

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Saturday, May 27

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

Sunday, May 28

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

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

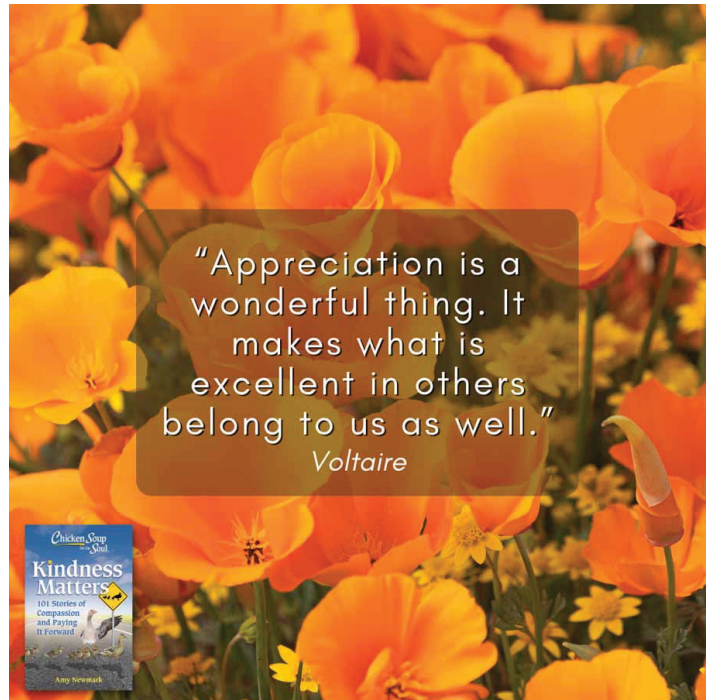
United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

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

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

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

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



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, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

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

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

Jr. Legion Baseball: Mobridge at Groton (DH), 5 p.m.

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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

Texas' Republican-led House of Representatives will vote Saturday afternoon on whether to impeach Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, an investigating committee announced.

A South Carolina judge put a new six-week abortion ban on hold until the state's Supreme Court can review the law, which Gov. Henry McMaster signed this week.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration plans to revoke drug distributor Morris & Dickson Co.'s license to sell and transport addictive painkillers following an investigation into the company's actions during the opioid crisis.

Polish police say they have safely relocated an unexploded World War II-era bomb found in Wroclaw. Authorities temporarily evacuated about 2,500 residents so safety teams could transport the bomb to a neutralization site.

Actor Hugh Grant's lawsuit alleging the British tabloid The Sun illegally gathered information about him will proceed to trial in January 2024, a judge in London has decided.

CEOs Elon Musk of Tesla and Jim Farley of Ford Motor Company said that Ford customers will be able to utilize the Tesla Supercharger electric vehicle charging network in North America starting in early 2024.

Newly published FBI files have revealed that Queen Elizabeth II of the U.K. was the target of assassination plot during a visit to the U.S. in 1983, motivated by the troubles in Ireland at the time.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the governor of Russia's Belgorod Oblast reported Ukrainian artillery and drone attacks across the region. Meanwhile, at least two people died and more than two dozen others were injured in a missile strike on a medical facility in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

Vice President Kamala Harris is scheduled to deliver the commencement address at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point today.

Turks will cast their ballots Sunday in Turkey's presidential runoff election between sitting president Tayyip Erdogan and Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden will visit Arlington National Cemetery on Monday. They will mark Memorial Day by laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Biden will later deliver a Memorial Day address.

State Farm will no longer accept new applications for property insurance in California. The company said it made the decision due to "historic increases in construction costs outpacing inflation, rapidly growing catastrophe exposure, and a challenging reinsurance market."

Congressional Republicans inched closer to a deal with the White House that would raise the debt ceiling for two years but cap spending on discretionary programs. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen set June 5 as the new debt default deadline.

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Boys 1600m Relay Team qualifies for finals at State Track

The second round of the State Track Meet was held Friday in Sioux Falls. The Groton Area boys 1600m Relay Team placed fourth in the prelims and will run in the finals today. The Groton Area Boys 800m relay team just missed getting into the finals. Groton Area placed ninth overall.

Friday's Results

Girls 4x200 Meter Relay Prelims: 19. (Jerica Locke [9], Kennedy Hansen [10], Rylee Dunker [9], Kella Tracy [8]), 1:52.73

Boys 4x200 Meter Relay Prelims: 9. (Keegen Tracy [9], Ryder Johnson [9], Andrew Marzahn [12], Lane Tietz [11]), 1:33.70

Girls 4x400 Meter Relay Prelims: 18. (Laila Roberts [10], Jerica Locke [9], Kennedy Hansen [10], Kella Tracy [8]), 4:19.76.

Boys 4x400 Meter Relay Prelims: 4. (Keegen Tracy [9], Andrew Marzahn [12], Ryder Johnson [9], Cole Simon [12]), 3:31.34

Thursday's Results

Girls Triple Jump: 18, Aspen Johnson (12), 31-11½

Girls 4x800 Meter Relay: 12. (Faith Traphagen [10], Kella Tracy [8], Ashlynn Warrington [8], Taryn Traphagen [8]), 10:16.93

Boys 1600m Sprint Relay: 15. (Andrew Marzahn [12], Lane Tietz [11], Keegen Tracy [9], Blake Pauli [10]), 3:47.87

Boys 4x800m Relay: 10. (Keegen Tracy [9], Cole Simon [12], Blake Pauli [10], Lane Tietz [11]), 8:35.88

Boys 4x100 Meter Relay Prelims: 13. Andrew Marzahn [12], Ryder Johnson [9], Teylor Diegel [10], Korbin Kucker [10]), 45.73

JAMES VALLEY TELECOMMUNICATIONS 66TH ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, June 1st
Groton Area High School Arena
11:30am Registration & Lunch
12:30pm Meeting

- Membership Gift
- Lunch catered by Ken's SuperFair Foods
- Door Prizes, including a \$500 JVT credit
- Call 605-397-2323 to reserve a free bus ride to the meeting
- JVT's Office will be closed 11am-2pm



JVT



Memorial Day Services Columbia American Legion

Monday, May 29, 2023, 1 p.m.

**Guest Speaker: Troy McQuillen
Owner of McQuillen Creative Group,
Publisher of Aberdeen Magazine &
The Aberdeen Insider**

Legion Memorial Services:

Bath at 9 a.m.

Westport at 10 a.m.

Houghton at 11 a.m.

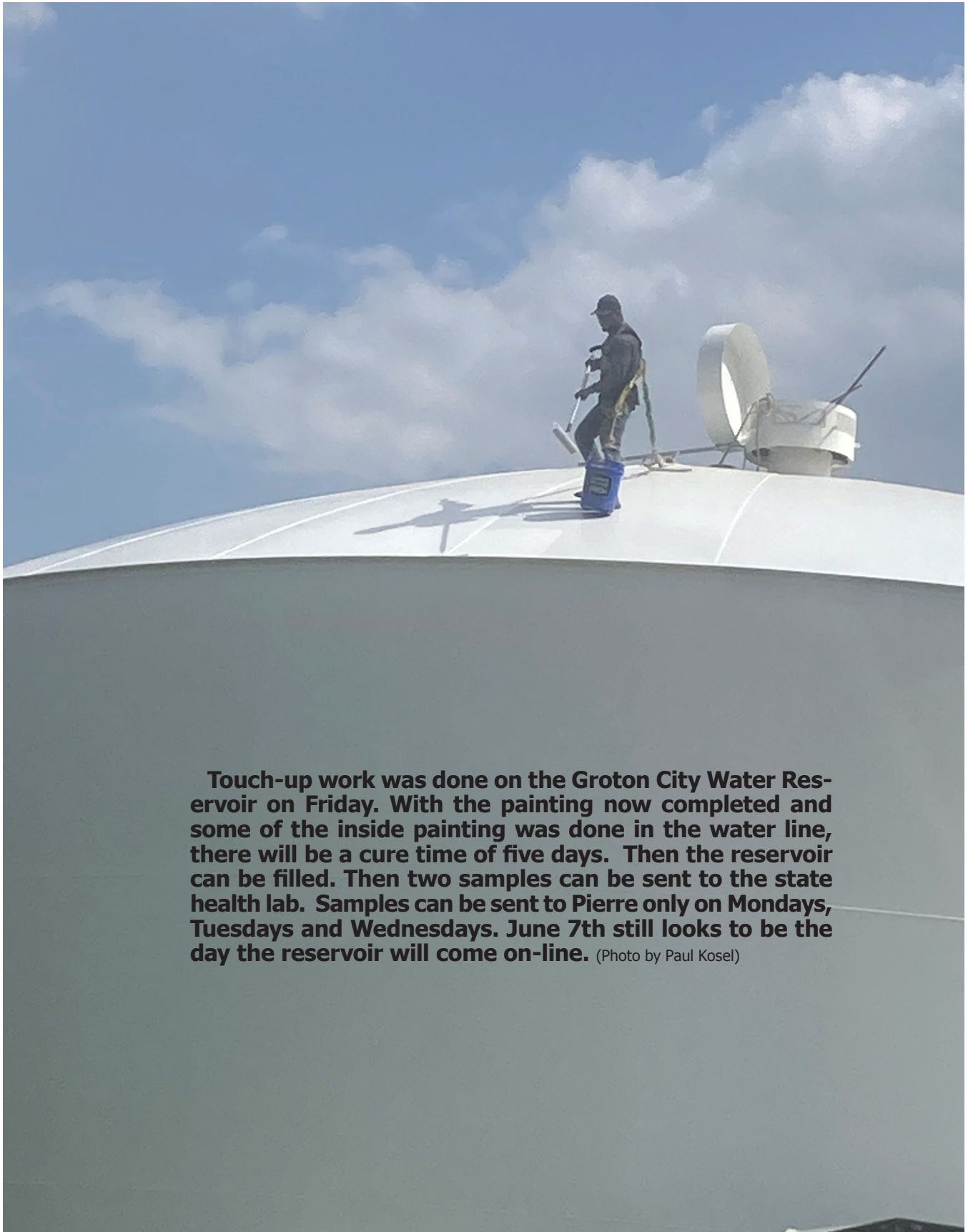
Columbia Lutheran at 11:30 a.m.

Columbia at noon.

**Potluck lunch at the Legion will
begin after the services at
the cemetery with our
guest speaker at 1 p.m.**

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Touch-up work was done on the Groton City Water Reservoir on Friday. With the painting now completed and some of the inside painting was done in the water line, there will be a cure time of five days. Then the reservoir can be filled. Then two samples can be sent to the state health lab. Samples can be sent to Pierre only on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. June 7th still looks to be the day the reservoir will come on-line. (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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Major Dolan and Owen Tewksbury were selling lemonade Friday afternoon at the north end of Main Street. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



MEMORIAL DAY

HONORING ALL WHO SERVED



Groton Post #39 Memorial Day Schedule

Hufton at 7:30 a.m.

James at 8:15 a.m.

Verdon at 8:45 a.m.

Bates-Scotland at 9:15 a.m.

Ferney at 10 a.m.

Andover Union at 11 a.m.

Groton at Noon

**Guest speaker at Groton
is Donald Pasch.**

**Lunch to follow at the Groton Post #39
home served by the Legion Auxiliary.**

**In the event of inclement weather,
the ceremony will be held at the
Post home.**

**Groton Post #39 is sponsoring
the FREE viewing of the broadcast
at**

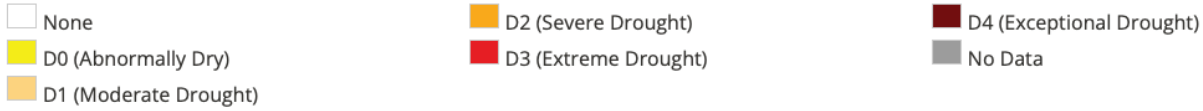
GDILIVE.COM

**People in their vehicles can listen
on the radio at 89.3 FM.**

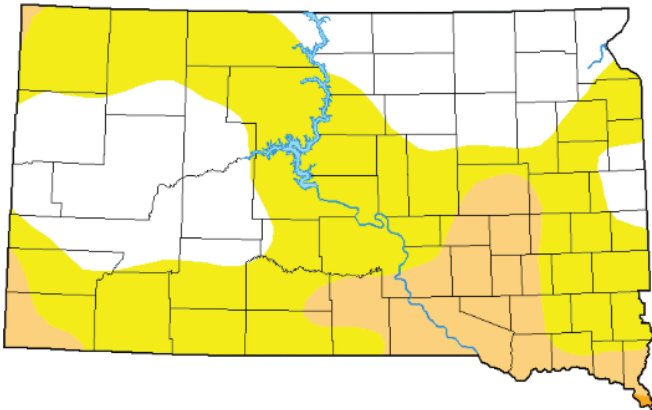
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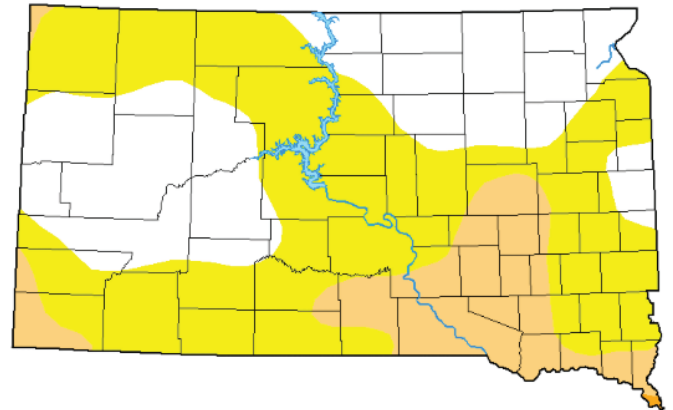
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



May 23



May 16

Following the previous week's substantial drought relief, mostly dry weather returned across the High Plains. However, locally heavy showers continued in parts of eastern Colorado and southern and western Kansas, leading to some additional reductions in the coverage of moderate to exceptional drought (D1 to D4). By May 21, Nebraska led the U.S. with rangeland and pastures rated 55% very poor to poor, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. On the same date, Nebraska led the High Plains with topsoil moisture rated 58% very short to short, followed by Kansas at 52% and South Dakota at 36%. Much of the recent rainfall has bypassed eastern sections of South Dakota and Nebraska, with some increase in drought coverage noted in the latter state.

