that have gone before state legislatures since the start of this year, according to the American Civil Liberties Union. At least 17 states have enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming care for transgender minors, though judges have temporarily blocked their enforcement in some states.

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

The controversy at Target has been exacerbated by several misleading videos circulating online. In some, people falsely claimed the retailer was selling "tuck-friendly" bathing suits for kids.

"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 said in a statement Tuesday.

The company pledged its continued support for the LGBTQ+ community and noted it is "standing with

them as we celebrate Pride Month and throughout the year.”

Indeed, it was business as usual at many Target locations on Wednesday.

At the Target in Topeka, Kansas, the Pride display remained up front, visible as shoppers passed a corral of shopping carts right after the entrance. It included Pride-themed clothing for kids, as well as T-shirts and women’s bathing suits for adults.

“I like that our local stores here have it front and center, when you walk in,” said Shay Hibler, a Topeka self-employed small business owner who was shopping with her 13-year-old daughter and supports LG-BTQ+ rights.

Megan Rusch, a Kansas City-area resident who is studying criminal justice at Washburn University in Topeka, was shopping at the same store and said while other locations might worry about their image, “This is a pretty diverse area.”

She said she believes it’s good for the stores to have the Pride displays so that LGBTQ+ customers feel included.

Her shopping companion, Blake Ferguson, a Colorado resident who is studying accounting and finance student at Ottawa University, added simply: “Love is love.”

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Durbin contributed from Detroit. AP Writer John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas contributed to this report.

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## After a year of long overdue Hollywood love, actor James Hong is still having his moment

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

Greeted with a standing ovation at the Screen Actors Guild Awards, James Hong could easily have just basked in the applause and moved on. But for the 94-year-old, the mostly Asian cast of “Everything Everywhere All at Once” winning best cast seemed like an opportunity for a stark reminder that Hollywood wasn’t always so open.

“It just came out of me that after all these years of working with producers and directors, and they were always saying, ‘Oh the Asian, the Chinese, are not good enough to play the leading role,’” Hong told The Associated Press recently. “But look at Michelle (Yeoh) and all these colleagues now coming forward to be recognized ... You can’t help but say ‘Look at us now.’”

Looking at Hong now, you will see perhaps the busiest nonagenarian in show biz. The last year for him has been a wild ride. A year ago he finally received his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Shortly after, “Everything Everywhere All at Once” and the overwhelming response propelled the actor into every major awards event. He got to see the movie collect seven Oscars, including a historic best actress win for Yeoh. Host Jimmy Kimmel even took a moment to pay tribute to him.

Viewers will soon be able to hear Hong in “Gremlins: Secrets of the Mogwai,” an animated prequel series of the movie franchise. Episodes began streaming Tuesday on Max (formerly HBO Max). He also appears in an episode of the new Disney+ show, “American Born Chinese,” which also premiered this week and is producer on the upcoming movie “Patsy Lee and the Keepers of the 5 Kingdoms.”

It’s as if the universe is trying to make up for all the racial discrimination the Asian American icon endured over the years.

Born in Minneapolis, Hong originally studied civil engineering in college. After serving in the Korean War, he decided in 1953 to move to Hollywood. He got his break on Groucho Marx’s quiz show, “You Bet Your Life.” Small film roles opposite actors like Clark Gable followed. But so did roles that were racist tropes.

In the series “The New Adventures of Charlie Chan,” Hong played the son of the titular Chinese detective. He had to stomach watching a white lead actor “put on fake eye pieces” so that his eyes would look more “Asian.”



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"Then he would just talk in a very stoic pattern that's supposedly Chinese," Hong recalled. "That irritated me for many, many years."

A lot of his early roles reflected the limited options for Asian actors at the time: workers in laundries, restaurants on railroad lines.

Those "Asian cliches" are far behind him now. He is also helping to revisit some and flesh them out.

Sam Register, president of Warner Bros. Animation, had the idea to do a prequel to "Gremlins" and gave showrunner Tze Chun the reins to come up with ideas. Chun wanted to expand on the family history of Mr. Wing, the store owner played by Keye Luke who houses original Gremlin Gizmo in the 1984 flick. In this animated take, viewers will see Mr. Wing as a little boy in 1920s Shanghai encountering the furry creatures who shouldn't eat after midnight. Hong, who was actually friends with Luke, voices Sam's sly and spunky grandfather.

Hong's "iconic voice" was at the top of the show's wish list. There's something about his delivery that is "equal parts gravitas and incredible humor," Chun said.

"It's never what you think it's going to be, which is what's so exciting about it," Chun said. "It's like you can try to hear it when you're writing it on the page. But then when he does it, he brings that like unique spin to it that is just out of left field. And, frankly, just makes it better."

"Secrets of the Mogwai," which retains some of the dark and funny elements of the movie, also serves as a "Mulan" voice cast reunion. Ming-Na Wen, B.D. Wong, George Takei and Hong were all part of the 1998 Disney animated feature. The "Mulan" connection was a complete coincidence.

"We just kind of went out to our first choices," Chun said. "These are people that I've looked up to like for my entire life."

Chun is one of several Asian American film directors and showrunners who have gotten emotional seeing Hong celebrated. Melvin Mar, one of the producers of "American Born Chinese," teared up when he spoke to him right before his Walk of Fame ceremony.

"That guy is a legend beyond legend," Mar said. "He was just so funny and quick and just a pleasure to have on set. Just the sweetest guy."

Gene Luen Yang, author of the "American Born Chinese" graphic novel and also a producer on the show, says Hong's life epitomizes Asian American history.

"His journey in Hollywood really is symbolic of us as Asian Americans. The kind of roles that he was offered in the beginning to now having his own Hollywood star, it shows the kind of progress that we've made," Yang said.

Hong is grateful that he has been around to witness how anti-Asian discrimination and whitewashing are no longer as tolerated. With new attitudes and new technology like streaming services, there are also more acting gigs than he thought possible.

"I'm going to be thinking of another project to do. Why? Because online and all these streaming things have created a whole new different field," he said. "You don't have to make a whole feature. You can make a something 10 minutes or half an hour or hour long and still get it so-called displayed."

With over 650 acting credits including 200-something voiceovers, is there anything Hong wants to conquer? Yes, but not in acting. He fantasizes about a James Hong comic book series with his brand of sarcastic humor.

"We'll see," Hong said. "I'm not going to stop working. My wife wants me to go to a retirement home soon, but I don't think I'm fit for that. I wouldn't know what to do."

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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>

## Microsoft: State-sponsored Chinese hackers could be laying groundwork for disruption

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — State-backed Chinese hackers have been targeting U.S. critical infrastructure and could be laying the technical groundwork for the potential disruption of critical communications between the U.S. and Asia during future crises, Microsoft said Wednesday.

The targets include sites in Guam, where the U.S. has a major military presence, the company said.

Hostile activity in cyberspace — from espionage to the advanced positioning of malware for potential future attacks — has become a hallmark of modern geopolitical rivalry.

Microsoft said in a blog post that the state-sponsored group of hackers, which it calls Volt Typhoon, has been active since mid-2021. It said organizations affected by the hacking — which seeks persistent access — are in the communications, manufacturing, utility, transportation, construction, maritime, information technology and education sectors.

Separately, the National Security Agency, the FBI, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and their counterparts from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Britain published a joint advisory sharing technical details on “the recently discovered cluster of activity.”

A Microsoft spokesman would not say why the software giant was making the announcement now or whether it had recently seen an uptick in targeting of critical infrastructure in Guam or at adjacent U.S. military facilities there, which include a major air base.

John Hultquist, chief analyst at Google’s Mandiant cybersecurity intelligence operation, called Microsoft’s announcement “potentially a really important finding.”