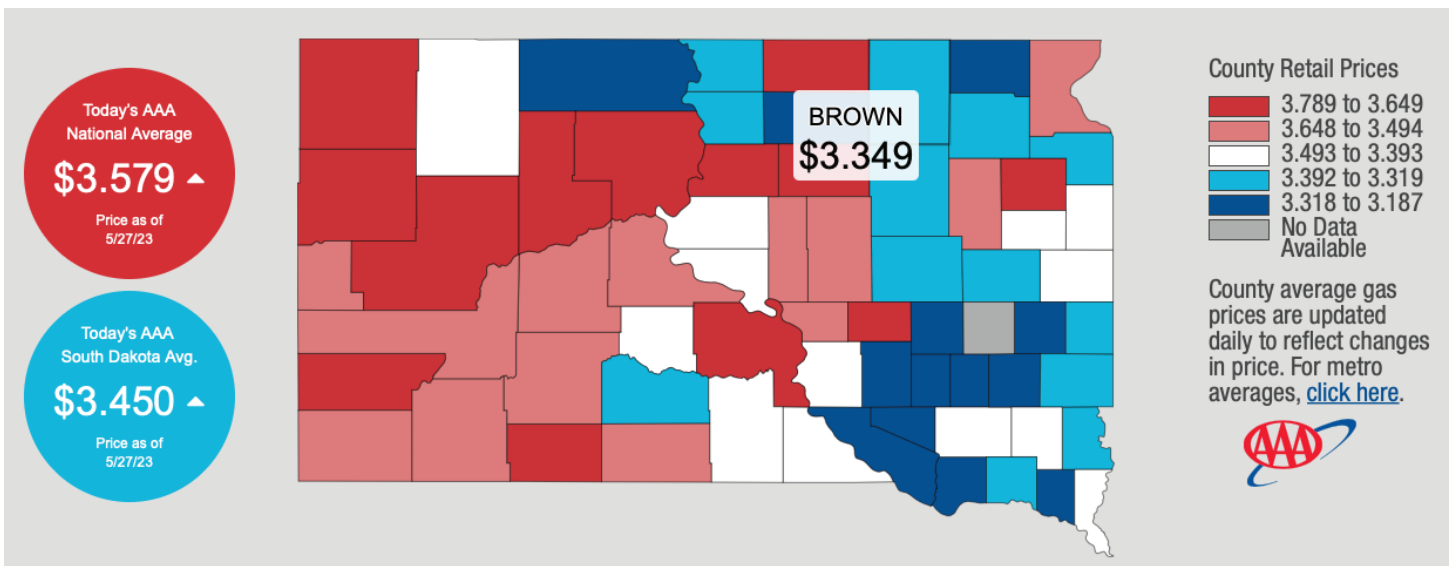
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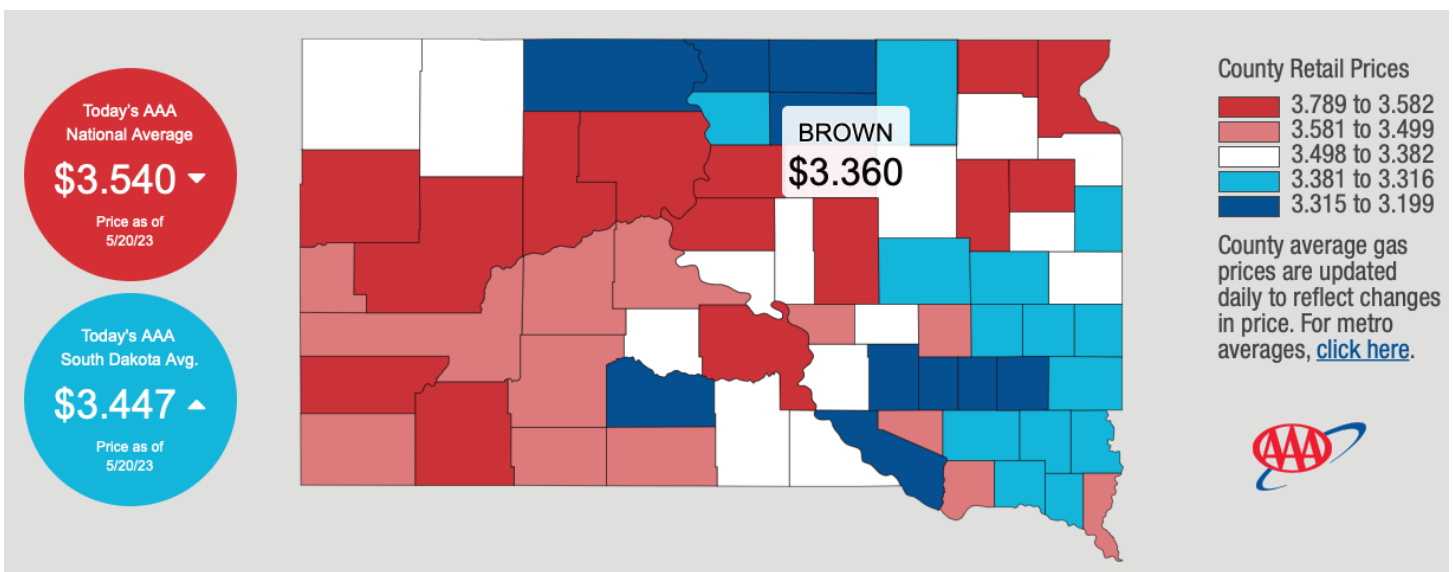
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

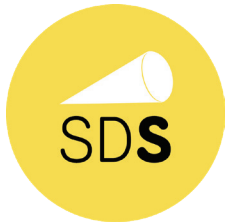
	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.450	\$3.604	\$4.069	\$3.777
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.449	\$3.604	\$4.056	\$3.781
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.447	\$3.574	\$4.050	\$3.803
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.554	\$3.686	\$4.128	\$3.970
Year Ago Avg.	\$4.251	\$4.375	\$4.750	\$5.223

This Week



Two Weeks Ago





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Nine months and counting: Slain transgender woman's family frustrated by wait for justice

Self-defense claim complicates Rapid City homicide case

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 26, 2023 3:25 PM

Prosecutors in Rapid City know who shot and killed Acey Morrison.

They've known since Aug. 21, 2022. That was the day the transgender member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe was shot in the mobile home of a man she'd met for an ill-fated hookup attempt that began on a dating app.

What they don't know and haven't yet said — to the family or the media — is whether the man will be charged with a crime or remain free on the grounds of self-defense.

Morrison's family and friends have grown impatient with the indecision. They say it's time for law enforcement to make the call.

"What they keep saying is that they can't tell you what charges, if any charges, will be put against this guy," said Edelyn Catches, of Oglala, Morrison's mother. "That's what always gets me — when they say 'if any.' It gets me all mad."

Morrison's family may have an answer before long. Pennington County State's Attorney Lara Roetzel told South Dakota Searchlight she intends to make a decision on the Morrison case soon.

"Yes, it is about time," said Roetzel, who returned to the office to take over as state's attorney after the departure of Mark Vargo earlier this year. "I am now in office, and I will review it and get to it as soon as possible."

Death follows dating app connection

Law enforcement has yet to release many details from the shooting, but Pennington County authorities have briefed the family on the situation.

Morrison, 30, met her eventual killer on a dating app called Grindr, though Catches didn't know much about the app until shortly after her daughter's death, when her grandson explained it.

Despite not knowing the specifics on how Morrison was meeting people, Catches always tried to warn her daughter about getting too close to strangers too quickly.

"I told her to be careful," Catches said. "There's weirdos out there."

The story Catches heard from law enforcement was that Morrison and the middle-aged man connected online, then made plans to meet up the night before the homicide occurred. They decided not to sleep together that evening, investigators told Catches, but the man asked Morrison to stay the night in his mobile home rather than drive home, because she'd had too much to drink.

The following morning, the man told law enforcement, Morrison grew agitated when asked to leave. A struggle allegedly ensued, and at some point she and the homeowner were each fighting for control of a 12-gauge shotgun. The man fired the weapon, hitting Morrison in the chest. He called 911 and claimed self-defense. Morrison was dead when law enforcement and first responders arrived at the trailer park on 180 Country Road north of Rapid City.

Slow notice, long investigation

The Pennington County Sheriff's Office misgendered Morrison in a press release sent the day of the incident, using her correct name but identifying her as a man.

Some of Morrison's friends say that helps explain why they were shocked to hear her name uttered at a day of remembrance for transgender victims of violent crime that fall. Some didn't connect the dots

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because the news had reported on the death of a man.

More troubling for Catches, however, is that it took more than a day for the Sheriff's Office to get the news of her daughter's death to her.

"I called Pennington County like five times to ask, you know, why they didn't notify me," Catches said. "They knew who she was. They notified Pine Ridge to come notify me."

Since then, she said, she's been briefed on the case on multiple occasions.

Catches is among those who struggle to believe the story of self defense. Morrison was a peacemaker, she said.

Cheryse Hawkins, who attended high school with Morrison in Oehlrichs, said that was true even if they'd been drinking. If there were threats, Hawkins said, Morrison would be the one to shepherd her friends away.

"In all the years I knew Acey, I'd never seen Acey physically harm anyone. She was the mom of our group," said Hawkins, who credited "hard truths" from Morrison as a motivator for her to kick opiates eight years ago. "I don't believe a word of it."

Morrison's family offered a list of names of people who could speak to her character, Catches said, but "the cops didn't talk to anybody."

Helene Duhamel, spokesperson for the Pennington County Sheriff's Office, declined to offer details on the interviews conducted by investigators.

"We really can't comment on cases pending prosecution," Duhamel said.

Native American transgender women, often referred to as "Two Spirit," are among the most vulnerable to violence in the U.S., and experience higher rates of substance abuse disorder and mental health troubles, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Online tributes to Morrison and stories of her killing have proliferated across LGBTQ+ websites and the sites of other nonprofit groups, including the Human Rights Campaign and the gun control advocacy organization Moms Demand Action.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) movement that's gained stream in recent years and led to legislative changes around the county and the world has been fueled by lower clearance rates for crimes against them.

It's had an impact in South Dakota, as well. Former Pennington County State's Attorney Mark Vargo, while working as acting attorney general for South Dakota in 2022, hired two people to serve as advocates in MMIP cases across the state. The duo has offered more than a dozen trainings to law enforcement since last fall and has consulted on seven criminal investigations, according to Attorney General's Office spokesperson Tony Mangan. The MMIP task force was asked to consult with investigators in the Morrison case, Mangan said, but they serve as educators in such cases, not investigators.

The lack of charges in her homicide sends the message that authorities in Rapid City don't take crimes against Native Americans seriously, according to Hawkins.

"Had she been anybody else in Rapid City, they wouldn't be getting away with it," Hawkins said. "Because as Native American people, especially in the trans community, we don't get justice."

Roetzel said that perception "makes me really said."

"It's important to me that the public knows I'm everybody's prosecutor, regardless of race," she said. "Anybody that knows me knows what a strong heart I have for victims and for victims' rights. And my heart goes out to Acey's family. She deserves justice. That looks different for everyone, and I understand that, but hopefully we can get her some form of justice."

Self-defense claims complicate charging decision

A host of factors have kept Morrison's case from closure, Roetzel said. The investigation by the Pennington County Sheriff's Office wasn't closed until January. At that point, Vargo had just returned from his interim stint as attorney general.

Within a few months, Vargo decided to take a job in southeast Asia to help the region in "establishing the rule of law."

His delay in making a call on the Morrison case has frustrated her family and friends, but Roetzel said the

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outgoing state's attorney left the charging decision to her because "I'd be the one who had to live with it."

Roetzel, who left the office in January after more than two decades there, returned to take the top spot at the request of the county commission.

With the Morrison case, she said, she's facing a difficult decision. The man who killed her cooperated with law enforcement as soon as they arrived. He was defending himself in a struggle, he told them. Morrison, of course, cannot dispute that version of events, and there were no other witnesses.

Given the way South Dakota law gives deference to self-defense claims, the claim carries a lot of weight. "If it was self defense, there's literally no crime that's been committed," Roetzel said.

If investigators gather evidence that casts doubt on a self-defense claim, she said, a prosecutor can choose to present the evidence to a grand jury, which could side with prosecutors or the potential defendant.

That's been the case for years, Roetzel said, but another complicating factor now exists in South Dakota.

For two years in a row, the South Dakota Legislature and Gov. Kristi Noem updated the state's self-defense statutes with a "stand your ground" law that bolstered a self-defense statute that was already robust. The 2021 and 2022 updates put the onus on prosecutors to prove that a homicide is not self defense before a case can go to trial.

Those "immunity hearings" require prosecutors to present "clear and convincing" evidence that an act of violence occurred outside the bounds of what the law defines as acceptable defensive behavior.

After such a hearing, a judge decides if a self-defense claim should prevent a case from reaching a jury.

Shooter still on dating app

Morrison's supporters now say they have what they see as new and relevant information.

They say the man who shot Morrison is still using the dating app he used to connect with her.

Patrick Fitzgibbon, a Rapid City drag performer, worked with former BuzzFeed reporter Nico Lang to track the man down using public information, such as the address of the homicide.

In late April, Fitzgibbon connected with a man on Grindr. He can't recall which person reached out first with a private message, but over the course of about an hour, Fitzgibbon said he grew uncomfortable with the user's "aggressive" sexual advances.

At that point, Fitzgibbon decided he wanted nothing to do with meeting the person. Even so, he thought it would be amusing to string the man along. Eventually, Fitzgibbon asked for a photo and got one.

The man in the photo was the man Fitzgibbon believes shot Morrison. Screenshots of a series of explicit messages and the photograph were shared with South Dakota Searchlight. Based on the public Facebook profile photo of the man, the screenshots appear to show the same man Morrison's family says met her that night in August.

Roetzel said her office has yet to see or hear any reports on the shooter's alleged activity on dating sites, and no such information has been shared with investigators. Fitzgibbon, for his part, isn't sure he'd want to testify about it, citing concerns for his own safety.

"I want to be able to share that, but I don't want to be a part of going to court," Fitzgibbon said. "How far am I willing to stick my neck out?"

The man the family says is the shooter has a criminal record in both South Dakota and Indiana that includes multiple drug offenses, four driving under the influence convictions and a handful of charges related to interference with law enforcement. Last October, just over two months after Morrison's death, he was given a probation sentence and suspended prison time for his fourth DUI. South Dakota Searchlight is withholding the man's name from this story because he has not been charged in the shooting, and the Pennington County State's Attorney's Office declined to publicly divulge the man's name. He did not return calls or a text message seeking comment.

It's unclear if any of the information on the man's past or his continued use of the dating app would factor into any charging decision.

Whatever happens on the criminal justice side, Catches thinks she knows what happened. She took part in an inipi (sweat lodge) ceremony after Morrison died, and said she heard her daughter's voice. It wasn't like other sweats, where the medicine man speaks the words of a spirit.

"This was Acey," she said. "It was Acey's voice."

She told her mother, Catches said, that she'd just met the man, and that he'd been pushing her to do something she wasn't comfortable with, that he'd been using drugs, and that he'd fired on her when she refused to go along with the plan.

That's the story that makes the most sense to Catches. Based on what she's heard from investigators, she believes there's enough to put the case in front of a jury to decide. Catches would like to see the killer charged with murder.

"The way they described it was that they wrestled over a 12-gauge shotgun, but it was fired 6 to 8 inches from her chest," Catches said.

Hawkins, who lives in Sioux Falls and lost touch with Morrison long before her death, agrees with Catches. Morrison's positive peer pressure put her in the position she's in today, Hawkins said, as a working mother free from opiates. She's thought about her friend every day since her death, she said, and searches the web frequently for news of charges.

"It's really frustrating," Hawkins said. "I miss her every day. Even though we'd lost touch, she had no idea how much she changed my life."

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

Feds propose drainage rules to protect wetlands in SD and nearby states

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 26, 2023 3:24 PM

A government agency wants to keep water-draining equipment used by farmers away from federally protected wetlands in several states.

Drain tiles are underground perforated pipes buried in farmers' fields. They are used to drain unwanted water – including some wetlands – allowing for more room to plant crops.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing a process to determine how close drain tile can be installed to wetlands that are under the agency's protection.

The regulations would apply to easements the agency has on privately owned wetlands, called Waterfowl Production Areas, and only in the Prairie Pothole region of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Waterfowl Production Areas are leased by the Wildlife Service as part of the National Wildlife Refuge system. The areas are managed for the production of waterfowl. There are about 1,000 such areas in South Dakota, totaling nearly 150,000 acres.

Public hunting is one of the benefits these areas provide. The Wildlife Service uses funds from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps – something hunters purchase with their duck license – to conserve the wetlands.

As part of the proposed new regulations, the Wildlife Service will provide individual setback distances to landowners based on site conditions, including soil characteristics, drain tile diameter, drain tile depth, and topography.

Landowners in the Prairie Pothole Region who follow these setback distances would not be held responsible for draining a protected wetland area.

Prairie potholes are freshwater depressions and marshes, often less than 2 feet deep and 1 acre in size. The region is known as a "duck factory" because more than 50% of North America's ducks hatch there.

The Wildlife Service said the proposed regulation would help ensure no drainage of the wetlands occurs, and would give farmers more clarity regarding where they can and cannot install drain tile.

Waterfowl Production Areas date to 1958, when Congress created the Small Wetlands Acquisition Program to conserve and protect small wetlands and pothole areas in the Prairie Pothole Region.

When landowners grant a wetland easement for a Waterfowl Production Area, they give up certain rights

to use or develop the wetland on their land in order to protect the habitat for waterfowl.

A public comment period is open until June 27 on the proposed drain tile regulations. To make a comment, search the docket number "2023-08998" at regulations.gov.

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.

Treasury secretary pinpoints June 5 as earliest date for U.S. debt default

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 26, 2023 4:51 PM

WASHINGTON — Republicans in Congress and the Biden administration have until at least June 5 to broker and enact a debt limit bill under new estimates from the Treasury Department, giving negotiators a few more days before the country would default.

"Based on the most recent available data, we now estimate that Treasury will have insufficient resources to satisfy the government's obligations if Congress has not raised or suspended the debt limit by June 5," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen wrote in a letter released Friday afternoon.

Yellen wrote that political leaders have "learned from past debt limit impasses that waiting until the last minute to suspend or increase the debt limit can cause serious harm to business and consumer confidence, raise short-term borrowing costs for taxpayers, and negatively impact the credit rating of the United States."

"In fact, we have already seen Treasury's borrowing costs increase substantially for securities maturing in early June," Yellen added. "If Congress fails to increase the debt limit, it would cause severe hardship to American families, harm our global leadership position, and raise questions about our ability to defend our national security interests."

Negotiations over the country's debt limit and government spending continued behind closed doors Friday, though the broad parameters of an agreement did begin to emerge.

Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, told reporters in the Capitol building Friday morning that the two sides would continue working towards a bipartisan agreement on the open items.

"I thought we made progress last night. We have to make more progress now," he said, noting he went on a bicycle ride that morning with negotiator Rep. Garret Graves, a Louisiana Republican.

McCarthy reiterated the key disagreement remains on how much the federal government should spend.

He also pressed for enhancing work requirements on able-bodied adults without dependents enrolled in some federal safety net programs. McCarthy has repeatedly tried to make the case for changes during interviews and television appearances as the Biden administration has rejected calls to change the existing requirements.

If Republicans, who control the U.S. House, Democrats, who control the U.S. Senate, and the White House don't address the debt limit soon, the country could default.

If that happens, payments on hundreds of federal programs would likely be delayed and the economy could begin moving toward a global recession, according to economists.

Yellen wrote in the letter the federal government has enough money on hand to make payments to veterans as well as Social Security and Medicare recipients totaling more than \$130 billion on June 1 and June 2.

The week of June 5, she wrote, Treasury is supposed to make \$92 billion in payments and transfers, however the government's "projected resources would be inadequate to satisfy all of these obligations."

'Unacceptable' default

Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said on CNN's "This Morning" on Friday that default was "unacceptable."

"The president is committed to making sure that we have a good-faith negotiation with the Republicans

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to reach a deal, because the alternative is catastrophic for all Americans," Adeyemo said.

"People often think about the debt limit as something that only affects financial markets," Adeyemo added. "But it also would mean that we are unable to meet our commitments to those same recipients you just talked about, to our seniors, to our veterans. And we know that that's unacceptable."

Russ Vought, budget director during the Trump administration, said Friday morning on C-SPAN that he was "amazed at how bad the parameters of the deal are that are emerging."

"It's basically almost worse than a clean debt limit," Vought added.

Summarizing his understanding of negotiations, Vought said, it would set spending caps for two years with some exclusions. The negotiators were discussing increasing defense and veterans funding, while freezing other discretionary spending accounts, he said.

"When you increase veterans by that amount of money, and I think they should, you are not going to get to the kind of cuts that are necessary to even be minimally less (spending) than last year," Vought said.

The talks, he said, would remove a portion of Democrats' \$80 billion increase in funding for the Internal Revenue Services that they approved as part of their signature climate change, health care and tax bill known as the Inflation Reduction Act, though not all.

"I'm actually amazed at how incompetent they have been," Vought said of McCarthy and his top GOP negotiators.

McCarthy fends off critics

McCarthy, speaking to reporters on Capitol Hill on Friday morning, dismissed criticism from conservative Republicans, including those in his own conference.

McCarthy said since negotiators were still sorting through disagreements and there wasn't a final agreement, members didn't know what would be in a final bill.

Discretionary spending accounts for about one-third of all federal funding, with the other two-thirds going to mandatory programs, like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

McCarthy has pledged not to reduce spending on Social Security, Medicare, defense accounts or veterans programs, which leaves any cuts to be made in a fraction of the annual budget.

In fiscal 2022, the federal government spent \$4.1 trillion on mandatory programs and about \$1.7 trillion on discretionary programs, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

During the same fiscal year, the federal government brought in \$4.9 trillion in revenue through taxes and fees, leading to an annual deficit.

In order to pay for the spending Congress approved that wasn't paid for by revenue, the Treasury Department borrowed money under the authority Congress gave it as part of the debt limit.

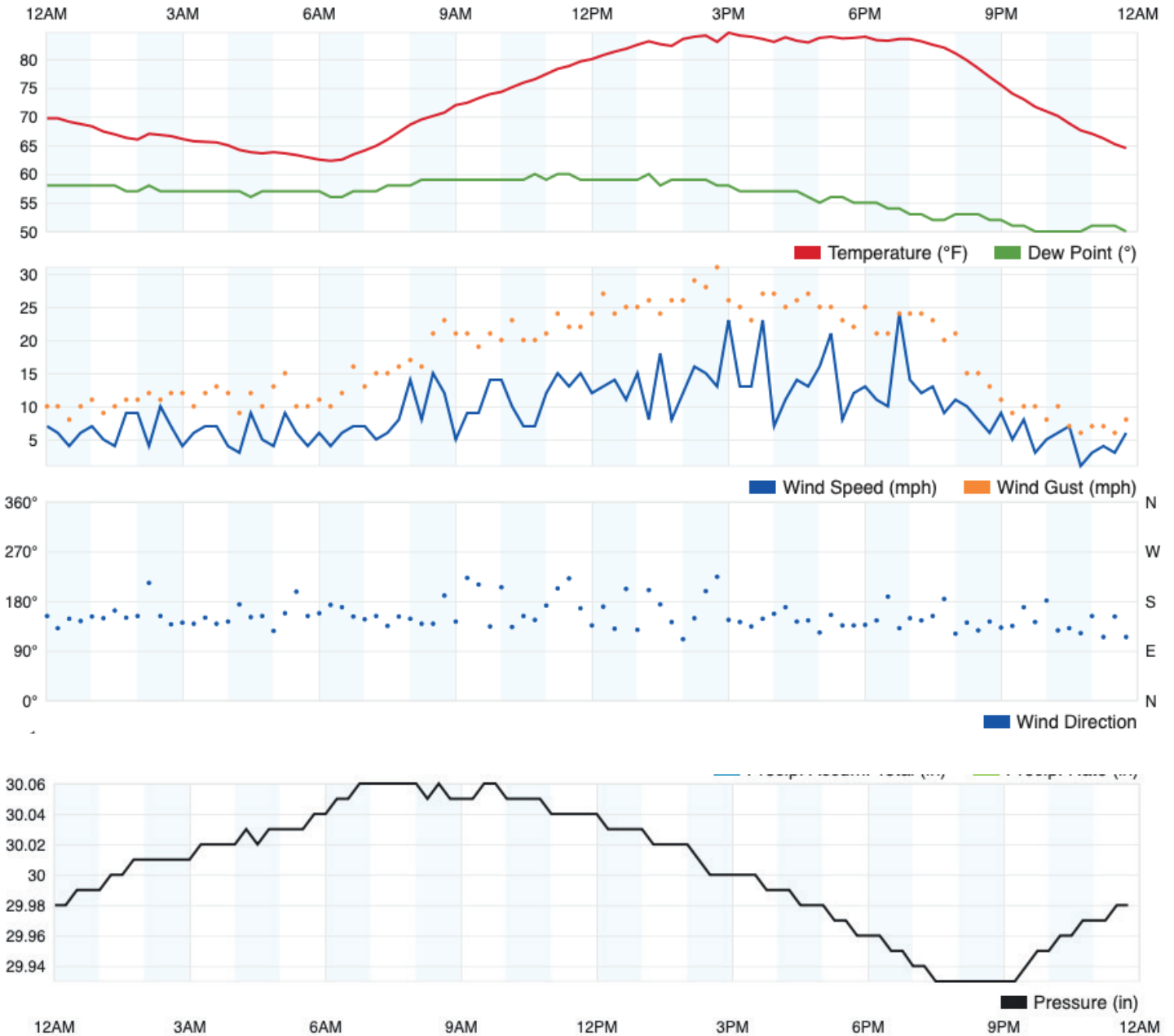
Ashley Murray contributed to this report.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Memorial Day	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Partly Cloudy and Breezy then Partly Cloudy	Sunny and Breezy	Chance T-storms and Breezy	Breezy. Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms
High: 85 °F	Low: 60 °F	High: 87 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 60 °F	High: 86 °F

Rain Chances Slowly Spreading East May 27, 2023 4:01 AM

	5/27 Sat	5/28 Sun	5/29 Mon	5/30 Tue	5/31 Wed
Aberdeen	86	87	87	87	89
Britton	84	86	84	84	86
Brookings	83	85	85	86	89
Chamberlain	85	81	89	91	92
Clark	81	84	82	83	85
Eagle Butte	81	77	82	84	86
Ellendale	84	85	84	85	86
Eureka	85	82	85	86	88
Gettysburg	81	79	84	84	87
Huron	86	86	87	89	90
Kennebec	84	81	88	89	90
McIntosh	80	77	80	83	84
Milbank	85	87	86	87	88
Miller	85	84	86	86	88
Mobridge	85	82	87	88	91
Murdo	82	80	86	87	88
Pierre	86	83	89	90	92
Redfield	85	86	87	87	89
Sisseton	86	88	86	86	88
Watertown	83	85	84	85	86
Webster	81	83	82	82	84
Wheaton	85	87	86	85	88

Late Today & Tonight

- Chance showers/storms *west river*

Sunday & Sunday Night

- Scattered showers/storms *statewide*



Rain Chances Pushing East, Remaining Warm

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 3:00 PM

Low Temp: 62 °F at 6:10 AM

Wind: 33 mph at 3:52 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 21 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 2018

Record Low: 28 in 1907

Average High: 75

Average Low: 49

Average Precip in May.: 2.88

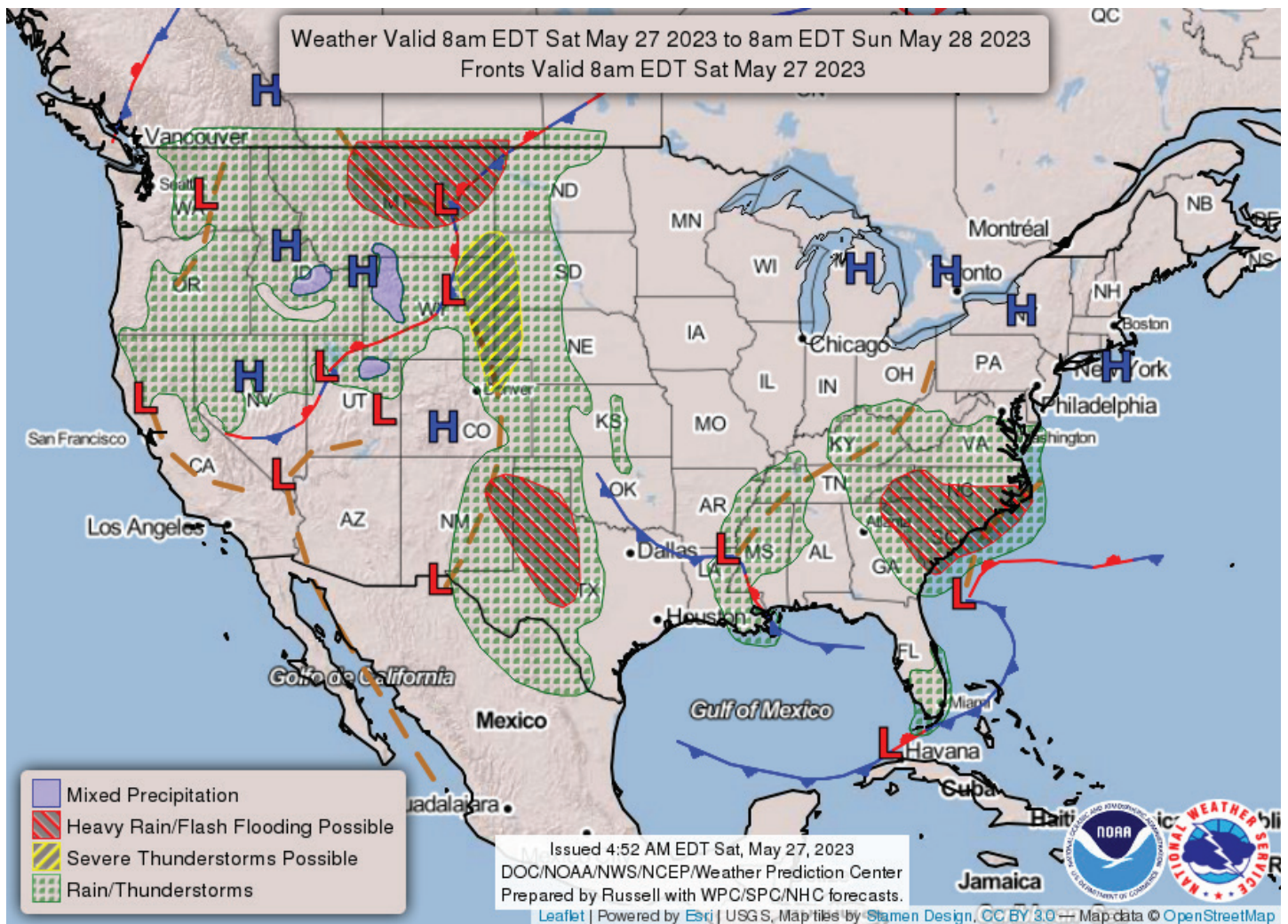
Precip to date in May.: 2.19

Average Precip to date: 6.85

Precip Year to Date: 7.91

Sunset Tonight: 9:10:29 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:47:55 AM



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Today in Weather History

May 27, 1942: A short estimated F2 touchdown uprooted 27 trees on the western edge of Bryant in Hamlin County. One barn was destroyed.

May 27, 1996: On May 26th, anywhere from 4 to 6 inches of rain fell in a 24 hour period over the lower Bad River Basin. Also, 3 to 5 inches of rain fell over much of Western South Dakota. This runoff caused the Bad River at Fort Pierre to crest at 26.25 feet or about 5 feet above flood stage late on the 27th before falling back below flood stage on the 30th. The entire length of the Bad River Road from U.S. Highway 83 near Fort Pierre to U.S. Highway 14 near Midland was closed to all except local traffic on the 27th. Twenty-five to 35 volunteers were filling sandbags all day on the 27th around two homes along the river. Most of the damage was associated with flooding of agricultural land and some county roads. One resident along the river said the river was the highest it has been in 32 years.

1771: In Virginia, a wall of water came roaring down the James River Valley following ten to twelve days of intense rain. As water swept through Richmond, buildings, boats, animals, and vegetation were lost. About one hundred fifty people were killed as the River reached a flood stage of forty-five feet above normal. A monument to the flood was inscribed by Ryland Randolph, of Curles, in 1771-72: " ... all the great rivers of this country were swept by inundations never before experienced which changed the face of nature and left traces of violence that will remain for ages."