“We don’t see a lot of this sort of probing from China. It’s rare,” Hultquist said. “We know a lot about Russian and North Korean and Iranian cyber-capabilities because they have regularly done this.” China has generally withheld use of the kinds of tools that could be used to seed, not just intelligence-gathering capabilities, but also malware for disruptive attacks in an armed conflict, he added.

Microsoft said the intrusion campaign placed a “strong emphasis on stealth” and sought to blend into normal network activity by hacking small-office network equipment, including routers. It said the intruders gained initial access through internet-facing Fortiguard devices, which are engineered to use machine-learning to detect malware.

The maker of Fortiguard devuces, Fortinet, did not immediately respond to an email seeking further details.

“For years, China has conducted aggressive cyber operations to steal intellectual property and sensitive data from organizations around the globe,” said CISA Director Jen Easterly, urging mitigation of affected networks to prevent possible disruption. Bryan Vorndran, the FBI cyber division assistant director, called the intrusions “unacceptable tactics” in the same statement.

Tensions between Washington and Beijing — which the U.S. national security establishment considers its main military, economic and strategic rival — have been on the rise in recent months.

Those tensions spiked last year after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to democratically governed Taiwan, leading China, which claims the island as its territory, to launch military exercises around Taiwan.

U.S.-China relations became further strained earlier this year after the U.S. shot down a Chinese spy balloon that had crossed the United States.

## Teen dies during apparent social media stunt on Los Angeles bridge, police say

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A 17-year-old boy fell to his death this weekend while climbing a Los Angeles bridge in an apparent social media stunt, police said.

Police were sent to the 6th Street Viaduct around 2 a.m. Saturday and found the boy, who was pronounced dead at a hospital. His name wasn’t immediately released.

The teen slipped and fell “when climbing upon one of the arches, in order to post, apparently, a social media broadcast,” Police Chief Michel Moore said Tuesday during a meeting of the Los Angeles Police Commission.

The bridge opened last July. The \$588-million span, which replaced an 84-year-old Art Deco span, runs 3,500 feet (1,066.80 meters) over the concrete-lined Los Angeles River and connects downtown to the historic Eastside.

The bridge, which has thousands of LED lights and views of LA’s skyline, is the largest and most expensive span ever built in the city. It was designed to become a city landmark.

But police closed the bridge several times after it quickly became a hotspot for street racing, graffiti and illegal takeovers that drew hundreds of spectators to watch drivers perform dangerous stunts in their vehicles.

Social media stunts abounded as well — in one case, a man sat in a barber’s chair for a haircut in the middle of the lanes.

A man was also fatally shot on the bridge in January during unauthorized filming of a music video.

“Tragically we see that location, while it has spawned a great deal of pride in Los Angeles, it has also unfortunately served as a backdrop now for tragedies such as this,” Moore told the Police Commission. “Our added patrols will continue at that location ... to counter such reckless actions.”

## **Typhoon Mawar flips cars, cuts power on Guam as scope of damage emerges in US Pacific territory**

By GRACE GARCES BORDALLO and SARAH BRUMFIELD Associated Press

HAGATNA, Guam (AP) — Powerful Typhoon Mawar smashed the U.S. territory of Guam and continued lashing the Pacific island with high winds and heavy rain Thursday, knocking down trees, walls and power lines and creating a powerful storm surge that threatened to wash out low-lying areas.

The typhoon, the strongest to hit the territory of roughly 150,000 people since 2002, briefly made landfall Wednesday night as a Category 4 storm at Andersen Air Force Base on the northern tip of the island, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Patrick Doll.

The storm strengthened to 150 mph (241 kph) winds the following morning, regaining its status as a super typhoon, according to the weather service. Mawar was forecast to intensify further.

As it churned slowly over the island, the typhoon flipped cars and ripped branches from trees. At what felt like its peak intensity Wednesday night, the winds screeched and howled like jets flying overhead and rainwater rushed into some homes.

Videos posted on social media showed fallen trees, an overturned pickup truck, solar panels flying through the air, parts of a hotel’s exterior wall crumbling to the ground and exposing rebar, and storm surge and waves crashing through coastal reefs.

The early scope of the damage was difficult to ascertain, with power and internet failures making communication with the far-flung island difficult. The governor and lieutenant governor were making their way after daylight arrived to assess the damage, weather service meteorologist Landon Aydlett.

“It looks like toothpicks,” Aydlett said. “It looks like a scene from the movie ‘Twister,’ with things just thrashed apart. Lots of Guam is dealing with a major mess that’s going to take weeks to clean up.”

J. Asprer, a police officer in the Dededo precinct in northern Guam, said before dawn that he had not received any reports of injuries but several police cars and personal vehicles had been damaged by debris, and uprooted trees made some roads impassable. Most of the calls overnight came from worried people off-island who were unable to reach family members, Asprer said.

“We told them we’ll have to wait until the storm clears up a bit,” he said.

Ray Leon Guerrero, an assistant in the mayor’s office in Barrigada, a village of about 9,000 people in central Guam, stayed at the office overnight fielding calls from residents and heard objects slamming into the roof and outside walls constantly.



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"Oh man. It was pretty noisy," he said.

The slow-moving storm continued to batter the island early Thursday with maximum sustained winds of 140 mph (225 kph), and it was expected to intensify through Friday, the weather service said.

In a sign of how much help Guam might need, the Navy ordered the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier strike group to head to the island to assist in the recovery effort, according to a U.S. official. The Nimitz, along with the USS Bunker Hill, a cruiser, and the USS Wayne E. Meyer, a destroyer, were south of Japan and expected to arrive in Guam in three or four days, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss ship movements not yet made public.

The weather service said the storm made landfall at around 9 p.m. Wednesday in Guam, which is about 3,800 miles (6,115 kilometers) west of Hawaii and 1,600 miles (1,575 kilometers) east of the Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

"It was on land for about 30 to 35 minutes before it moved back offshore," Doll said by phone from the weather service's office in Tiyan, Guam.

Peak winds at the office reached 105 mph (169 kph), but the office later lost its wind sensors, Aydlett said. The building vibrated with a "constant, low rumbling," and its doors and windows shook, he said.

By early Thursday, Mawar was centered 75 miles (121 kilometers) northwest of the island and 85 miles (137 kilometers) west of Rota, Guam's neighbor to the north, moving west-northwest at 8 mph (13 kph).

Power was knocked out for the entire island of Rota, the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. said late Wednesday. Rota has about 2,500 residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

In Tumon, on Guam's northeastern shore, winds tore a granite countertop from a hotel's outdoor bar and tossed it 4 feet (about a meter) in the air. Guests scrambled to stack chairs to brace the doors, and windows buckled and creaked.

Tinian and Saipan, in the Northern Marianas, were under tropical storm warnings. Some people in those areas have been living in temporary shelters or tents since Category 5 Super Typhoon Yutu in 2018.

Mawar, a Malaysian word that means "rose," might threaten Taiwan next week.

Many communities on the 212-square-mile (549-square-kilometer) island had lost power by Wednesday 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 those living in coastal, low-lying and flood-prone areas to evacuate to higher ground. The highest point on the island is Mount Lamlam in the southwest at 1,334 feet (406 meters). But much of the beachfront tourist district of Tamuning, where many resorts are located, is close to sea level.

Leon 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."

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 from areas that were expected to be affected.

The military said it moved its ships out to sea as a standard precaution. It also sent aircraft off the island or placed them in protective hangars.

About 6,800 U.S. service members are assigned to Guam, according to the Pentagon.

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Brumfield reported from Washington. AP Science Writer Seth Borenstein in Kensington, Maryland, and Associated Press writers Lolita C. Baldor in Washington, Jennifer Sinco Kelleher and Audrey McAvoy in Honolulu, Mark Thiessen in Anchorage, Alaska, and Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles contributed.

## Who's behind the attack on a Russian region bordering 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.

One group claiming responsibility for the strike, the Russian Volunteer Corps, denied Wednesday it had lost any men and said its action had exposed Russian border weaknesses.

The conflicting versions of events reflect the role of disinformation and propaganda in the 15-month war.

Ukraine denied any involvement in the skirmishes Monday and Tuesday. It blamed two Russian groups, including the RVC, that claim to be volunteers fighting in coordination with 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.

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 RVC and the Freedom of Russia Legion — 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.

In early March, the RVC claimed responsibility for an incursion in Russia's Bryansk region, another border area.

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.

Denis Nikitin, a well-known Russian far-right figure, described himself as commander of the RVC when he met reporters Wednesday in Ukraine's northern Sumy region bordering Russia.

He described the group as "a right-wing, conservative, military, semi-political organization," saying its fight is against Putin and his state apparatus.

He declined to say how many soldiers were involved in the Belgorod raid.

Nikitin said that inside Ukraine, the RVC's actions are planned with the knowledge and assistance of Ukraine's military, but anything outside the country's borders "is our decision."

The RVC sources its own military equipment, he added.

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.

### 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."

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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 contractor, 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.



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

## Danish masters prepped canvases with leftovers from brewing beer

By MADDIE BURAKOFF AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Danish painters in the 19th century may have turned to an unusual source for some of their supplies: breweries.

Researchers examined paintings from the Danish Golden Age and found traces of yeast and grains. That suggests painters were turning to byproducts from local breweries to prepare canvases, they reported Wednesday in the journal *Science Advances*.

Study author Cecil Krarup Andersen said they went into the project looking for glue made from animals. "Then, by surprise, we found something completely different," said Andersen, a paintings conservator at the Royal Danish Academy.

The brewing leftovers would have been spread over the canvases as a paste, creating a smooth surface and preventing the paint from seeping through, Andersen explained. Today, this priming process is usually done with a white mixture known as gesso.

The authors said that knowing what's on the canvases will help in conserving them.

In the study, scientists took a look at works by two of the first master painters to come out of Denmark — Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, considered the father of Danish painting, and Christen Schiellerup Kobke.

To get a peek underneath their scenes of bobbing ships and family portraits, researchers used pieces of canvas that had been trimmed off the paintings in an earlier conservation project.

The team analyzed the little strips to pick out what kinds of proteins were in them, explained lead author Fabiana Di Gianvincenzo, a heritage scientist now at Slovenia's University of Ljubljana.

Their results showed that seven of the 10 paintings contained mixes of yeast, wheat, rye and barley proteins — some of the key ingredients for a good Danish ale.

Beer itself was a precious commodity at the time — it was even used to pay salaries — so artists probably weren't pouring actual drinks onto their work, Di Gianvincenzo said. Instead, the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, which prepared canvases for its artists, likely bought leftover mash from local breweries.

This kind of recycling wasn't uncommon, Andersen added: Artists also used bits of sails for their canvases and boiled leather scraps for their glue. Records from the time also suggested that beer products may have been used in the arts.

The research links two elements of Danish culture, Andersen said.

"What represents Denmark? Well, beer is one of the first things that some people think about," Andersen said. "But then also, this particular time and these particular paintings are deeply rooted in our story as a nation."

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## Fuzzy falcon chicks who nest at Michigan State football stadium get tracking bands

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Newly fitted with tracking bands, four peregrine falcon chicks named Pickles, Muhammad, Egbert and Swooper have a nest in one of the best seats — make that perches — at Michigan State University's football stadium.

Scientists and college students on Wednesday carefully attached metal tracking bands to the fluffy white chicks' legs. At about a month old, they're still not much bigger than a pigeon and can't yet fly away from

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their manmade nest atop Spartan Stadium. But the boisterous birds already have sharp talons and beaks, so the banding process was handled with care.

The chicks weren't too happy about the experience, writhing and squawking. Once a tag was applied to a chick's leg, the bird was placed back in a box. And the squawking ceased.

The chicks have become celebrities in East Lansing and around the globe, thanks to a web camera and livestream by the school's Fisheries and Wildlife Club, which installed the nest box on the stadium roof last year. The chicks could be seen resting calmly in their nest later Wednesday, under the watchful eye of a parent.

Club members helped band the chicks on the stadium's 8th floor near the press box, overseen by Chad Fedewa, a wildlife biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Moments earlier, Fedewa and Jim Schneider with the university's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife journeyed up to the roof to retrieve the chicks despite their parents — Freyja and Apollo — angrily screeching and hovering above. They were named in a Twitter contest, and a Michigan elementary school decided on the chicks' monikers.

"I've seen what they do when you have to get to their chicks. Fortunately, they didn't get too close," said Schneider, who held an umbrella aloft in case mom or dad made a move toward the humans tasked with retrieving their offspring.

"They make a lot of noise, but they're not too intimidating," he said, adding that there were "a couple of stoops in there," referring to a falcon's hunting dive.

Peregrine falcons are considered the world's fastest birds. They can reach 200 mph (322 kph) during a dive.

The American birds were declared endangered in the 1970s due to ingesting prey that was poisoned by pesticides. Recovery programs have brought the raptor back from potential extinction.

Now that the chicks are tagged, researchers will be able to keep tabs on the birds' eventual migration patterns and survival rate. Until then, viewers at home can follow along as the baby falcons grow up.

"It's really gratifying to see people get involved with it and make the same personal connections that we do," said Molly Engelman, the club's president and a senior from Plymouth, Michigan. "It's like they're our children, a little bit."

## **Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton likely broke laws, Republican investigation finds**

By PAUL J. WEBER and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A Republican-led investigation on Wednesday accused Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton of committing multiple crimes in office — including felonies — during an extraordinary public airing of scandal and alleged lawbreaking that plunged one of the GOP's conservative stars into new political and legal risk.

For more than three hours, investigators presented findings alleging Paxton sought to hide an affair, misused his office to help a donor, skirted protocols "grossly outside" norms and built a culture of fear and retaliation in his office. Investigators told the GOP-led House General Investigating Committee that there was evidence that Paxton repeatedly broke the law over the years, including by misusing official information, abusing his official capacity and retaliation.

The dramatic turn of events in the Texas Capitol unleashed a new test of Paxton's durability in a way he has not previously confronted despite a felony indictment in 2015 and an ongoing FBI investigation. The House committee's investigation has been quietly going on for months and did not come to light until Tuesday.

The committee ended Wednesday's hearing without acting on the findings. The panel is led by Republican state Rep. Andrew Murr, who afterward declined to discuss next steps or whether a recommendation to impeach or censure Paxton was possible.

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The legislative session ends Monday and any action against Paxton would have to be taken by then, unless GOP Gov. Greg Abbott calls a special session. In Texas, unlike in the U.S. government, an official who's impeached by the House is suspended from office pending the outcome of a Senate trial. The governor can appoint an interim to fill the vacant post.

Wednesday's hearing amounted to a remarkable rebuke from Republicans in a building where Paxton has long maintained defenders and allies, including Abbott, who lauded Paxton while swearing him in to a third term in January.

Paxton called the hours of testimony by investigators "false," accused the committee of misleading the public and attacked Republican House Speaker Dade Phelan as a "liberal." Paxton also has claimed repeatedly since Tuesday that Phelan has been drunk on the job, something Phelan's office has brushed off as an attempt by Paxton to "save face."