1896: A massive tornado struck Saint Louis, Missouri killing 306 persons and causing thirteen million dollars damage. The tornado path was short but cut across a densely populated area. It touched down six miles west of Eads Bridge in Saint Louis and widened to a mile as it crossed into East Saint Louis. The tornado was the most destructive of record in the U.S. at that time. It pierced a five-eighths inch thick iron sheet with a two by four-inch pine plank. A brilliant display of lightning accompanied the storm.

1987 - Severe thunderstorms in West Texas produced baseball size hail at Crane, hail up to three and a half inches in diameter at Post, and grapefruit size hail south of Midland. Five days of flooding commenced in Oklahoma. Thunderstorms produced 7 to 9 inches of rain in central Oklahoma. Oklahoma City reported 4.33 inches of rain in six hours. Up to six inches of rain caused flooding in north central Texas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Sunny and warm weather prevailed across much of the nation to kick off the Memorial Day weekend. Afternoon thunderstorms in southern Florida caused the mercury at Miami to dip to a record low reading of 69 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather prevailed in the southeastern U.S. Ten cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 90s. Lakeland, FL, reported a record high of 99 degrees, and Biloxi, MS, reported a temperature of 90 degrees along with a relative humidity of 75 percent. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from north central Texas to the Central Gulf Coast Region. Severe thunderstorms spawned four tornadoes, and there were eighty-one reports of large hail or damaging winds. Late afternoon thunderstorms over southeast Louisiana produced high winds which injured twenty-seven persons at an outdoor music concert in Baton Rouge, and high winds which gusted to 78 mph at the Lake Ponchartrain Causeway. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1997: An F5 tornado killed 27 people in Jarrell, Texas. Although tornado warnings were issued 30 minutes in advance and local sirens were sounded, there were few places to go for safety. Most homes were on slabs, with no basements. Houses were swept clean off their foundations, with little debris left behind. Total damage was \$20 million. The same thunderstorm complex produced a wind gust to 122 mph at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

FORGIVE WHO? FOR WHAT?

Pope John Paul II was one of the most notable leaders of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1981 the Pope made a trip to a prison to speak with the man who tried to assassinate him and tell him that he forgave him. In 1984 the Pope appeared on the cover of TIME with the would-be assassin, shaking hands with him while his other arm was around his shoulders. Underneath the photo were the words "WHY FORGIVE?" in bold letters.

Strangely, the Pope asked readers to "pray for my brother whom I have sincerely forgiven." Some condemned the Pope. Others agreed with the Pope. Still, others could not understand the reason the Pope did such a thing: offer to forgive him.

For most of us, forgiveness is not easy to do nor pleasant to think about. Some of us might even enjoy the resentment and anger that grows within us when we have been wronged. Some speak of their anger as a sign of strength and power. Yet,

Paul said, when we accept and understand God's mercy and forgiveness, He expects us to forgive others just as Jesus did to those who crucified Him.

Furthermore, because God through the death of Jesus has forgiven us, He expects us to forgive others as our Savior has forgiven us. When we willingly forgive others, we begin to understand the cost of our salvation.

Prayer: Father, we pray for the willingness to forgive others who have wronged us even as our Savior willingly forgives us. May we show Your love by forgiving others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.26.23

12 20 37 41 64 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$187,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 14 Hrs 41 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.26.23

2 12 27 32 38 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 14 Hrs 11 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.24.23

6 14 16 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$72,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 41 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.24.23

7 25 29 40 45 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 14 Hrs 40 Mins
DRAW: 59 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 14 Hrs 40 Mins
DRAW: 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

US has treaty duty to fund policing on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, judge rules

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A federal judge has ruled that the U.S. government has a treaty obligation to support law enforcement on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, but declined for now to determine whether the Oglala Sioux Tribe is entitled to as much funding as it's seeking.

Tribal leaders depicted the ruling as a victory, saying the important point is that the court confirmed that the federal government has a duty to fund policing on the reservation and ordered U.S. officials to meet with Oglala Sioux leaders "to work together promptly to figure out how to more fairly fund tribal law enforcement."

The outcome of the case could affect other reservations, including some where Native women are killed at a rate more than 10 times the national average. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana has filed a similar lawsuit.

Oglala Sioux officials contend the tribe is entitled to federal funding for 120 fully equipped officers for the sprawling Pine Ridge Reservation, something the federal government has disputed.

"This Court concludes that the United States has a treaty duty unique to the Tribe to provide protection and law enforcement cooperation and support on the Reservation. ... However, the Tribe has not shown at this stage that a duty extends to entitle the Tribe to the level of funding or support that it sought," U.S. District Judge Roberto Lange said in an order filed Tuesday.

The tribe sued the Bureau of Indian Affairs and some high-level officials last July. The court held a two-day hearing in February.

The government denied having any such obligation and asked the judge to dismiss the lawsuit.

Lange directed the Bureau of Indian Affairs to help the tribe refine its funding requests "as soon as practicable" to reflect its treaty obligations. He also told the federal government to reevaluate its census-based population estimates for the reservation of 19,800 to 32,000, which are lower than the tribe's figure of 40,000. The judge said the federal estimates likely represent an undercount.

Oglala Sioux President Frank Star Comes Out and Public Safety Chief Algin Young called on the government in separate statements to provide the tribe with the resources it needs to tackle the public safety and humanitarian crisis on the reservation. If the government fails, Star Comes Out said, the tribe "will look forward to proving at trial that the United States has violated its treaty obligations."

Officials from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs did not immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

Lange's ruling gave a dire depiction of crime on the more than 5,400-square-mile (14,000-square-kilometer) Pine Ridge Reservation, which is about the size of Connecticut. He noted that it's among the most impoverished places in the country.

"In recent years, communities on the Reservation have struggled with dangerous and highly addictive drugs and experienced unprecedented levels of violence and threats to public safety," he wrote. "In the Tribe's view, a lack of competent and effective law enforcement on the Reservation is a big reason for the crisis."

At any given time over the last several years, Lange wrote, the tribe has only had funding to employ roughly 33 police officers and seven criminal investigators to cover all of its 911 calls. In 2021 alone, nearly 134,000 calls were made to 911 on the reservation, but at any given time, he said, only six to eight, and sometimes fewer, tribal police officers are on duty to respond. So many calls are abandoned or not properly investigated, he said, that many crimes go unprosecuted.

While neither side disputes that crime is "very high" on the reservation and that its police are underfunded, the judge wrote, the federal government insists "that the funding is fair given budget constraints

and Congress's decision to underfund law enforcement services in Indian country generally."

Across the country, Native American tribes have increasingly advocated through the courts for treaty rights, including hunting, fishing and education, with some success.

Lange concluded that the "express language" of the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, when read in conjunction with other treaties and federal laws, "imposes some duty on the United States to provide law enforcement support on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The contours of that duty is a more difficult question."

Associated Press reporter Hallie Golden in Seattle contributed to this story.

South Dakota governor asks college board to ban drag shows, opens hotline

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Republican Gov. Kristi Noem opened a hotline for complaints about South Dakota colleges and is calling on the state's higher education governing board to ban drag shows, she announced Friday.

In a letter to the South Dakota Board of Regents, Noem said states have allowed "liberal ideologies to poison their colleges and universities."

"On campuses across the country, students have been taught the importance of diversity and equity and given access to 'safe spaces' instead of learning to tolerate the disagreement, discomfort, and dissent that they will experience in the real world," Noem wrote.

She called on the college oversight board to increase graduation rates, remove references to "preferred pronouns" in school materials, cut administrative costs and ensure universities are not accepting any money from China.

An Associated Press request for comment to the regents was not immediately returned Friday.

Noem pitched the hotline to regents as a way to "keep our institutions accountable — and ensure that we are all aware of what is happening at our taxpayer-funded colleges and universities." She wrote that information gathered from the hotline will guide policy changes.

"As I work with our Board of Regents and Board of Technical Education to chart our path for higher education, we are giving students, faculty, and parents this tool to help voice any concerns so that they can be addressed," Noem said in a statement.

Republican Tim Rave, a former South Dakota House speaker and Noem appointee, leads the Board of Regents. Noem recently appointed two new members to the board: Jim Lochner, formerly of Tyson Foods, and Doug Morrison, the former Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis director.

On Friday, Noem said she plans to make more appointments soon.

The Board of Regents in December ordered a review of university campus events and its policy on minors attending them after a drag show at South Dakota State University faced criticism from conservative lawmakers for being advertised as family friendly.

Deaths and tragedy from 1973 Indy 500 opened the door for safety evolution in racing

By MICHAEL MAROT AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Johnny Rutherford and Gordon Johncock delivered spectacular results at the 1973 Indianapolis 500 that were overshadowed by perhaps the worst month in the history of the storied race.

Rutherford won the pole with a record-breaking, four-lap average speed of 198.413 mph and Johncock wound up with the first of his two Indy wins, but it was a grim across the rest of Gasoline Alley.

Art Pollard was killed in a pole day crash. David Savage died from injuries sustained in a terrifying race-day crash. In the chaos after Savage's wreck, pit-sign board holder Armando Teran was fatally struck by a safety truck. And roughly a dozen spectators were burned when Salt Walther's fuel tanks ruptured as his spinning car destroyed part of the catch fence.

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"I don't know what the rest of the guys thought, but I thought, 'Let's just get this damn thing over, you know, this has not been good,'" Rutherford recalled. "That was the way the business was. You know, A.J. (Foyt) and I have lost so many friends in the business."

Pretty much any successful IndyCar driver from that era — Johncock, Rutherford, Foyt, Mario Andretti, the Unser brothers, Parnelli Jones — felt the same way.

Back then, deaths and serious injuries were the norm.

Foyt, for instance, still recalls his January 1965 stock car crash in Riverside, California, caused by a brake failure. He went down an embankment and actually was pronounced dead by the track's doctor — only to be saved when Jones stepped in and scooped dirt from Foyt's mouth.

Yes, Foyt was lucky, especially at a time when safety measures seemed almost taboo.

"Without better safety, this sport never would have survived because corporations were not going to spend millions of dollars to go to funerals," Andretti said in the days before Sunday's Indy 500. "We would start the year with a drivers' meeting, and you wouldn't know who would finish the year. That never changed. There were years we lost six, seven drivers."

It wasn't that sanctioning bodies did nothing.

The fiery crash that took the lives of Eddie Sachs and Dave MacDonald during the Indy 500 in 1964 led to more firefighters being hired for races. In 1967, 30 of the 33 Indy 500 starters donned the late Bill Simpson's innovative fire suit; the double fatality in 1964 also led to the installation of rubber bladder tanks that military helicopters were using in Korea and Vietnam to limit fuel spillage.

But the 1973 race forced track and series officials to finally pay attention to drivers' concerns.

"I think they started to realize the drivers knew what they needed and what they wanted for safety," said Johncock. "It was hard because USAC (the U.S. Auto Club) didn't want to listen to it."

In the aftermath — Savage finally succumbed to his injuries 33 days after the race — the USAC agreed to make rules changes.

It reduced the size of rear wings by nine inches, cut fuel tank capacity from 75 gallons to 40, moved those tanks to the left sidepod away from the grandstands — and where most side impacts occur on oval tracks — and required pit-sign board holders to remain at their posts the entire race.

Indianapolis Motor Speedway went even further in 1974.

The track owner at the time, Tony Hulman, widened the pit lane entrance, eliminated the angled inside wall in the fourth turn and moved the flagman from the inside near the front of pit road to a starter's stand above the cars and the outside wall, where it remains today. The height of retaining walls was increased, catch fences were bolstered and some of the trackside box seats were removed.

"It was an inflection point for safety," speedway president Doug Boles said when asked about the impact of 1973.

Eventually, cockpits were repositioned to protect the legs and feet of drivers and tubs were made of stronger, safer materials. IndyCar introduced the world to traveling safety teams in 1981 and SAFER barriers in 2002. HANS devices, which stabilized heads and necks of drivers, became mandatory, as did tethered tires to prevent them from flying into the stands and more recently, head-protecting aeroscreens. Better car designs reduced energy inside the cockpit, too, lowering the risk of serious injuries.

"I'd have a lot better legs if the cars were as good back then as they are today," Johncock said.

Of course, risk always exists when cars are turning laps over 230 mph. Seven deaths have occurred on Indy's 2.5-mile oval in the half-century since that deadly May. Four took the lives of IndyCar drivers — three in Indy 500 practice, the last being pole-winner Scott Brayton in May 1996, and the fatal test crash of rising star Tony Renna in October 2003.

Serious injuries now often lead to immediate attention as lessons from that tragic month 50 years ago loom large.

"Art Pollard was the first IndyCar driver I ever met," said Tim Baughman, IndyCar's senior director of track safety. "I was a Boy Scout, he was sponsored by the Boy Scouts and I met him at the (Indiana) state fairgrounds the winter before the '73 race. I was 12 years old, so it hit a little closer to home."

"The late '60s and early '70s were a really horrific time to be a race-car driver, but I think it all came to a boil in '73 and it changed everything."

AP auto racing: <https://apnews.com/hub/auto-racing> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

UK police free man involved in Downing Street collision — then arrest him on unrelated charge

LONDON (AP) — A man who was taken into custody after his car crashed into the gates of the British prime minister's residence in central London was released in that case — but then immediately rearrested on charges of making indecent images of children, police said Saturday.

The 43-year-old suspect was arrested for the unrelated offense shortly after he was released pending further investigation into the crash, the Metropolitan Police Service said in a statement.

The collision Thursday afternoon outside the prime minister's official residence and offices at 10 Downing St. set off an intense security response.

Authorities later said the incident wasn't believed to be terror-related. The suspect was arrested on suspicion of dangerous driving and criminal damage.

It wasn't immediately clear whether the crash was deliberate. Video posted on social media showed a silver hatchback car heading straight for the gates at low speed across Whitehall, the main thoroughfare in London's government district.

No one was injured.

The man will appear in Westminster Magistrates Court on Saturday in relation to the unrelated charge of making indecent images of children.

New Mexico shooting victims mourned by their children, 64 grandchildren

By RIO YAMAT and MORGAN LEE Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Gwendolyn Dean Schofield hoped to live to 100, and she was nearly there.

But on May 15, in what appeared to be a final act of kindness, Schofield and her daughter pulled over on a residential street in the northwestern New Mexico city of Farmington to help a woman who was shot at random, and they, too, were hit by gunfire and died.

"I guarantee they would have stopped in that situation 10 out of 10 times," said Dallin Dean, Schofield's grandson.

Schofield, who grew up in the Great Depression and became a teacher during World War II, was a month shy of her 98th birthday. Daughter Melodie Ivie, who ran a preschool with the catchy name "Ivie League," was 73. The woman they stopped to help, Shirley Voita, was a 79-year-old retired school nurse and regular at morning Mass who volunteered to help people file their taxes.

Each of the women led active professional and civic lives, centered around their families and faith, leaving indelible marks on a city of 50,000 near the point where New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah meet.

Altogether they had 64 grandchildren.

They were laid to rest this week during two days of memorial services in a community still grieving from the impacts of a rampage by an 18-year-old on the eve of his high school graduation that left six others wounded, including two police officers. Officers shot and killed the gunman.

At a joint memorial service Thursday for Schofield and Ivie, Dean looked out into the crowd and told them his aunt and grandmother would have been the first to forgive the gunman had they survived.

Schofield began teaching in the remote lakeside town of Valier, Montana, amid a shortage of teachers during World War II. There she met her first husband, Raymond Dean, a crop-duster pilot. They married in 1946 and had four children.