"It is not surprising that a committee appointed by liberal Speaker Dade Phelan would seek to disenfranchise Texas voters and sabotage my work as Attorney General," Paxton said in a written statement.

The hearing came as Paxton is seeking legislative approval for more than \$3 million in taxpayer dollars to settle a whistleblower lawsuit with top aides who accused him of corruption. The whistleblowers' lawyers on Wednesday thanked the committee for recognizing that their clients "suffered real harm in retaliation" for accusing Paxton and called on lawmakers to fund the deal.

Accusations laid out by investigators surround actions by Paxton that previously have been uncovered by reporters or disclosed in court records. Despite the cloud that has hung over Paxton, he has remained popular with GOP voters in Texas and elevated his profile nationally through lawsuits against President Joe Biden's administration and through his defense of former President Donald Trump.

Paxton's former staff members reported him to the FBI in 2020 on accusations of breaking the law to help a campaign contributor. The donor, Austin real estate developer Nate Paul, employed a woman with whom Paxton acknowledged having had an extramarital affair. In February, the Justice Department's Washington-based Public Integrity Section took over the federal criminal investigation of Paxton.

Since April, the House committee has issued at least 12 subpoenas for testimony and information to people and entities as part of its probe, according to meeting minutes that note the parties were left anonymous to "prevent reprisal and retaliation."

During Wednesday's hearing, state Rep. Ann Johnson, a Houston Democrat and vice chair of the committee, asked whether "it was fair to say" that the attorney general's office "was effectively hijacked for an investigation by Nate Paul through the attorney general."

"That would be my opinion," replied attorney Erin Epley, one of the investigators.

Lawyers for Paul did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Each of Paxton's accusers later quit or was fired. In the years since, his agency has come unmoored by disarray behind the scenes, with seasoned lawyers quitting over practices they say aim to slant legal work, reward loyalists and drum out dissent. But until now, GOP lawmakers had shown little appetite for looking into Paxton.

Among the new revelations Wednesday were details of Paxton's high-end home renovation, which previously came under FBI scrutiny, and that his affair continued longer than previously known.

It ended "briefly" in 2019 when Paxton's wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton, found out, "but then it resumed and was underway again by 2020," said Epley, a former state and federal prosecutor.

That year, Paxton renovated his million-dollar Austin home. Epley said an attorney general's employee overheard Paxton telling a contractor that his wife wanted granite countertops. According to Epley, the contractor replied that the counters would cost \$20,000 and said, "I'll have to check with Nate."

Bleiberg reported from Dallas.



## Taking a daily multivitamin appears to boost brains of adults over 60, but more study is needed

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Millions of American adults take daily multivitamins, even though the pills have not been shown to prevent ailments like heart disease or cancer and experts say it's better to get nutrients from food.

The latest research looks at whether taking a daily vitamin can have an effect on memory. The study found multivitamins may boost memory function in some people, by the equivalent of three years of normal, age-related memory loss.

While the study isn't comprehensive enough to warrant broad recommendations to take vitamins, it provides important information about their use, said Adam Brickman, the Columbia University professor of neuropsychology who led the study.

"Well-designed research studies are showing that there might indeed be some benefits " to taking multivitamins, he said.

Further study is needed to determine exactly which nutrients might make a difference.

Here's what to know about the new research published Wednesday in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

### ABOUT THE STUDY

Researchers at New York's Columbia University and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston tracked more than 3,500 people over age 60 for three years.

The participants were randomly assigned to take a daily multivitamin or a dummy pill. They were evaluated annually for three years with internet-based exams that measure memory function.

One test gave participants a list of 20 words, one at a time, for 3 seconds each, then asked them to type all of the words they remembered immediately and after 15 minutes. The exam measured the function of the hippocampus, an area in the brain that controls learning and memory, Brickman said.

After one year, participants who took daily vitamins had better memory function, moving from correctly recalling 7.10 words at the start to 7.81 words. Participants who got dummy pills went from recalling 7.21 words to 7.65 words. The researchers calculated that the difference amounted to an improvement in memory equal to about three years of normal, age-related change. That improvement was maintained for at least the remaining two years of the study and was more pronounced in people with heart disease, the study found.

The multivitamins may work by providing micronutrients that enhance function of the hippocampus, Brickman said. This is the second large study conducted by the researchers to show that memory improved in older adults who took daily multivitamins.

The study was funded by the National Institutes of Health and also by Mars Edge, a division of Mars, which makes candy, pet food and other products; and Pfizer and Haleon, both makers of multivitamins.

### ABOUT MULTIVITAMIN USE

About 60% of U.S. adults and about 35% of children take daily vitamins, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The pills are part of nearly \$56 billion Americans spend each year on dietary supplements.

U.S. dietary guidelines recommend that Americans should get their nutrients from food, unless they have specific needs or are advised to take vitamins by a health care provider. Vitamins can provide missing nutrients in the diet, but taking high amounts can result in side effects ranging from stomach upset to serious heart and liver problems.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, a national advisory group, said last year that current evidence is "insufficient" to assess the risks and benefits of multivitamin supplements to prevent heart disease and cancer. The group recommended against beta carotene and vitamin E for that purpose.

### WHAT IT MEANS

The new study shows that vitamin pills may provide missing micronutrients, especially in the diets of older adults, said Robert Hackman, a research nutritionist with the University of California, Davis, who was

not involved in the research. About a third of adults older than 60 fail to get adequate vitamins, minerals and fiber from food alone.

Still, the Alzheimer's Association does not recommend the use of multivitamins to reduce the risk of cognitive decline in older adults.

Most of the participants in the new study were white and college-educated, with access and ability to take internet exams, noted Heather Snyder, vice president of medical and scientific relations for the Alzheimer's Association.

"It would be important to see independent confirmation of these results, in particular in more representative study populations," she said.

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## Who is the head of the Russian mercenary group bashing the military's role in Ukraine?

By The Associated Press undefined

The head of the Russian private military contractor Wagner returned to a familiar theme this week — bashing the country's military leadership for failures in the war in Ukraine. That's something only a select few can do publicly without drawing retribution from the Kremlin.

The comments by Yevgeny Prigozhin underscored his long-running feud with the Defense Ministry.

This time, however, they came as Moscow could boast of a rare, badly needed victory in the 15-month war in Ukraine, when Prigozhin and his fighters raised a Russian flag in the eastern city of Bakhmut after a long and bloody battle.

He turned that moment of triumph into an opportunity just days later to moan about Russian failures in Ukraine.

A look at the 61-year-old Prigozhin and Wagner's role in the war:

### WHAT DID PRIGOZHIN SAY?

Using blunt and coarse language in an almost 80-minute video interview Tuesday to a pro-Kremlin political strategist, Prigozhin said that "somehow nothing is working out for us" in Ukraine.

He returned to a Kremlin line at the start of the war in February 2022. At the start of the war, President Vladimir Putin tried to justify the invasion by falsely saying it was a campaign against "Nazis," even though Ukraine has a Jewish president who lost relatives in the Holocaust and who heads a Western-backed, democratically elected government.

"We came rudely (into Ukraine), walked with our boots on all over Ukraine in search of Nazis. While looking for Nazis, we bumped off everyone we could," Prigozhin said, citing retreats from areas around Kyiv and the southern city of Kherson.

Russia failed to "demilitarize" Ukraine, one of the goals stated by Putin on the first day of the invasion, but instead turned Kyiv's army into "one of the strongest" in the world with more quality equipment and training.

Commenting on Bakhmut, Prigozhin said he lost about 20,000 men from his private army.

### WHAT'S PRIGOZHIN'S BACKGROUND?

Prigozhin was convicted of robbery and assault in 1981, and sentenced to 12 years in prison. Following his release, he opened a restaurant business in St. Petersburg in the 1990s. It was in this capacity that he got to know Putin, then the city's deputy mayor.

Prigozhin used that connection to develop a catering business and won lucrative Russian government contracts that earned him the nickname "Putin's chef." He later expanded into other areas, including media and an infamous internet "troll factory" that led to his indictment in the U.S. for meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

In January, Prigozhin acknowledged founding, leading and financing the shadowy Wagner company.

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## WHERE HAS WAGNER OPERATED?

Wagner was first seen in action in eastern Ukraine soon after a separatist conflict erupted there in April 2014, in the weeks following Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

While backing the separatist insurgency in the Donbas, Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, Russia denied sending its own weapons and troops there despite ample evidence to the contrary. Engaging private contractors in the fighting allowed Moscow to maintain a degree of deniability.

Prigozhin's company was called Wagner after the nickname of its first commander, Dmitry Utkin, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Russian military's special forces. It soon established a reputation for brutality and ruthlessness.

Wagner personnel also deployed to Syria, where Russia supported President Bashar Assad's government in a civil war. In Libya, they fought alongside forces of commander Khalifa Hifter. The group has also operated in the Central African Republic and Mali.

Prigozhin has reportedly used Wagner's deployment to Syria and African countries to secure lucrative mining contracts. U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland said in January the company was using its access to gold and other resources in Africa to fund operations in Ukraine.

Some Russian media alleged that Wagner was involved in the 2018 killings of three Russian journalists in the Central African Republic who were investigating the group's activities. The slayings remain unsolved.

## WHAT IS WAGNER'S REPUTATION?

Western countries and U.N. experts have accused Wagner mercenaries of human rights abuses throughout Africa, including in the Central African Republic, Libya and Mali.

In 2021, the European Union accused the group of "serious human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and killings," and of carrying out "destabilizing activities" in the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria and Ukraine.

Video has surfaced purporting to show some of the activities that have contributed to Wagner's fearsome reputation.

A 2017 online video showed a group of armed people, reportedly Wagner contractors, torturing a Syrian and beating him to death with a sledgehammer before mutilating and burning his body. Russian authorities ignored requests by the media and rights activists to investigate.

In 2022, another video showed a former Wagner contractor beaten to death with a sledgehammer after he allegedly fled to the Ukrainian side and was repatriated. Despite public outrage and demands for an investigation, the Kremlin turned a blind eye.

## WHAT'S WAGNER'S ROLE IN UKRAINE?

Wagner has taken an increasingly visible role in the war as regular Russian troops have suffered heavy attrition and lost territory in humiliating setbacks.

Prigozhin toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising pardons if they survived a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner.

In the interview this week, he said he had recruited 50,000 convicts, about 10,000 of whom were killed in Bakhmut; a similar number of his own fighters have died there.

He said he had 50,000 men at his disposal "in the best times," with about 35,000 on the front lines at all times. He didn't say whether these numbers included convicts.

The U.S. has estimated Wagner had about 50,000 personnel fighting in Ukraine, including 10,000 contractors and 40,000 convicts. A U.S. official says nearly half of the 20,000 Russian forces killed in Ukraine since December have been Wagner's troops in Bakhmut.

The U.S. assesses that Wagner is spending about \$100 million a month in the fight. In December, Washington accused North Korea of supplying weapons, including rockets and missiles, to the Russian company in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions. Both Wagner and North Korea denied the reports.

## HOW HAS PRIGOZHIN CRITICIZED RUSSIA'S MILITARY?

If the U.S. accusation is true, Wagner's reach for North Korean weapons may reflect its long-running dispute with the Russian military leadership, which dates to the company's creation.



Prigozhin claimed full credit in January for capturing the Donetsk region salt-mining town of Soledar and accused the Russian Defense Ministry of trying to steal Wagner's glory. He has repeatedly complained the Russian military failed to supply Wagner with sufficient ammunition to capture Bakhmut and threatened to pull out his men.

Troops purported to be Wagner contractors in Ukraine recorded a video in which they showered the chief of the Russian military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, with curses and accusations of failing to provide ammunition.

Prigozhin also has singled out Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for withering criticism, accusing military leaders of incompetence. His frequent complaints are unprecedented for Russia's tightly controlled political system, in which only Putin could air such criticism.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday that Prigozhin's remarks critical of the war "could be a sort of morbid way of him ... claiming credit for whatever they've been able to achieve in Bakhmut, but also trying to publicly embarrass the Ministry of Defense further that the cost was borne in blood and treasure by Wagner, and not by the Russian military."

Once a shadowy figure, Prigozhin has increasingly raised his public profile, boasting almost daily about Wagner's purported victories, sardonically mocking his enemies and complaining about the military brass.

Asked recently about a media comparison of him with Grigory Rasputin, a mystic who gained fatal influence over Russia's last czar by claiming to have the power to cure his son's hemophilia, Prigozhin snapped: "I don't stop blood, but I spill blood of the enemies of our Motherland."

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## Head of Russian private army Wagner says more than 20,000 of his troops died in Bakhmut battle

By SUSIE BLANN and JOANNA KOZLOWSKA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The head of the Russian private army Wagner has again broken with the Kremlin line on Ukraine, saying its goal of demilitarizing the country has backfired, acknowledging Russian troops have killed civilians and agreeing with Western estimates that he's lost more than 20,000 men in the battle for Bakhmut.

Yevgeny Prigozhin said about half of those who died in the eastern Ukrainian city were Russian convicts recruited for the 15-month-old war. His figures stood in stark contrast to Moscow's widely disputed claims that just over 6,000 of its troops were killed throughout the war as of January. By comparison, official Soviet troop losses in the 1979-89 Afghanistan war were 15,000.

Ukraine hasn't said how many of its soldiers have died since Russia's full-scale invasion began in February 2022.

White House officials said Wednesday that Prigozhin's comments were in line with their own estimates that Russian losses have accelerated. The White House estimated this month that Russian forces had suffered 100,000 casualties, including 20,000 killed in fighting, since December. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said then that about half of those killed were Wagner forces.

Analysts believe many of those killed in the nine-month fight for Bakhmut were Russian convicts with little military training.

Prigozhin — himself a former convict — has frequently criticized Russian military officials for not supplying his troops with enough ammunition. He also has questioned their tactics, commitment and leadership capabilities, and complained they haven't sufficiently credited his forces for battlefield successes.

He's highlighted his forces' sacrifices, and on Saturday touted what he claimed was the capture of the city of Bakhmut.

In an interview published late Tuesday with Konstantin Dolgov, a pro-Kremlin political strategist, Prigozhin went even further in his criticism — questioning some of Russian President Vladimir Putin's rationale for

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the war. Prigozhin said Russia's goal of "demilitarizing" Ukraine has backfired because Kyiv's military has become stronger with Western weapons and training.

In invading Ukraine, Putin also cited the need to increase Russia's security and prevent Ukraine from joining NATO. Since the war began, Ukraine has applied to join NATO, and cross-border attacks into Russia itself have increased.

In Washington, Kirby speculated Wednesday on Prigozhin's motives.

"And it's possible that this could be a sort of morbid way of him ... claiming credit for whatever they've been able to achieve in Bakhmut, but also trying to publicly embarrass the Ministry of Defense further that the cost was borne in blood and treasure by Wagner, and not by the Russian military."

In the interview, Prigozhin also challenged Moscow's vehement denials that Russian forces had killed civilians.

In what it says is likely a low estimate, the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights says that from February 2022 until early April 2023, it recorded 22,734 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 8,490 killed and 14,244 injured.

Prigozhin, a wealthy businessman with longtime links to Putin, is known for his bluster — often spiced with obscenities — and has previously made unverifiable claims from which he later backtracked.