Schofield moved on to other teaching jobs, gravitating to small towns in Wyoming and Idaho before

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settling in Farmington to be closer to her family after Raymond Dean died in the 1990s. She remarried but became a widow again 20 years later in 2020.

Dean said his grandmother — affectionately referred to as “Grandma Dean” by her 26 grandchildren — was self-reliant. She loved gardening and growing her own food and always kept a stockpile of canned goods.

At 97, Dean said, his grandmother remained vibrant. Relatives at the memorial service said Schofield did so by living with a “loving mind devoid of anger and criticism” and a “forgiving heart.”

Dean said his family had already been talking about her 100th birthday party before the shooting.

Ivie followed in her mother’s footsteps as an educator. For decades, “Mrs. Ivie” welcomed hundreds of Farmington children into her home, where she ran the Ivie League preschool and prepared generations of kids for kindergarten.

Neighbor Sheldon Pickering, 42, said he grew up a few houses from the Ivie family home and was there often, playing the piano for Ivie whenever she asked to hear a song.

“She really made you feel like part of the family,” Pickering said.

When Pickering became a parent, he enrolled his daughter and son at the Ivie League preschool, where they learned to tie shoes and count, and where Ivie taught Pickering countless lessons that he says changed the way he views parenthood.

On one occasion, Pickering recalled feeling embarrassed after buying his daughter a pack of gum and sending her to school, where gum was forbidden. When Pickering apologized, saying he should have said no when his daughter asked for the candy, Ivie reassured him that a parent should say yes to the little things.

“That’s what your kids will remember,” Pickering remembered Ivie saying. “So say yes to the little things when you can.”

Ivie and her husband, Dennis, raised their eight children in Farmington.

Later in life, the couple served as senior missionaries for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ghana and offered to support students afterward, relatives said. Ivie’s husband died last year.

Ivie and Schofield had grown especially close in recent years after Ivie moved her mother into her home, Dean said.

On the morning of the shooting, they drove together to pick up one of Ivie’s grandchildren from school, Dean said. They never arrived.

Police have said the gunman did not appear to be targeting anyone. Rather, he shot indiscriminately from outside his home before walking around the neighborhood, perforating cars and houses using three different guns. Video recently released by police included a voice authorities believed to be the shooter urging police to kill him.

On Friday, police released a new trove of body and dash camera videos that paint a vivid picture of the shooting. Authorities also provided audio recordings from hundreds of frantic calls to emergency dispatchers by witnesses to the rampage and its aftermath, including a call from one of Voita’s daughters.

Voita, who was hit by gunfire while in her car, started the day with morning Mass at St. Mary’s Catholic Church, part of a routine involving a deep commitment to faith and community service, friends and acquaintances said.

Her memorial service was held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, where she had been a member for nearly 50 years. Relatives of Ivie and Schofield were among those who gathered to remember her.

Voita and her husband of 57 years had five children, including the current elected tax assessor for San Juan County, 14 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Mary Johnson, a friend of Voita’s for 25 years through community service events and prayer groups, said Voita “did everything she could to help people.”

That included volunteering at a senior center to help residents file taxes and participating in anti-abortion marches. She also enjoyed skiing, tennis, pickleball and trips to Vallecito Lake in Colorado.

Voita talked with ease about mortality and redemption, Johnson said.

“She just always expressed her love for Jesus and how we all really need to be ready, all the time, that you never know when our time is coming,” Johnson said.

Yamat reported from Las Vegas.

Texas' GOP-held House set for impeachment proceedings against Attorney General Ken Paxton

By ACACIA CORONADO, JIM VERTUNO and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas' GOP-led House of Representatives was set to hold historic impeachment proceedings against Attorney General Ken Paxton on Saturday as the scandal-plagued Republican called on supporters to protest a vote that could lead to his ouster.

The House scheduled an afternoon start for debate on whether to impeach and suspend Paxton from office over allegations of bribery, unfitness for office and abuse of public trust — just some of the accusations that have trailed Texas' top lawyer for most of his three terms.

The hearing sets up what could be a remarkably sudden downfall for one of the GOP's most prominent legal combatants, who in 2020 asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn Joe Biden's electoral defeat of President Donald Trump. Only two officials in Texas' nearly 200-year history have been impeached.

Paxton, 60, has called the impeachment proceedings "political theater" based on "hearsay and gossip, parroting long-disproven claims," and an attempt to disenfranchise voters who re-elected him in November. On Friday he asked supporters "to peacefully come let their voices be heard at the Capitol tomorrow."

Paxton has been under FBI investigation for years over accusations that he used his office to help a donor and was separately indicted on securities fraud charges in 2015, though he has yet to stand trial. Until this week his fellow Republicans have taken a muted stance on the allegations.

Impeachment requires just a simple majority in the House. That means only a small fraction of its 85 Republicans would need to join 64 Democrats in voting against him.

If impeached, Paxton would be removed from office pending a Senate trial, and it would fall to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott to appoint an interim replacement. Final removal would require a two-thirds vote in the Senate, where Paxton's wife's, Angela, is a member.

Texas' top elected Republicans have been notably quiet about Paxton this week. But some party members began to rally around him Friday, with the state GOP chairman, Matt Rinaldi, calling the process a "sham."

In one sense, Paxton's political peril arrived with dizzying speed: The House committee's investigation of him came to light Tuesday, and by Thursday lawmakers issued 20 articles of impeachment.

But to Paxton's detractors, the rebuke was years overdue.

In 2014 he admitted to violating Texas securities law, and a year later he was indicted on securities fraud charges in his hometown near Dallas, accused of defrauding investors in a tech startup. He pleaded not guilty to two felony counts carrying a potential sentence of five to 99 years.

He opened a legal defense fund and accepted \$100,000 from an executive whose company was under investigation by Paxton's office for Medicaid fraud. An additional \$50,000 was donated by an Arizona retiree whose son Paxton later hired to a high-ranking job but was soon fired after displaying child pornography in a meeting. In 2020, Paxton intervened in a Colorado mountain community where a Texas donor and college classmate faced removal from his lakeside home under coronavirus orders.

But what ultimately unleashed the impeachment push was Paxton's relationship with Austin real estate developer Nate Paul.

In 2020, eight top aides told the FBI they were concerned Paxton was misusing his office to help Paul over the developer's unproven claims that an elaborate conspiracy to steal \$200 million of his properties was afoot. The FBI searched Paul's home in 2019, but he has not been charged and denies wrongdoing. Paxton also told staff members he had an affair with a woman who, it later emerged, worked for Paul.

The impeachment accuses Paxton of attempting to interfere in foreclosure lawsuits and issuing legal opinions to benefit Paul. Its bribery charges allege that Paul employed the woman with whom Paxton had an affair in exchange for legal help and that he paid for expensive renovations to the attorney general's home.

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A senior lawyer for Paxton's office, Chris Hilton, said Friday that the attorney general paid for all repairs and renovations.

Other charges, including lying to investigators, date back to Paxton's still-pending securities fraud indictment.

Four of the aides who reported Paxton to the FBI later sued under Texas' whistleblower law, and in February he agreed to settle the case for \$3.3 million. The House committee said it was Paxton seeking legislative approval for the payout that sparked their probe.

"But for Paxton's own request for a taxpayer-funded settlement over his wrongful conduct, Paxton would not be facing impeachment," the panel said.

Bleiberg reported from Dallas.

At West Point, Vice President Harris to make history as first woman to deliver commencement speech

Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris on Saturday will become the first woman to deliver a commencement address at the U.S. Military Academy, an institution that has made slow progress diversifying its ranks in the four decades since the first class of female cadets graduated.

This year some 950 men and women are expected to take part in the graduation ceremony in West Point, New York.

The vice president plans to make the case that a strong U.S. military is vital to world security and applaud the graduating cadets for their noble sacrifice in serving their country.

"A strong America remains indispensable to the world," Harris is expected to say, according to prepared remarks provided by the White House. "And, it is this pillar of our strength where you have dedicated yourself to lead."

While Harris visits West Point, about 60 miles (96 kilometers) north of Manhattan, President Joe Biden heads to Colorado Springs, Colorado, on Thursday to address graduates at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Vice presidents typically travel to one of the federal service academies to address graduating classes. Harris' visit will be her first to the U.S. Army academy.

Today, about one quarter of the student body are women. Only a few dozen graduates each year are Black women, like Harris, though the number has ticked up in recent years. The academy didn't admit women until 1976 and had its first female graduates in 1980.

West Point dates to 1802. Since then, the college has educated future military leaders including Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Gen. George Patton and Presidents Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Upon graduation, the cadets will be commissioned as Army second lieutenants.

Last year, Harris addressed graduates at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. The year before, she spoke at commencement ceremonies for the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

Disgusted by racism targeting soccer's Vinícius, his Brazilian hometown rallies to defend him

By DAVID BILLER Associated Press

SAO GONCALO, Brazil (AP) — The chants of "monkey!" at the Spanish soccer stadium echoed across the Atlantic, reaching the ears of people on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

That's where Vinícius Júnior, who is Black, grew up and launched his soccer career. Now, despite his global fame and millions, he was again the target of crude European racism.

His city in multiracial Brazil was sickened, and has rallied to his defense.

In Sao Goncalo, rapper Deivisson Oliveira was eating breakfast when the TV news showed the abuse aimed at his hometown hero.

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"I needed to cry out," said Oliveira, 30, who raps under the name MC Menor do CPX.

Oliveira typed lyrics on his phone with his 6-month-old son at his feet. Powerful verses surged through his thumbs: "From the favela to the world: Strength, Vinícius Júnior!"

Racism in the Spanish league has intensified this season, especially after Vinícius started celebrating goals by dancing. On at least nine occasions, people have made monkey sounds at Vinícius, chanted the slur "monkey!" and hurled other racist slurs. Vinícius has repeatedly demanded action from Spanish soccer authorities.

Vinícius' 2017 move to Real Madrid was the culmination of years of effort. One of the most popular clubs in global soccer paid 45 million euros (about \$50 million) — at the time the most ever for a Brazilian teenager — even before his professional debut with Rio-based Flamengo. Relentless racism wasn't part of Vinícius' dream when he was growing up in Sao Goncalo.

Sao Goncalo is the second-most populous city in Rio's metropolitan region, and one of the poorest in the state of Rio de Janeiro, according to the national statistics institute. At night in some areas, motorists turn on their hazard lights to signal to drug-trafficking gangs that the driver is local. It is also where the 2020 police killing of a 14-year-old sparked Black Lives Matter protests across Rio.

Racism has once again fanned outrage.

Rio's imposing, illuminated Christ the Redeemer statue was made dark one night in solidarity. The city's enormous bayside Ferris wheel this week exhibits a clenched Black fist and the scrolling words: "EVERY-ONE AGAINST RACISM."

"My total repudiation of the episode of racism suffered by our ace and the pride of all of us in Sao Goncalo," the city's mayor, Nelson Ruas dos Santos, wrote on Twitter the morning after the incident.

Rio's Mayor Eduardo Paes was less diplomatic when responding to a defense issued by the Spanish soccer league's president.

"Go to hell, son of a..." Paes wrote.

On Thursday, Spanish league president Javier Tebas held a news conference claiming that the league has been acting alone against racism, and that it could end it in six months if granted more power by the government.

At the same time in Rio, representatives of more than 150 activist groups and nonprofits delivered a letter to Spain's consulate, demanding an investigation into the league and its president. They organized a protest that evening.

"Vinicius has been a warrior, he's being a warrior, for enduring this since he arrived in Spain and always taking a stand," activist Valda Neves said. "This time, he's not alone."

The first Black Brazilian players to sign for European clubs in the 1960s met some racism in the largely white society, but rarely spoke out. At the time when Brazil still considered itself a "racial democracy," and did not take on the racism that many faced.

In the late 1980s, the federal government made racial discrimination a crime and created a foundation to promote Afro-Brazilian culture. At the time, many Brazilian players who might identify as Black today did not recognize themselves as such. Incidents of racism in Europe prompted little blowback in Brazil.

In the decades since, Brazil's Black activists have gained prominence and promoted awareness of structural racism. The federal government instituted policies aimed at addressing it, including affirmative-action admissions for public universities and jobs. There has been heightened consciousness throughout society.

In 2014, a fan hurled a banana at defender Dani Alves during a Spanish league match; he picked it up and ate it in a show of defiance, triggering a coordinated social media campaign with other Brazilian players, including star forward Neymar, who did the same.

Vinícius' own educational nonprofit this week launched a program to train public school teachers to raise awareness about racism and instruct kids in fighting discrimination. A teacher at a Sao Goncalo school that will host the project, Mariana Alves, hopes it will provide kids much-needed support and preparation. She spoke in a classroom with soccer-ball beanbag chairs strewn about, and enormous photos of Vinícius on the walls.

Most of the school's students are Black or biracial, and many have experienced racism, Alves said in an

interview. This week, her 10-year-old students have been asking if she saw what happened to Vinícius because they don't fully understand.

"He has money, he has all this status, and not even that stopped him from going through this situation of racism," said Alves, who is Black and from Sao Goncalo. "So the students wonder ... 'Will I go through that, too? Is that going to happen to me?'"

As a boy, Vinícius started training at a nearby feeder school for Flamengo, Brazil's most popular club, before signing with its youth team.

Sao Goncalo kids there were a blur Wednesday afternoon as they ran non-stop drills, leaving them without time or breath to discuss their idol's troubles on another continent.

Still, they knew.

One of them, Ryan Gonçalves Negri, said he has talked about it with his friends outside the soccer school, and that Vinícius should transfer out of the Spanish league "urgently."

"I would never want to play there," Negri, 13, said. "It's not for Brazilians who know how to score goals and celebrate."

While the kids practiced, the rapper Oliveira and his producer Éverton Ramos, known as DJ Cabide, stepped onto the turf and made their way to the corner. They set up a speaker beneath a banner of Vinícius as a brash teenager with his tongue extended, then started recording a clip for their protest song's music video.

"I'm no one, but my voice can reach where I can't go, where I can't imagine going," Oliveira said. "My voice will get there, you understand?"

Associated Press writer Mauricio Savarese contributed from Sao Paulo

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

EU at the crossroads of fight for environment amid growing opposition to law to restore nature

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union has been at the forefront of the fight against climate change and the protection of nature for years. But it now finds itself under pressure from within to pause new environmental efforts amid fears they will hurt the economy.

With the next European Parliament elections set for 2024, some leaders and lawmakers are concerned about antagonizing workers and voters with new binding legislation and restrictive measures and are urging the 27-nation bloc to hit the brakes.

Since Ursula von der Leyen took the helm of the powerful European Commission back in 2019, environmental policies have topped the EU agenda. EU nations have endorsed plans to become climate neutral by 2050 and adopted a wide range of measures, from reducing energy consumption to sharply cutting transport emissions and reforming the EU's trading system for greenhouse gases.

But cracks in the European united front against climate change have emerged in recent months.

The first sign was earlier this year when Germany, the bloc's economic giant, delayed a deal to ban new internal combustion engines in the EU by 2035 amid ideological divisions inside the German government.

An agreement was finally reached in March, but just weeks later, the bloc's other powerhouse, France, called for a pause on EU environmental regulation, causing controversy.

As he presented a bill on green industry earlier this month, French President Emmanuel Macron said it was time for the EU to implement existing rules before adopting new ones.

"We have already passed a lot of regulations at European level, more than our neighbors," he said. "Now we have to execute, not make new rules, because otherwise we will lose all players."

Macron has been particularly concerned by a U.S. clean energy law that benefits electric vehicles and

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other products made in North America, fearing it will expose European companies to unfair competition. Although Europeans and their American partners keep working to resolve the challenges posed by the U.S. law, Macron's logic basically holds that a pause on environmental constraints would help EU businesses keep producing on home soil, despite competition from countries such as China that have lower environmental standards.