Earlier this month, his media team published a video of him shouting, swearing and pointing at about 30 uniformed bodies on the ground, saying they were Wagner fighters who died in a single day. He claimed the Russian Defense Ministry had starved his men of ammunition, and he threatened to give up the fight for Bakhmut.

Prigozhin has frequently warned of a counteroffensive that Ukrainian officials have said they're planning, and in Tuesday's interview, he said that, given continued Western support, Kyiv's forces might succeed in pushing Russian troops out of all territory they occupy in southern and eastern Ukraine, as well as annexed Crimea.

"A pessimistic scenario: the Ukrainians are given missiles, they prepare troops, of course they will continue their offensive, try to counterattack," he said. "They will attack Crimea, they will try to blow up the Crimean bridge (to the Russian mainland), cut off (our) supply lines. Therefore we need to prepare for a hard war."

Prigozhin's admission of heavy losses appears to show the impact of Ukraine's strategy. Ukrainian officials have said their goal in Bakhmut was to exhaust and deplete Russian forces, distract them from protecting territory they occupy elsewhere, and buy time for more Western weapons and ammunition supplies to arrive, and for training to be completed.

Russia's largest state-run and pro-Kremlin media did not report Prigozhin's interview, posted in a Telegram channel with only 50,000 followers, making it unlikely to be widely seen in Russia. Nor did Russian military bloggers, whose popular Telegram pages are important sources of information about the war to many Russians, mention it.

On the battlefield, the Ukrainian General Staff said Wednesday that "heavy fighting" was continuing inside Bakhmut, days after Russia claimed it had completely captured the devastated city. Bakhmut lies in Donetsk province, one of four Russia illegally annexed last fall and only partially controls.

The head of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskyi, said Kyiv's forces "are continuing their defensive operation" in Bakhmut, with unspecified "successes" on its outskirts. He didn't elaborate.

A Ukrainian commander in Bakhmut told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the Ukrainians planned to trap the Russians.

"Now we don't need to fight in Bakhmut. We need to surround it from flanks and block it," Yevhen Mezhevikin said. "Then we should 'sweep' it. This is more appropriate, and that's what we are doing now."

Elsewhere, more attacks continued in a border region that Russian officials had claimed had calmed down after one of the most serious incursions since the war began. 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 from Ukraine.

The drones were intercepted overnight, Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram, and an-

other was shot down Wednesday just outside the regional capital, also called Belgorod. He said no one had been hurt, but property had been damaged.

Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment.

In Moscow, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu vowed to respond "promptly and extremely harshly" to such attacks.

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

Moscow blamed the incursion 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. The Belgorod region, like the neighboring Bryansk region and other border areas, has seen sporadic spillover from the war.

Kozłowska reported from London. Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, Amer Madhani in Washington, and Andrew Katell in New York contributed.

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## **Debt ceiling explained: Why it's a struggle in Washington and how the impasse could end**

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, LISA MASCARO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pushing to strike a debt ceiling deal, the Republican negotiating team headed Wednesday to the White House for more discussions with the sides still far apart. Time is short: There are just days left before the government could run out of cash to pay its bills.

The White House and House Republicans are working to reach a budget compromise before June 1, when Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said the country could run out of cash to pay the nation's bills. A debt default would be potentially devastating for the U.S. and global economy, depending on how long the standoff drags on.

White House estimates say a prolonged default could cause 8.3 million job losses and a world-shaking recession, while a brief default could lead to 500,000 fewer jobs. Moody's Analytics has estimated that a default of no longer than a week would lead to the loss of 1.5 million jobs.

President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy met Monday after a weekend of on again, off again negotiations. While both sides said it was a "productive" session, by Wednesday, McCarthy said he was sending his negotiating team to the White House warning they were still "far apart."

McCarthy and Republicans are insisting on spending cuts in exchange for raising the debt limit. Biden has come to the negotiating table after balking for months but says the GOP lawmakers will have to back off their "extreme positions."

A look at the negotiations and why they are happening:

WHAT IS THE DEBT CEILING FIGHT ALL ABOUT?

Once a routine act by Congress, the vote to raise the debt ceiling allows the Treasury Department to continue borrowing money to pay the nation's already incurred bills.

The vote in more recent times has been used as a political leverage point, a must-pass bill that can be loaded up with other priorities.

House Republicans, newly empowered in the majority this Congress, are refusing to raise the debt limit unless Biden and the Democrats impose federal spending cuts and restrictions on future spending.

The Republicans say the nation's debt, now at \$31 trillion, is unsustainable. They also want to attach other priorities, including stiffer work requirements on recipients of government cash aid, food stamps and the Medicaid health care program. Many Democrats oppose those requirements.



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Biden had insisted on approving the debt ceiling with no strings attached, saying the U.S. always pays its bills and defaulting on debt is non-negotiable.

But facing the prospect of the government running out of money to cover all its bills, Biden launched negotiations with Republicans.

## IS IT CLOSE TO BEING RESOLVED?

The talks have been a weeks long see-saw of positive signs and rocky moments — a grind.

They are at odds over how to trim annual budget deficits. Republicans are determined to cut spending while Biden's team offered to hold spending levels flat.

Biden wants to increase some taxes on the wealthiest Americans and some big companies, but McCarthy said early on that that is out of the question.

But reaching an agreement is only part of the challenge. Any deal would also have to pass the Republican-led House and Democratic-majority Senate with significant bipartisan support. In the end, leaders from both parties will need to muscle it over the finish line.

## WHAT ARE THE HANGUPS?

Republicans have dropped their demand to roll back spending to 2022 levels but say spending next year 2024 must be less than it is today. They also want to cap spending for the next decade.

Democrats aren't willing to go that far to actually cut federal spending. The White House has instead proposed freezing spending at the current 2023 levels.

There are also policy priorities under consideration, including steps that could help speed the construction and development of energy projects that both Republicans and some Democrats want.

Democrats have strenuously objected to a Republican push to impose stiffer work requirements on people who receive government aid through food stamps, Medicaid health care and the cash assistance programs.

Biden, though, has kept the door open to some discussion over work requirements.

## WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR ALL THIS?

Treasury says it will run out of money as soon as June 1. Yellen said Wednesday it's "almost certain" the U.S. would default by early June if no action is taken.

It's hard to pinpoint an exact date the government would start missing payments, because tax revenues and expenditures vary from day to day.

McCarthy has promised that he will allow 72 hours for lawmakers to look over any proposed deal before it is brought for a vote, so the soonest the House could vote at this point is over the weekend. It would then have to go to the U.S. Senate next week, where Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said it could pass more quickly.

But it's a crunch time. And before the legislative text can be reviewed, it needs to be written and a deal needs to be made.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY DON'T RAISE THE DEBT CEILING?

A government default would be unprecedented and devastating to the nation's economy. Yellen and economic experts have said it could be "catastrophic."

There isn't really a blueprint for what would happen. But it would have far-reaching effects.

Yellen has said it 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.

More than 8 million people could lose their jobs, government officials estimate. The economy could nose-dive into a recession.

"A default could cause widespread suffering as Americans lose the income that they need to get by," she said. Disruptions to federal government operations would impact "air traffic control and law enforcement, border security and national defense, and food safety."

## IS THERE A BACKUP PLAN IF TALKS FAIL?

Some Democrats want Biden to raise the debt ceiling on his own, without help from Republicans.

Progressives have urged Biden to invoke a clause in the Constitution's 14th Amendment that says the validity of the public debt in the United States "shall not be questioned." Default, the argument goes, is

therefore unconstitutional.

Supporters of unilateral action say Biden already has the authority to effectively nullify the debt limit if Congress won't raise it. The president has resisted that option, which raises legal issues. Biden said Sunday it's a "question that I think is unresolved," as to whether he could act alone.

In Congress, meanwhile, House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries has launched a process that would "discharge" the debt ceiling issue to the House floor forcing a vote on raising the limit. That, however, is an unlikely option as a handful of Republicans would have to defy McCarthy and their leadership to join the Democrats' effort.

## **Target becomes latest company to suffer backlash for LGBTQ+ support, pulls some Pride month clothing**

By ANNE D'INNOENZIO AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Target is removing some items from its stores and making other changes to its LGBTQ+ merchandise nationwide ahead of Pride month after intense backlash from some customers who confronted workers and tipped over displays.

"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 said that customers knocked down Pride displays at some stores, angrily approached workers and posted threatening videos on social media from inside the stores.

Target declined to specify Wednesday 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 response to confrontations in its stores is taking place as state legislatures introduce a record number of bills targeting LGBTQ+ individuals.

There are close to 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills that have gone before state legislatures since the start of this year, an unprecedented number, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

Those efforts focus on health, particularly gender-affirming health care for transgender youth, and education. State legislatures are pushing to prevent discussions in school regarding sexuality and gender identity.

At least 17 states have enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming care for transgender minors, though judges have temporarily blocked their enforcement in some, including Arkansas. An Associated Press analysis found that often those bills sprang not from grassroots or constituent demand, but from the pens of a handful of conservative interest groups.

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, based in Minnesota, 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.

Follow Anne D'Innocenzio on Twitter

## 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



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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, Hartford, 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.

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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 disproportionately 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,

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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."

\_\_\_ 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](https://twitter.com/kat__stafford).

## Seeking asylum and work, migrants bused out of NYC find hostility

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEWBURGH, N.Y. (AP) — Before he left Mauritania, the West African nation of his birth, Mohamed thought of New York as a place of "open arms," a refuge for immigrants fleeing dire circumstances.



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Now that he's here, seeking political asylum from a government he feared would kill him, he doesn't feel welcome. The 19-year-old has become a pawn in an escalating stand-off between New York City and suburban and upstate communities, which are using lawsuits, emergency orders and political pressure to keep people like him out.

Mohamed is one of about 400 international migrants the city has been putting up in a small number of hotels in other parts of the state this month to relieve pressure on its overtaxed homeless shelter system.

Some of the relocated asylum seekers say they now regret leaving the city, pointing to a lack of job opportunities and resources to pursue their asylum cases, as well as a hostile reception.

"It's better in New York City," Mohamed said. "There, no one cursed at you and said 'go back to your country.'"

The Associated Press is withholding Mohamed's full name at his request to protect the safety of his family in Mauritania. In his home country, Mohamed said he had joined a group of young people to decry the government's corruption and human rights abuses, including allegations of ongoing slavery. Days later, he said a group of men threw him in an unmarked car, took him to a secret room, and beat him viciously for two days.

After a journey that took him across the U.S. border with Mexico, he landed in a shelter system in New York City he found frightening and overcrowded. In one Brooklyn shelter, a room with 40 beds, someone stole his few remaining possessions as he slept.

So when outreach workers offered him the chance to relocate earlier this month, promising more space and chances to work, Mohamed took it. He joined other asylum seekers at two hotels a few miles outside the small Hudson River Valley city of Newburgh, about two hours north of the city.

Republican county officials there have accused the city of dumping its problems on its neighbors, while insinuating that the new arrivals pose a danger.

Last week, Orange County Executive Steven Neuhaus won a temporary restraining order barring the city from sending additional migrants. More than two dozen other counties across New York state have declared emergencies in an attempt to block migrant arrivals, even in places where none are planned.

As far as 400 miles (644 kilometers) north of the city, Niagara County officials have warned of an imminent safety threat, vowing criminal penalties for hotels found to be housing asylum seekers.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, says he will continue his efforts to disperse some of the more than 40,000 asylum seekers currently in the city's care.

Meanwhile, some who joined the initial wave of relocations have since returned to New York City's shelter system. Those who don't have money for transportation, such as Mohamed, say they are stuck.

"It's like the desert," lamented Mohamed, who studied law and taught himself English in Mauritania. "There's nothing here for us."

Some asylum seekers described a sense of being lured upstate on false pretenses, saying outreach workers described local economies in need of off-the-books migrant labor. Instead they have suffered a stream of harassment.

"There are people driving by pretty constantly in big pickup trucks telling them to go back to their country," said Amy Belsher, an attorney for the New York Civil Liberties Union, describing a phenomenon also witnessed by an AP journalist.

"It's a completely predictable outcome of the local county executives jumping on the migrant ban bandwagon," she added. The NYCLU has brought a lawsuit against Orange and Rockland counties alleging discrimination against migrants.

An attorney for Orange County, Richard Golden, said it was "utterly ridiculous" to accuse the county of fostering xenophobia. The county's lawsuit against the city, he said, rests on a 2006 state administrative directive requiring municipalities to meet certain requirements before transferring homeless individuals.

Misinformation among local residents has not helped, including a false allegation that migrants displaced homeless veterans inside the hotels — a widely-circulated story that has fallen apart.

Peruvian Jhonny Neira offered a more mixed assessment of his time in Newburgh. The 39-year-old asylum

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seeker described a recent Sunday visit to a church where he felt welcomed by the congregation, even if he couldn't understand the English sermon.

"I'm a respectful, hard-working person," he said in Spanish. "I think after getting to know me, they would trust me."

The number of U.S.-Mexico border crossings has declined since May 11, when the Biden administration put new rules in place intended to encourage migrants to apply for asylum online rather than enter the country illegally. But New York and other migrant destination cities are still dealing with thousands of people who entered the U.S. before the new rules.

The Crossroads Hotel in Newburgh is now home to men from South and Central America, Senegal, Egypt, Mauritania, and Russia. They speak in French and English and Spanish, as they kick a soccer ball in the hotel parking lot, beside a diner and a tangle of highways. A few yards away, a man who once worked as a barber in Venezuela offers haircuts for \$5, as another sweeps up.

In order to gain asylum in the United States, they will have to prove they have a "well-founded fear of persecution" over their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

Mohamed's experience tracks with a report by the U.S. State Department, which found Mauritania has overseen an expanded crackdown on political dissidents since 2021 and cites allegations of torture in unofficial detention centers.

If his story passes a credibility check, it would likely constitute a legitimate asylum claim, according to Jaya Ramji-Nogales, an asylum law professor at Temple University. But getting to that stage will require navigating an immigration system under severe strain.

"It was always an under-resourced system but now it's really at a breaking point," Ramji-Nogales said. "There's not the political will to put aside the money it needs to function."

Mohamed said his goal is building his asylum case -- something he's come to believe is not possible in Newburgh. A few days ago, he missed a key immigration appointment after a car that was supposed to take him to the city never showed up.

"You can't stay here just sleeping, eating, after that going back to sleeping," he said. "If you make no progress in your case, they will send you back home. For me, that would be very bad."

## **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 Sandra 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.

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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 brinkmanship 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.

## **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."

The coffins cost 995 euros (more than \$1,000) each, and the price for an urn is 196.80 euros (\$212).

To put nature at the heart of such funerals, Loop Biotech is partnering with Natuurbegraven Nederland — Nature Burials Netherlands — which uses six special habitats where 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.



## **Do not call: States sue telecom company over billions of robocalls**

PHOENIX (AP) — Attorneys general across the U.S. joined in a lawsuit against a telecommunications company accused of making more than 7.5 billion robocalls to people on the national Do Not Call Registry.