Belgian Prime minister Alexander De Croo quickly followed suit, calling this week for a moratorium on the introduction of EU legislation aimed at nature preservation, creating a rift within the governing coalition including green politicians.

The law proposed by the EU's executive arm aims, by 2030, to cover at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas with nature restoration measures, "and eventually extend these to all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050," the commission said.

De Croo said that climate legislation should not be overloaded with restoration measures or limits on agricultural nitrogen pollution, warning that businesses would no longer be able to keep up.

"That's why I'm asking that we press the pause button," he told VRT network. "Let's not go too far with things that, strictly speaking, have nothing to do with global warming. These other issues are important too, but measures to address them must be taken in phases."

Macron and De Croo have found allies at the European Parliament, where members of the biggest group, the Christian Democrat EPP, have asked the European Commission to withdraw the nature restoration law proposal on grounds that it will threaten agriculture and undermine food security in Europe.

The move came after two parliamentary committees, the Fisheries Committee and the Agriculture Committee, rejected the planned legislation.

EPP lawmakers claim that abandoning farmland will lead to an increase in food prices, more imports and drive farmers out of businesses.

"This is an exceptional step and shows that the Parliament is not ready to accept a proposal that only increases costs and insecurity for farmers, fishers and consumers," said Siegfried Mureşan, the vice-chairman of the EPP Group responsible for budget and structural policies.

The growing opposition to the nature restoration law has caused great concern among environmental NGOs, and Frans Timmermans, the EU Commission's top climate official in charge of its Green Deal, warned he would not put forward an alternative proposal because there isn't time.

"You can't say I support the Green Deal, but not the ambition to restore nature. It's not 'à la carte menu,'" Timmermans said.

The EU commission has also proposed setting legally binding targets to reduce the use of pesticides by 50% by 2030 and a ban on all pesticide use in public parks, playgrounds and schools. To ease the transition to alternative pest control methods, farmers would be able to use EU funds to cover the cost of the new requirements for five years.

"If one piece falls, the other pieces fall. I don't see how we can maintain the Green Deal without the nature pillar, because without the nature pillar, the climate pillar is also not viable," Timmermans told EU lawmakers. "So we need to get these two together."

Thousands of exhausted South Sudanese head home, fleeing brutal conflict

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

RENK, South Sudan (AP) — Tens of thousands of exhausted people are heading home to the world's youngest country as they flee a brutal conflict in neighboring Sudan.

There's a bottleneck of men, women and children camping near the dusty border of Sudan and South Sudan and the international community and the government are worried about a prolonged conflict.

Fighting between Sudan's military and a rival militia killed at least 863 civilians in Sudan before a seven-day ceasefire began Monday night. Many in South Sudan are concerned about what could happen if the fighting next door continues.

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"After escaping danger there's more violence," said South Sudanese Alwel Ngok, sitting on the ground outside a church. "There's no food, no shelter, we're totally stranded, and I'm very tired and need to leave," she said.

Ngok thought she'd be safe returning home after fleeing clashes in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, where she watched three of her relatives killed. She and her five children arrived in Renk, South Sudan, where people were sheltering on the ground, some sleeping with their luggage piled up near thin mats. Women prepared food in large cooking pots as teenagers roamed aimlessly. Days after Ngok and her family arrived, she said, a man was beaten to death with sticks in a fight that began with a dispute over water.

Years of fighting between government and opposition forces in South Sudan killed almost 400,000 people and displaced millions until a peace agreement was signed nearly five years ago. Enacting a solid peace has been sluggish: The country has yet to deploy a unified military and create a permanent constitution.

Large-scale clashes between the main parties have subsided, but there is still fighting in parts of the country.

South Sudan has billions in oil reserves that it moves to international markets through a pipeline that runs through Sudan in territories controlled by the warring parties. If that pipeline is damaged, South Sudan's economy could collapse within months, said Ferenc David Marko, a researcher at the International Crisis Group.

However, the most immediate concern is the tens of thousands of South Sudanese who are returning with no idea of how they'll get home to their towns and villages. Many are unable to afford the trip. Aid groups and the government are stretched for resources they can use to help.

Some 50,000 people have crossed into the border town of Renk, many sheltering in stick huts along the road and in government buildings throughout the city. Some wander aimlessly in the market, desperately asking foreigners how to get home. People are arriving faster than they can be taken to new locations.

The longer they stay, the greater the risk of fighting between communities, many with longstanding grievances stemming from the civil war. Many are frustrated because they don't know what lies ahead.

The power struggle in South Sudan between President Salva Kiir, a Dinka, and Vice President Riek Machar, a Nuer, took on an ethnic dimension during the civil war. Communities in Renk said that the conflict that broke out over water in May and led to the killing of the man with sticks quickly became a wider dispute between the ethnic groups, forcing people to flee once again.

At first, the local government wanted to divide the South Sudanese returning through Renk, based on their place of origin. Aid groups, however, pushed back. Together with the government and community leaders, the aid groups are engaging in peace dialogues.

"We are worried (about more violence)," said Yohannes William, the chairman for the humanitarian arm of the government in Upper Nile state. "The services that (are) being provided here, they are limited. We have been told that this is a transit center, anyone who comes should be there two days or three days and then transit."

"But now, unfortunately, due to the delayment of transportation, they have been there for more than two weeks, three weeks," William said.

Situated at the northernmost tip of South Sudan, Renk is connected to other parts of the country by few roads. The main routes are flights or boat trips along the Nile, and many people can't afford them.

The United Nations' International Organization for Migration is trying to send the most vulnerable South Sudanese who have returned — some 8,000 people — home by boat, with the goal of transporting nearly 1,000 people daily along the Nile to the state capital of Malakal. However, the trips have just begun, and problems in coordination between aid groups and the government at the port this month delayed people from leaving, with children, babies and the sick camped by empty boats for days under the scorching sun.

Aid workers say it could take up to two months to decongest the city, which has nearly doubled in size. But Malakal already hosts some 44,000 displaced people in a United Nations protection camp, many still too afraid to leave for security reasons.

"The problem is 'an out of the frying pan, into the fire' conundrum, because we're moving them to

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scheduled games in the league season have been completed despite the relentless war. There are now 16 games left.

That looked to be an unlikely achievement in Lviv back on Aug. 24 last year when air raid alerts were disrupting the second day of games.

It was also a national holiday, celebrating Ukraine's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and the game between Lviv club Rukh Vynnyky and Metalist took 4-1/2 hours to complete after the teams stopped play four times to find shelter.

League officials had weighed starting the league season in Poland or Turkey but decided it was their "moral obligation" to stay in Ukraine. They relied on financial help from their fellow members of the 29-nation European Leagues group.

"It was like a symbol of sport to our people and our warriors," said Dykyi, adding that soldiers connected with the league by sending video clips of them watching games online from the frontline. "They sent their really deepest 'Thankyou's' that the championship can be played."

In these conditions, fans have been almost entirely excluded. A limit of 280 people on site was imposed for each game.

"At this moment we have not the opportunity to bring back the supporters to the stadium because of the issues about safety and shelter," said Dykyi, who worked in Kyiv for the past year.

He said his family shelters in their bathroom during air raid alerts.

"Now we have maybe, unfortunately, got used to this," he said.

Fans around Europe also got used to seeing Ukrainian soccer teams in international competitions while Russian teams remain suspended by FIFA and UEFA.

The national team is playing in Euro 2024 qualifying and in September will face defending champion Italy in Milan, then will take on England at a neutral venue yet to be announced.

Shakhtar and Dnipro-1 advanced to knockout rounds in UEFA competitions this year, and a place in the group stage of the Champions League next season is the likely reward for winning the Ukrainian title.

The millions of dollars in UEFA prize money from European competition is even more important income for clubs which have seen so many sponsors and customers shut down during the war.

"A lot of teams are suffering a lot," Dykyi said. "A lot of businesses of the club owners were destroyed."

Shakhtar owner Rinat Akhmetov's business included the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol that one year ago was a powerful symbol of resistance in the city devastated by Russian attacks.

Mariupol's soccer club could not continue, though a place in the top league is held open for its return. The league made the same offer to the Desna Chernihiv club.

Dykyi becomes emotional telling the story of one Mariupol club official's escape from the city last year on roads peppered with mines: "Mariupol is a terrible story."

The uncertainty and insecurity for Ukrainian soccer because of the war meant Shakhtar last year lost its Italian coach, Roberto de Zerbi, who went on to be an acclaimed success in England with Brighton.

Shakhtar then hired the Croatian Igor Jovićević from Dnipro-1, which then appointed Oleksandr Kucher. He played at Shakhtar for 11 years and played in its storied 2009 UEFA Cup-winning team.

The close coaching ties add another layer to a game Sunday that is a kind of victory for all Ukraine.

"In the first months (of the war) it was a really scary situation," Dykyi said. "We couldn't imagine in this situation we can play our championship."

More AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

As Elizabeth Holmes heads to prison for fraud, questions remain about her motives

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — As Elizabeth Holmes prepares to report to prison next week, the criminal case that laid bare the blood-testing scam at the heart of her Theranos startup is entering its final phase.

The 11-year sentence represents a comeuppance for the wide-eyed woman who broke through “tech bro” culture to become one of Silicon Valley’s most celebrated entrepreneurs, only to be exposed as a fraud. Along the way, Holmes became a symbol of the shameless hyperbole that often saturates startup culture.

But questions still linger about her true intentions — so many that even the federal judge who presided over her trial seemed mystified. And Holmes’ defenders continue to ask whether the punishment fits the crime.

At 39, she seems most likely to be remembered as Silicon Valley’s Icarus — a high-flying entrepreneur burning with reckless ambition whose odyssey culminated in convictions for fraud and conspiracy.

Her motives are still somewhat mysterious, and some supporters say federal prosecutors targeted her unfairly in their zeal to bring down one of the most prominent practitioners of fake-it-til-you-make-it — the tech sector’s brand of self-promotion that sometimes veers into exaggeration and blatant lies to raise money.

Holmes will begin to pay the price for her deceit on May 30 when she is scheduled begin the sentence that will separate her from her two children — a son whose July 2021 birth delayed the start of her trial and a 3-month-old daughter conceived after her conviction.

She is expected to be incarcerated in Bryan, Texas, about 100 miles (160 km) northwest of her hometown of Houston. The prison was recommended by the judge who sentenced Holmes, but authorities have not publicly disclosed where she will be held.

Her many detractors contend she deserves to be in prison for peddling a technology that she repeatedly boasted would quickly scan for hundreds of diseases and other health problems with a few drops of blood taken with a finger prick.

The technology never worked as promised. Instead, Theranos tests produced wildly unreliable results that could have endangered patients’ lives — one of the most frequently cited reasons why she deserved to be prosecuted.

Before those lies were uncovered in a series of explosive articles in The Wall Street Journal beginning in October 2015, Holmes raised nearly \$1 billion from a list of savvy investors including Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison and media mogul Rupert Murdoch. It was the duping of those investors that led to her prison sentence and a \$452 million restitution bill.

Holmes’ stake in Theranos at one point catapulted her paper wealth to \$4.5 billion. She never sold any of her stock in the company, though trial evidence left no doubt she reveled in the trappings of fame and fortune — so much so that she and the father of her children, William “Billy” Evans, lived on a palatial Silicon Valley estate during the trial.

The theory that Holmes was running an elaborate scam was buttressed by trial evidence documenting her efforts to prevent the Journal’s investigation from being published. That campaign compelled John Carreyrou — the reporter responsible for those bombshell stories — to attend court and position himself in Holmes’ line of vision when she took the witness stand.

Holmes also signed off on surveillance aimed at intimidating Theranos employees who helped uncover the flaws with the blood-testing technology. The whistleblowers included Tyler Shultz, the grandson of former Secretary of State George Shultz, whom Holmes befriended and persuaded to join the Theranos board.

Tyler Shultz became so unnerved by Holmes’ efforts to shut him up that he began sleeping with a knife under his pillow, according to a wrenching statement delivered by his father, Alex, at her sentencing.

Holmes’ supporters still contend she always had good intentions and was unfairly scapegoated by the Justice Department. They insist she simply deployed the same over-the-top promotion tactics as many other tech executives, including Elon Musk, who has repeatedly made misleading statements about the capabilities of Tesla’s self-driving cars.

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According to those supporters, Holmes was singled out because she was a woman who briefly eclipsed the men who customarily bask in Silicon Valley's spotlight, and the trial turned her into a latter-day version of Hester Prynne — the protagonist in the 1850 novel "The Scarlet Letter."

Holmes steadfastly maintained her innocence during seven often-riveting days of testimony in her own defense — a spectacle that caused people to line up shortly after midnight to secure one of the few dozen seats available in the San Jose courtroom.

On one memorable day, Holmes recounted how she had never gotten over the trauma of being raped while enrolled at Stanford University. She then described being subjected to a long-running pattern of emotional and sexual abuse by her former lover and Theranos conspirator, Ramesh "Sunny" Balwani, and suggested his stifling control blurred her thinking.

Balwani's lawyer, Jeffrey Coopersmith, denied those allegations during the trial. In Balwani's subsequent trial, Coopersmith unsuccessfully tried to depict his client as Holmes' pawn.

Balwani, 57, is now serving a nearly 13-year prison sentence for fraud and conspiracy.

When it came time to sentence the then-pregnant Holmes in November, U.S. District Judge Edward Davila seemed as puzzled as anyone about why she did what she did.

"This is a fraud case where an exciting venture went forward with great expectations and hope, only to be dashed by untruth, misrepresentations, hubris and plain lies," Davila lamented while Holmes stood before him. "I suppose we step back and we look at this, and we think what is the pathology of fraud?"

The judge also hearkened back to the days that Silicon Valley consisted mostly of orchards farmed by immigrants. That was before the land was ceded to the tech boom beginning in 1939 when William Hewlett and David Packard founded a company bearing their surnames in a one-car garage in Palo Alto — the same city where Theranos was based.

"You'll recall the wonderful innovation of those two individuals in that small garage," Davila reminded everyone in the rapt courtroom. "No exotic automobiles or lavish lifestyle, just a desire to create for society's benefit through honest hard work. And that, I would hope, would be the continuing story, the legacy and practice of Silicon Valley."

Michael Liedtke has been covering Silicon Valley for The Associated Press for 23 years.

Why Texas' GOP-controlled House wants to impeach Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton

By JIM VERTUNO and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — After years of legal and ethical scandals swirling around Texas Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton, the state's GOP-controlled House of Representatives has moved toward a Saturday impeachment vote that could quickly throw him from office.

The extraordinary and rarely used maneuver comes in the final days of the state's legislative session and sets up a bruising political fight. It pits Paxton, who has aligned himself closely with former President Donald Trump and the state's hard-right conservatives, against House Republican leadership, who appear to have suddenly had enough of the allegations of wrongdoing that have long dogged Texas' top lawyer.

Paxton is fighting it every step of the way, calling the entire process "corrupt." He asked supporters to rally for him at the state Capitol during the vote.

Here is how the impeachment process works in Texas, and how the 60-year-old Republican came to face the prospect of becoming just the third official to be impeached in the state's nearly 200-year history:

THE PROCESS

Under the Texas Constitution and law, impeaching a state official is similar to the process on the federal level: The action starts in the state House.

In this case the five-member House General Investigating Committee voted unanimously Thursday to send 20 articles of impeachment to the full, 149-member chamber.

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Paxton faces grim legislative math. Just a simple majority is needed to impeach. That means only a small fraction of the House's 85 Republicans would need to vote against him if all 64 Democrats do.

The House can call witnesses to testify, but the investigating committee already did that prior to recommending impeachment. Over several hours Wednesday, investigators delivered an extraordinary public airing of Paxton's years of scandal and alleged lawbreaking.

Saturday's floor debate and vote is expected to last about five hours.

If the House impeaches Paxton, a Senate trial will decide whether to permanently remove him from office or acquit. Removal by the Senate requires a two-thirds majority vote.

A SUDDEN THREAT

But there is a major difference between Texas and the federal system: And impeachment means Paxton is immediately suspended from office until the outcome of the Senate trial. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott would appoint an interim replacement.

The GOP in Texas controls every branch of state government. Republican lawmakers and leaders alike have until this week taken a muted posture toward the myriad examples of Paxton's alleged misconduct and law breaking that emerged in legal filings and news reports over the years.

In February, Paxton agreed to settle a whistleblower lawsuit brought by former aides who accused him of corruption. The \$3.3 million payout must be approved by the House, and Republican Speaker Dade Phelan has said he doesn't think taxpayers should foot the bill.

Shortly after the settlement was reached, the House investigation into Paxton began.

"But for Paxton's own request for a taxpayer-funded settlement over his wrongful conduct, Paxton would not be facing impeachment," the investigative committee wrote in a Friday memo.

THE SCENE

While the vote happens inside the House chamber, Paxton has called for supporters statewide to descend on the Capitol and demonstrate peacefully.

"Exercise your right to petition your government. Let's restore the power of this great state to the people, instead of the politicians," Paxton said.

The request echoed Trump's call for people to protest his electoral defeat on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob violently stormed the U.S. Capitol in Washington. Paxton spoke at the rally in Washington that day, before the insurrection.

A few hours before the impeachment vote, Gov. Abbott, who has stayed quiet about it, is scheduled to make a Memorial Day address to lawmakers in the House chamber.

The Capitol and the House gallery have been the site of boisterous demonstrations over gun and LG-BTQ+ rights legislation in recent weeks. Hundreds of state police troopers cleared the gallery and Capitol rotunda after protests erupted over a bill to ban transgender medical care for minors.

REPUBLICAN ON REPUBLICAN

The five-member committee that mounted the investigation of Paxton is led by his fellow Republicans, contrasting America's most prominent recent examples of impeachment.

Trump's federal impeachments in 2020 and 2021 were driven by Democrats who had majority control of the U.S. House of Representatives. In both cases, the impeachment charges approved by the House failed in the Senate, where Republicans had enough votes to block conviction.

In Texas, Republicans control both chambers by large majorities and the state's GOP leaders hold all levers of influence. That hasn't stopped Paxton from seeking to rally a partisan defense.

When the House investigation emerged Tuesday, Paxton suggested it was a political attack by Phelan. He called for the "liberal" speaker's resignation and accused him of being drunk during a marathon session last Friday.

Phelan's office brushed off the accusation as Paxton attempting to "save face."

None of the state's other top elected Republicans have voiced support for Paxton since. But the chairman of the state party came to his defense Friday, issuing a statement calling the impeachment effort a "sham" based on "allegations already litigated by voters."

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Republican Party Chairman Matt Rinaldi said they would rely on the "principled leadership of the Texas Senate to restore sanity and reason."

On Thursday, Paxton also portrayed the impeachment proceedings as an effort to disenfranchise voters who elected him to a third term in November. He said that by moving against him "the RINOs in the Texas Legislature are now on the same side as Joe Biden."

THE MARRIAGE WRINKLE

But Paxton, who served five terms in the House and one in the Senate before becoming attorney general, is sure to still have allies in Austin.

One is his wife, Angela, a two-term state senator who could be in the awkward position of voting on her husband's political future. It's unclear whether she would or should participate in the Senate trial, where the 31 members make margins tight.

In a twist, Paxton's impeachment deals with an extramarital affair he acknowledged to members of his staff years earlier. The impeachment charges include bribery for one of Paxton's donors, Austin real estate developer Nate Paul, allegedly employing the woman with whom he had the affair in exchange for legal help.

YEARS IN THE MAKING

The impeachment reaches back to 2015, when Paxton was indicted on securities fraud charges for which he still has not stood trial. The lawmakers charged Paxton with making false statements to state securities regulators.

But most of the articles stem from Paxton's connections to Paul and a remarkable revolt by the attorney general's top deputies in 2020.

That fall, eight senior Paxton aides reported their boss to the FBI, accusing him of bribery and abusing his office to help Paul. Four of them later brought the whistleblower lawsuit. The report prompted a federal criminal investigation that in February was taken over by the U.S. Justice Department's Washington-based Public Integrity Section.

The impeachment charges cover myriad accusations related to Paxton's dealings with Paul. The allegations include attempts to interfere in foreclosure lawsuits and improperly issuing legal opinions to benefit Paul, and firing, harassing and interfering with staff who reported what was going on. The bribery charges stem from the affair, as well as Paul allegedly paying for expensive renovations to Paxton's Austin home.

The fracas took a toll on the Texas attorney general's office, long one of the primary legal challengers to Democratic administrations in the White House.

In the years since Paxton's staff went to the FBI, his agency has become 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.

TEXAS HISTORY

Paxton was already likely to be noted in history books for his unprecedented request that the U.S. Supreme Court overturn Biden's defeat of Trump in the 2020 presidential election. He may now make history in another way.

Only twice has the Texas House impeached a sitting official.

Gov. James "Pa" Ferguson was removed from office in 1917 for misapplication of public funds, embezzlement and the diversion of a special fund. State Judge O.P. Carrillo was forced out of office in 1975 for using public money and equipment for his own use and filing false financial statements.

Bleiberg reported from Dallas.

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Malakal, and Malakal is itself congested," Nicholas Haysom, the United Nations chief in South Sudan, told The Associated Press.

Some who have already returned to Malakal from Sudan say they're unsure if there's a home to go back to, having had no contact with their families during the civil war.

"I don't know if my relatives are dead or alive," said William Deng. The 33-year-old hasn't been able to speak to his family in neighboring Jonglei state, which has little phone service, since returning in early May.

The government says that it has funding for 10 charter planes to fly people from Renk to parts of the country harder to reach by boat. But Renk's tiny airport can't support large planes, so each flight can only hold 80 people.

"The situation is dire ... (South Sudan) is now being forced to receive additional refugees and returnees. As a result, the humanitarian needs in the country will continue to grow," said Michael Dunford, regional director for East Africa for the World Food Program.

Even before this crisis, 70% of the population needed humanitarian assistance, and the World Food Program can't meet their needs, he said.

Traders in Renk, who get the majority of their goods from Sudan, say they're already feeling the economic pain, with prices spiking 70%.

"I used to send my family \$100 a week. Now I send half that," said Adam Abdalla Hassan.

The Sudanese shop owner supports his family in Sudan, but now is earning less because people don't have enough money, he said.

Those who returned say they've received little information about where or how they're supposed to get home, and worry they won't make it in time before the rainy season, which starts soon, floods roads and makes it harder to fly.

"How can we stay here under the rain with the kids?" said Ehlam Saad. Holding up her UN-issued wristband, the 42-year-old said she's been living in Renk for nearly three weeks. She has no idea how she'll get to the capital of South Sudan, Juba, where she and her family lived before the war. Her only choice now is to find a way home and reunite with her husband and son, she said.

"A home is a home. Even if there's fighting, even if you move around the world, even if it's the worst option, it's home," she said.

Ukraine soccer league set for a title-deciding game in a remarkable, war-hit season

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — Two soccer teams exiled from cities in war-battered eastern Ukraine play each other Sunday in the safer western part of the country with the league title at stake.

The showdown between competition leader Shakhtar Donetsk and second-place Dnipro-1 at Arena Lviv can be decisive in a soccer season that is finishing on schedule in remarkable circumstances. The stadium was one of four in Ukraine, including Shakhtar's home in Donetsk, secure enough in 2012 from Russian aggression to co-host that year's European Championship with Poland.

Shakhtar leads by five points and needs just a draw this weekend to secure the title ahead of the last scheduled round on June 4.

"I think it will maybe be one of our best matches ever," Ukrainian league chief executive Ievgen Dykyi told The Associated Press this week in a call from Kyiv. "Because the situation now is really hard and all the players understand about this."

In Dnipro on Friday, the Russian military struck a medical clinic, killing at least two and injuring more than 20, including children.

Still, the soccer season continues with the blessing of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a bid to help keep some normalcy in daily life.

The kickoff at 2 p.m. in Lviv will open the 29th round of games in the 16-team league. All 224 previously

A growing number of LGBTQ+ Russians seek refuge from war, discrimination in Argentina

By NATACHA PISARENKO and DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — Anastasia Domini and wife Anna Domini walked hand in hand on a recent sunny day in Argentina's capital while their four restless children played nearby.

It's a common sight in a country where same-sex marriage has been legal for more than a decade. But the couple, who got married shortly after arriving in Buenos Aires early last year, still remember the fear they felt when they first decided to hold hands in public after leaving Russia, which explicitly outlawed same-sex marriages in 2020.

"It was really scary," Anastasia Domini said, but "we were looking around and really, really nobody was looking."

For the Dominis, who changed their last names so they could more convincingly pretend to be sisters in Russia, the stroll exemplified how much their lives had changed since they moved, joining an increasing number of LGBTQ+ Russians who decided to leave their homeland and settle in Argentina to escape discrimination and the war with Ukraine.

Over the past decade, living openly as a member of the LGBTQ+ community in Russia has grown increasingly difficult.

In December 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law that significantly expanded restrictions on activities seen as promoting LGBTQ+ rights in the country, building on a law that had been in place since 2013 and that independent researchers say led to a surge in violence against sexual minorities.

More recently, the Kremlin has even framed the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine partly as a way to defend conservative values against Western promotion of gay and transgender rights.

The Argentine LGBT Federation has received about 130 inquiries in the past year and a half from Russians interested in seeking refuge in Argentina, more than any other nationality.

"The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has accelerated the decision of many people who were already in a vulnerable situation," said Maribe Sgariglia, who heads the organization's international relations department.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community aren't the only Russians coming to Argentina. In January, 4,523 Russians entered Argentina, more than four times the 1,037 that arrived in the same month last year, according to government figures. In 2022, some 22,200 Russians entered Argentina, including a large number of pregnant women who have flown into the country to give birth, partly in a bid to obtain a passport that opens more doors.

For at least some of the Russians arriving in Argentina, the country wasn't their first choice.

Mark Boyarsky, a 38-year-old trans man who left Moscow with his wife and two children, aged 5 and 8, shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, first moved to Nepal in a bid to get a British visa. After several fruitless months, they decided to move to Argentina in September.

It "feels so safe for me here," Boyarsky said, noting that he has yet to tell his children that he's trans because "it felt too dangerous for them" to know that back home considering there's a general belief that "there are no gays in Russia."

Two years after marriage equality became law in Argentina in 2010, Congress approved a pioneering Gender Identity Law that codified rights for transgender individuals, including the ability to change names without the need for medical evaluations.

Boyarsky works as an independent photographer and often snaps photos at same-sex weddings involving Russian immigrants. At least 34 Russian same-sex couples got married in Argentina in 2022, and 31 so far this year, according to the Argentine LGBT Federation.

Recently, Boyarsky photographed the wedding of Nadezhda Skvortosova, 22, and Tatiana Skvortosova, 29, who got married less than a month after moving to Buenos Aires. The pair had also changed their last names in Russia so they could pretend to be sisters.

"It's a very important moment for us. We're waiting for very long to be officially family," Nadezhda

Skvortosova said after getting married at a Buenos Aires civil registry.

Many of the Russians who arrive in Argentina knew little about the country before moving.

"Tango, Che Guevera, and that it was a Spanish colony," joked Nikolai Shushpan, a 26-year-old gay man who moved to Argentina's capital in October when he started fearing he could be drafted into the war.

Shushpan now shares an apartment in downtown Buenos Aires with Dimitry Yarin, a fellow Russian he met on a dating app.

Yarin, 21, said he long had plans to move to a more tolerant country but "the war accelerated that decision."

Because of the discrimination they face at home, many of the Russians who arrive in Argentina request refugee status, a process that can take as long as three years.

Authorities have increased controls on Russian migrants recently after the arrest of two alleged Russian spies with Argentine passports in Slovenia late last year.

For now, Shushpan is enjoying living openly as a gay man for the first time. Back home, there was always tension and the feeling "that something could happen."

"The only country where I didn't feel that is here. You don't have to be worried all the time. The only thing you have to worry about is prices," Shushpan said, referring to Argentina's inflation rate — one of the world's highest — of about 110%.

After a little more than a year in Argentina, the Dominis share that feeling of relief.

In the northwestern Russian city of Petrozavodsk, Anastasia, 34, and Anna, 44, barely told anyone about their relationship and two sets of twins, ages 3 and 6. There was a constant fear authorities would take their children away and put them in an orphanage, Anastasia Domini said.

Now they live without having to worry that someone could take their kids or put them in prison.

"We're absolutely used to our status of married women and that we are parents of lots of kids and that we can be free here," she said.

Associated Press videographers Victor R. Caivano and Yesica Brumec contributed to this report. AP reporter Elise Morton contributed from London.

Mechanical sails? Batteries? Shippers forming 'green corridors' to fast-track cleaner technologies

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

It's among the world's busiest container shipping routes — a stream of vessels packed with furniture, automobiles, clothing and other goods, traversing the Pacific between Los Angeles and Shanghai.

If plans succeed, this corridor will become a showcase for slashing planet-warming carbon emissions from the shipping industry, which produces nearly 3% of the world's total. That's less than from cars, trucks, rail or aviation but still a lot — and it's rising.

The International Maritime Organization, which regulates commercial shipping, wants to halve its greenhouse gas releases by midcentury and may seek deeper cuts this year. "Shipping must embrace decarbonization," IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim said in February.

Meeting agency targets will require significant vessel and infrastructure changes. That's inspiring plans for "green shipping corridors" along major routes where new technologies and methods could be fast-tracked and scaled up.

More than 20 of these partnerships have been proposed. They're largely on paper now but are expected to take shape in coming years. The goal: uniting marine fuel producers, vessel owners and operators, cargo owners and ports in a common effort.

FRONT-RUNNERS

Los Angeles and Shanghai formed their partnership last year.

"The vision is that a container will leave a factory on a zero-emissions truck (in China)," said Gene Seroka,

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executive director of the Port of Los Angeles.

"It will arrive at the port of Shanghai, be loaded onto a ship by a zero-emissions cargo handling equipment unit, and move across the Pacific Ocean on a vessel that emits zero carbon. Once it gets to Los Angeles, the reverse happens," with carbon-free handling and distribution.

Los Angeles entered a second agreement in April with nearby Long Beach and Singapore. Others in the works include the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River; a Chilean network; and numerous corridors in Asia, North America and Europe.

C40 Cities, a global climate action coalition of mayors, advocates green corridors as "tools that can turn ambition into action, bringing together the entire shipping value chain," said Alisa Kreyne, a deputy director.

But Kreyne sounded a note of caution: "I can't help but wonder how much of it is PR and how much of it is actually going to become practice. It's going to require a cultural shift in thinking about how we get things from point A to point B."

New approaches developed in green corridors could bring fast results, said John Bradshaw, technical director for environment and safety with the World Shipping Council. "I'm very confident that the industry will deliver zero emissions by 2050."

PRESSURE BUILDS

From tea to tennis shoes, stuff in your pantry and closets likely spent time on a ship.

Roughly 90% of traded goods move on water, some in behemoths longer than four football fields, each holding thousands of containers with consumer products. About 58,000 commercial ships ply the seas.

Their emissions are less noticeable than onshore haulers such as trucks, although noxious fumes from ships draw complaints in port communities.