The 141-page lawsuit was filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Phoenix against Avid Telecom, its owner Michael D. Lansky and company vice president Stacey S. Reeves. It seeks a jury trial to determine damages.

The lawsuit arises from the nationwide, bipartisan Anti-Robocall Multistate Litigation Task Force of 51 attorneys general and the District of Columbia. It was formed last year to investigate and take legal action against telecommunications companies routing volumes of robocall traffic.

Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes said nearly 197 million of the robocalls were made to Arizona phone numbers between December 2018 and January 2023.

"Every day, countless Arizona consumers are harassed and annoyed by a relentless barrage of unwanted robocalls — and in some instances these illegal calls threaten consumers with lawsuits and arrest," Mayes said in a statement. "More disturbingly, many of these calls are scams designed to pressure frightened consumers, often senior citizens, into handing over their hard-earned money."

The lawsuit said Avid Telecom used spoofed or invalid caller ID numbers, including more than 8.4 million calls that appeared to be coming from government and law enforcement agencies as well as private companies.

The company also allegedly sent or transmitted scam calls about the Social Security Administration, Medicare, Amazon and DirecTV, as well as auto warranties, employment and credit card interest rate reductions.

"Americans are sick and tired of their phones ringing off the hook with fraudulent robocalls," New York Attorney General Letitia James said in a statement. "Seniors and vulnerable consumers have been scammed out of millions because of these illegal robocalls."

The lawsuit alleges Lansky and Reeves violated the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, the Telemarketing Sales Rule and other federal and state telemarketing and consumer laws.

"Contrary to the allegations in the complaint, Avid Telecom operates in a manner that is compliant with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations," said Neil Ende, the company's outside legal counsel. "The company has never been found by any court or regulatory authority to have transmitted unlawful traffic and it is prepared to meet with the attorneys general, as it has on many occasions in the past, to further demonstrate its good faith and lawful conduct."

"In this context, the company is disappointed that the attorneys' general chose not to communicate their concerns directly before filing the lawsuit," Ende added. "While the company always prefers to work with regulators and law enforcement to address issues of concern, as necessary, the company will defend itself vigorously and vindicate its rights and reputation through the legal process."

Robocalls have also been an issue during elections in recent years. During the 2020 election, voters across the U.S. received anonymous robocalls in the weeks leading up to Election Day telling them to "stay safe and stay home."

Two conservative hoaxers were convicted of fraud for making over 85,000 robocalls to Black voters in five states.

The calls falsely stated giving information in mail-in ballots could lead to arrest, debt collection or forced vaccination. Their sentence included spending 500 hours registering voters in low-income neighborhoods of Washington, D.C.

## **Today in History: May 25, death of George Floyd**

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 25, the 145th day of 2023. There are 220 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black man, was killed when a white Minneapolis police officer pressed

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his knee on Floyd's neck for about 9 1/2 minutes while Floyd was handcuffed and pleading that he couldn't breathe; Floyd's death, captured on video by a bystander, would lead to worldwide protests, some of which turned violent, and a reexamination of racism and policing in the U.S.

On this date:

In 1787, the Constitutional Convention began at the Pennsylvania State House (Independence Hall) in Philadelphia after enough delegates had shown up for a quorum.

In 1946, Transjordan (now Jordan) became a kingdom as it proclaimed its new monarch, Abdullah I.

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy told Congress: "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."

In 1964, the U.S. Supreme Court, in Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, ordered the Virginia county to reopen its public schools, which officials had closed in an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka desegregation ruling.

In 1968, the Gateway Arch in St. Louis was dedicated by Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall.

In 1977, the first "Star Wars" film (later retitled "Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope") was released by 20th Century Fox.

In 1979, 273 people died when an American Airlines DC-10 crashed just after takeoff from Chicago's O'Hare Airport.

In 2008, NASA's Phoenix Mars Lander arrived on the Red Planet to begin searching for evidence of water; the spacecraft confirmed the presence of water ice at its landing site.

In 2011, a judge in Salt Lake City sentenced street preacher Brian David Mitchell to life in prison for kidnapping and raping Elizabeth Smart, who was 14 at the time of her abduction in 2002.

In 2016, actor Johnny Depp's wife, Amber Heard, filed for divorce in Los Angeles, citing irreconcilable differences after 15 months of marriage.

In 2020, a white woman, Amy Cooper, called 911 to claim she was being threatened by "an African American man," Christian Cooper, who had confronted her for walking her dog without a leash in New York's Central Park. (After a video of the confrontation was widely circulated, Amy Cooper lost her job with investment firm Franklin Templeton and was charged with filing a false police report; the charge was dismissed after she completed a counseling program.)

Ten years ago: Making his first official trip to sub-Saharan Africa, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry demanded that Nigeria respect human rights as it cracked down on Islamist extremists and pledged to work hard in the coming months to ease tensions between Sudan and South Sudan. A French soldier, Cedric Cordier, was wounded in the throat in a busy commercial district outside Paris; a suspect was later arrested. Marshall Lytle, 79, the original bass player for Bill Haley & His Comets, died in New Port Richey, Florida.

Five years ago: Harvey Weinstein was charged in New York with rape and another sex felony in the first prosecution to result from the wave of allegations against him; the once-powerful movie producer turned himself in to face the charges and was released on \$1 million bail after a court appearance. A student opened fire in a classroom at a suburban Indianapolis middle school; the student was tackled and disarmed by a teacher, Jason Seaman, who was shot three times as he ended the shooting, which also seriously wounded a 13-year-old girl. President Donald Trump signed a trio of executive orders to overhaul the federal bureaucracy by making it easier to fire federal workers for poor performance and misconduct. By a two-to-one margin, voters in Ireland chose to repeal a constitutional ban on abortion.

One year ago: Texas Governor Greg Abbott said that 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, the gunman who massacred 19 children and two teachers at an Uvalde elementary school a day earlier, warned in online messages sent minutes before the attack that he had shot his grandmother and was going to shoot up a school. Ramos was killed by police. Former reality TV star Josh Duggar was sentenced to more than 12 years in prison on child pornography charges. Harold Billow, the last known survivor of a World War II

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POW massacre during the Battle of the Bulge, died at age 99. Johnny Depp called his ex-wife's accusations of sexual and physical abuse "insane" as he returned to the witness stand in his libel suit against Amber Heard.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ann Robinson is 94. Former White House news secretary Ron Nessen is 89. Actor Sir Ian McKellen is 84. Country singer Jessi Colter is 80. Actor-singer Leslie Uggams is 80. Movie director and Muppeteer Frank Oz is 79. Actor Karen Valentine is 76. Actor Jacki Weaver is 76. Rock singer Klaus Meine (The Scorpions) is 75. Actor Patti D'Arbanville is 72. Playwright Eve Ensler is 70. Musician Cindy Cashdollar is 68. Actor Connie Sellecca is 68. Rock singer-musician Paul Weller is 65. Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., is 63. Actor-comedian Mike Myers is 60. Actor Matt Borlenghi is 56. Actor Joseph Reitman is 55. Rock musician Glen Drover is 54. Actors Lindsay and Sidney Greenbush (TV: "Little House on the Prairie") are 53. Actor-comedian Jamie Kennedy is 53. Actor Octavia Spencer is 53. Actor Justin Henry is 52. Rapper Daz Dillinger is 50. Actor Molly Sims is 50. Actor Erinn Hayes is 47. Actor Cillian Murphy is 47. Actor Ethan Suplee (soo-PLÉE') is 47. Rock musician Todd Whitener is 45. Actor Corbin Allred is 44. Actor-singer Lauren Frost is 38. Actor Ebonee Noel is 33. Musician Guy Lawrence (Disclosure) is 32. Olympic gold medal gymnast Aly Raisman is 29.