Maritime trade volumes are expected to triple by 2050, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Studies predict the industry's share of greenhouse gas emissions could reach 15%.

Yet the 2015 Paris climate accord exempts maritime shipping, partly because vessels do business worldwide, while the agreement covers nation-by-nation goals.

"No one wants to take responsibility," said Allyson Browne of Pacific Environment, an advocacy group. "A ship may be flagged in China, but who takes ownership of emissions from that ship when it's transporting goods to the U.S.?"

The IMO responded to mounting pressure with a 2018 plan for a 50% emissions reduction by midcentury from 2008 levels. An update scheduled for July may set more ambitious targets favored by the U.S., Europe and small island nations. Opponents include Brazil, China and India.

The Biden administration wants a zero-emission goal, a State Department official told The Associated Press.

But fewer than half of large shipping companies have pledged to meet international carbon objectives. And there's no consensus about how to accomplish them.

Proposals range from slowing vessels down to charging them for emissions, as the European Union did last year.

"Global shipping is hard to decarbonize ... because of the energy required to cover long distances with heavy cargoes," said Lee Kindberg, head of environment and sustainability for Maersk North America, part of A.P. Moller-Maersk, which has more than 700 vessels. "It's a stretch but we consider it doable."

BUT HOW?

Mechanical sails. Batteries. Low- or zero-carbon liquid fuels.

They're among propulsion methods touted as replacements for "bunker fuel" that powers most commercial ships — thick residue from oil refining. It spews greenhouse gases and pollutants that endanger human health: sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, soot.

Finding alternatives will be a priority for green shipping corridors.

For now, liquid natural gas is the runaway choice. Worldwide, it's used by 923 of 1,349 commercial vessels not powered by conventional fuels, according to a study last year by DNV, a Norway-based maritime

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accreditation society. Vessels with batteries or hybrid systems placed a distant second.

Many environmentalists oppose LNG because it emits methane, another potent greenhouse gas. Defenders say it's the quickest and most cost-effective bunker fuel substitute.

Of 1,046 alternative-energy ships on order, 534 are powered by LNG while 417 are battery-hybrids, DNV reported. Thirty-five others will use methanol, which analysts consider an up-and-coming cleaner alternative.

Moller-Maersk plans to launch 12 cargo vessels next year that will use "green methanol" produced with renewable sources such as plant waste. A biodiesel from used cooking oil fuels some of its ships.

The company is collaborating on research that may lead to ammonia- or hydrogen-powered vessels by the mid-2030s.

"This is the first step toward the turnover of our fleet into something much more climate-friendly," Kindberg said.

Norsepower offers a new twist on an ancient technology: wind.

The Finnish company has developed "rotor sails" — composite cylinders about 33 yards (30 meters) tall that are fitted on ship decks and spin in the breeze. Air pressure differences on opposite sides of the whirring devices help push a vessel forward.

An independent analysis found rotor sails installed on a Maersk oil tanker in 2018 produced an 8.2% fuel savings in a year. Norsepower CEO Tuomas Riski said others have saved 5% to 25%, depending on wind conditions, ship type and other factors.

Thirteen ships are using the devices or have them on order, Riski said.

"Mechanical sails have an essential role in the decarbonization of shipping," he said. "They can't do it alone, but they can make a great contribution."

Fleetzero contends electric ships are best suited to wean the industry off carbon. The company was founded two years ago in Alabama to build cargo vessels with rechargeable battery packs.

CEO Steven Henderson says it envisions fleets of smaller, nimbler ships than huge container vessels. They would call at ports that have freshly charged batteries to swap for ones running low. Fleetzero's prototype ship is slated to begin delivering cargo later this year.

WHO GOES FIRST?

Before building or buying low-emission vessels, companies want assurances clean fuels will be available and affordable.

Companies producing the fuels, meanwhile, want enough ships using them to guarantee strong markets.

And both need port infrastructure that accommodates new-generation ships, such as electrical hookups and clean fuel dispensing mechanisms.

But ports await demand to justify such expensive upgrades. Switching onshore cargo handling equipment and trucks to zero-emission models will cost the Los Angeles port \$20 billion, officials say.

"Once you put a (green) corridor on the map," said Jason Anderson, senior program director for the nonprofit ClimateWorks Foundation, "at least they're heading in the same direction."

Success will require government regulation and corridor funding, along with support from shipping industry customers, said Jing Sun, a University of Michigan marine engineering professor.

"Shipping is the most cost-effective way of moving things around," Sun said.

An organization called Cargo Owners for Zero Emission Vessels pledges to use only zero-emission shipping companies by 2040. Among 19 signatories are Amazon, Michelin and Target.

"When big corporate buyers come together and say we need this to happen, the rest of the chain has confidence to make needed investments," said Ingrid Irigoyen, an assistant director of the nonprofit Aspen Institute, which helped assemble the group.

Follow John Flesher on Twitter: @JohnFlesher

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.

Ahead of 'Succession' finale, uncertainty about outcomes for its sparring siblings

By ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

There's no Iron Throne, but the stakes feel just as high.

"Succession," the critically acclaimed drama chronicling a Murdoch-esque feuding billionaire family, wraps its four-season run on Sunday with a highly anticipated 88-minute finale.

And just like another tentpole HBO show, "Game of Thrones," there's no shortage of theories over how the series will end and who will prevail. But instead of a throne, the Roy siblings are battling over the sprawling Waystar Royco media empire.

The Shakespearean-level intrigue has prompted speculation among fans looking for clues in past episodes, characters' names and elsewhere. Even the final episode's title, "With Open Eyes," has critics poring through the John Berryman poem that has been used for each season finale's title.

Here are some of the questions that remain as the finale nears.

WHERE DO THINGS STAND WITH THE ROY FAMILY?

"Succession" has been about who will ultimately run the media conglomerate founded by Logan Roy, the belligerent and profane Roy family patriarch played by Brian Cox.

For most of the series, three siblings have been vying for the crown: Kendall, played by Jeremy Strong; Roman, played by Kieran Culkin; and Shiv, played by Sarah Snook. A fourth sibling — Connor, played by Alan Ruck — instead mounted an ill-fated run for president.

By the end of season three, the siblings had buried their differences enough to attempt a corporate coup of their father — only to be betrayed by Shiv's husband Tom Wambsgans, played by Matthew Macfadyen.

The series' most shocking twist came early this season, when Logan died on his way to close a deal with GoJo, a tech company.

Logan's death and the power vacuum it created have led to renewed struggle among the siblings, with Kendall and Roman hoping to block the GoJo deal.

WHO WILL PREVAIL?

Show creator Jesse Armstrong told *The New Yorker* earlier this year "there's a promise in the title of 'Succession,'" a sign that there'll be some certainty at least on this question.

The finale could live up to Logan's statement in season 3 that life is "a fight for a knife in the mud."

Kendall appeared in the penultimate episode to be on track to follow in his father's footsteps, delivering an impromptu eulogy at Logan's funeral after Roman was too grief-stricken to do so.

After aligning himself with the far-right presidential candidate Jeryd Mencken — who the Roy's network questionably declared the winner — Roman's fortunes appeared to be falling and was seen fighting with protesters in the streets in the final scenes.

Shiv, meanwhile is still trying to shepherd the GoJo deal with a plan she's concocted that would install her as the company's chief executive in the United States.

Connor, after losing every state and endorsing Mencken, is instead planning for his hoped-for ambassadorship.

There are a few wild cards that remain, in and outside the Roy family. The biggest one of all is Greg, the cousin and fan favorite played by Nicholas Braun, known for his awkward quotes and verbal abuse he endures from Tom.

WHO WON THE ELECTION?

All of this is happening with the backdrop of an unsettled U.S. election that may have been swung to Mencken (Justin Kirk) with the help of the Roy's cable network and a seemingly not-coincidental fire at a vote center in a swing state.

The scenario and the series' Election Night episode has echoed the conversations revealed among Fox News executives and talent during the defamation suit by Dominion Voting Systems that led to a nearly \$800 million settlement with the network.

"Succession's" fictional election results have both professional and personal implications for the Roy

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family, with protests over Mencken erupting throughout the city. But even Shiv seems willing to put her moral qualms aside at the prospect of making a deal with Mencken.

WHAT ABOUT TOM AND SHIV?

Tom and Shiv's marriage had been on shaky ground before he betrayed her to Logan at the end of last season.

This season it's even more so, with the two holding a no-holds-barred argument at a pre-election party where the two traded grievances and insults.

Shiv's revelation to Tom on Election Night that she's pregnant prompted one of the most gut-wrenching responses, with Tom asking her whether she was telling the truth or just using a new tactic against him.

The show continues to offer some signs of affection between the two, with Shiv telling an exhausted Tom to sleep at her apartment after the funeral, but it remains to be seen whether their marriage is salvageable.

IS THIS REALLY THE END?

There are plenty of examples of shows that lived on after their finales. "Game of Thrones" spawned a popular prequel series, "House of the Dragon," while "Seinfeld" got a second try on its much-maligned finale on "Curb Your Enthusiasm."

Even "The Sopranos," known for one of the buzziest finales of all time, came back with a movie looking at Tony Soprano's beginning.

Armstrong has left open revisiting his character in another fashion, and the possibilities for doing so are endless. A Tom and Greg buddy comedy? Or maybe a Logan Roy origin story, just to reveal the first time he said his signature vulgar phrase.

Teen workers are in high demand for summer and commanding better pay

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Teens have long been vital to filling out the summertime staffs of restaurants, ice cream stands, amusement parks and camps.

Now, thanks to one of the tightest labor markets in decades, they have even more sway, with an array of jobs to choose from at ever higher wages.

To ease the labor crunch, some states are moving to roll back restrictions to let teens work more hours and, in some cases, more hazardous jobs — much to the chagrin of labor rights groups, who see it as a troubling trend.

Economists say there are other ways to expand the workforce without putting more of a burden on kids, including by allowing more legal immigration.

SEEKING TEEN WORKERS

At Funtown Splashtown USA, an amusement park in southern Maine, teens play a critical role in keeping the attractions open, which isn't as easy as it used to be.

General Manager Cory Hutchinson anticipates hiring about 350 workers this summer, including many local high schoolers, compared with more than 500 in past summers.

"We literally do not have enough people to staff the place seven days a week and into the evenings," he said. This summer, Funtown Splashtown will only be open six days a week, and will close at 6 p.m., instead of 9 p.m.

In April, nearly 34% of Americans aged 16 to 19 had jobs, according to government data. That compares with 30% four years ago, the last pre-pandemic summer.

More jobs are available for those who want them: There are roughly 1.6 jobs open for every person that is unemployed, according to the Labor Department. In normal times, that ratio is about 1:1.

At RideAway Adventures on Cape Cod, which offers kayak, bike and paddleboard rentals and tours, finding enough teen workers hasn't been a challenge. Owner Mike Morrison chalks it up to the fact that RideAway is a desirable place to work compared with other options.

"They're not washing dishes and they get to be outside and active," Morrison said.

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Plus, while he typically starts off new teen hires at \$15 an hour, the state's minimum wage, he will bump up the pay of hard workers by as much as 50 cents per hour toward the end of July to help keep them through the end of summer.

CHOOSIER TEENS

Maxen Lucas, a graduating senior at Lincoln Academy in Maine, had his first job at 15 as a summer camp dishwasher, followed by a stint as a grocery bagger before getting into landscaping. He said young workers can be choosier now.

"After COVID settled down, everyone was being paid more," said the 18-year-old from Nobleboro who'll head off to Maine Maritime Academy this fall.

Indeed, hourly pay jumped about 5% in April from a year ago at restaurants, retailers and amusement parks, the industries likely to employ teens. Before the pandemic, pay in these industries typically rose no more than 3% annually.

Addison Beer, 17, will work this summer at the Virginia G. Piper branch of the Boys & Girls Club in Scottsdale, Arizona, where she feels a strong connection with colleagues and the kids she helps out.

Because of a scheduling conflict, she temporarily took a job at Zinburger, a restaurant that was desperate for workers. "They just asked me a few questions and were like, 'Oh, you're hired!'" she said.

For many teens, the point of a summer job doesn't have to be about finding the highest pay available.

"Having a job is just so I can sustain myself, be more independent, not rely on my parents too much," said Christopher Au, 19, who has been dishing out ice cream at a J.P. Licks in Boston for the past few months.

Jack Gervais, 18, of Cumberland, Maine, lined up an internship shooting photography at an arts venue and will earn roughly the minimum wage of \$13.80 an hour while gaining skills that relate to his career goals. But he said many kids he knows are seeking — and commanding — higher paying jobs.

"Nobody I know would work for minimum wage, unless there were major tips involved," he said.

EXPANDING TEEN HOURS

New Jersey passed a law in 2022 allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to work up to 50 hours per week during the summer, when the state's shore economy swells with tourists. The previous limit was 40 hours per week.

The measure has earned praise from parents.

Sally Rutherford, 56, of North Wildwood, New Jersey, said her 17-year-old son, Billy, was excited about the change. With the money he earns working as a game operator at a Jersey Shore amusement park, he'll be able to help pay for a car.

"It makes him a much more independent and responsible," she said.

Other states are considering a variety of proposals to expand teens' role in the workplace.

In Wisconsin, lawmakers are backing a proposal to allow 14-year-olds to serve alcohol in bars and restaurants. In Iowa, the governor signed a bill into law Friday that will allow 16- and 17-year-olds to serve alcohol in restaurants, and to expand the hours minors can work.

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

IMMIGRATION IS A FACTOR

Economists say allowing more legal immigration is a key solution to workforce shortages, noting that it has been central to the country's ability to grow for years in the face of an aging population.

Many resort towns rely on immigrants with summer visas to staff businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and tourist sites. But immigration fell sharply during the COVID outbreak as the federal government tightened restrictions. In 2022, nearly 285,000 of the summer visas were issued, down from about 350,000 before the pandemic.

The Federal Reserve in March estimated that the overall drop in immigration has cost the United States nearly one million workers, compared with pre-pandemic trends. Immigration is rebounding to pre-COVID levels, but the effects are still being felt.

LABOR CRUNCH BEGINNING TO EASE

Another factor straining the labor market is Baby Boomers reaching retirement age. The Federal Reserve calculates that rising retirements has left the economy with about 2 million fewer workers.

Yet despite the significant challenges employers face this summer, labor shortages are much less of a problem than they were in 2021, when the pandemic made many people reluctant to return to consumer-facing jobs. Higher inflation has also incentivized many people to seek work to help their families cover food and rent.

In just the past six months, 2 million Americans who had been out of the workforce have taken jobs or started looking for one. The share of Americans aged 25 through 54 who are working or job-hunting is now above pre-pandemic levels.

Associated Press writers Chris Rugaber in Washington, David Sharp in Portland, Maine, and Alina Hartounian in Scottsdale, Arizona, contributed to this report.

Biden says debt deal 'very close' even as two sides far apart on work requirements

By MARY CLARE JALONICK, LISA MASCARO and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Work requirements for federal food aid recipients have emerged as a final sticking point in negotiations over the looming debt crisis, even as President Joe Biden said Friday that a deal is "very close."

Biden's optimism came as the deadline for a potentially catastrophic default was pushed back to June 5 and seemed likely to drag negotiations between the White House and Republicans over raising the debt ceiling into another frustrating week. Both sides have suggested one of the main holdups is a GOP effort to boost work requirements for recipients of food stamps and other federal aid programs, a longtime Republican goal Democrats have strenuously opposed.

Even as they came closer to a framework on spending, each side seemed dug in on the work requirements. White House spokesman Andrew Bates called the GOP proposals "cruel and senseless" and said Biden and Democrats would stand against them.

Louisiana Rep. Garret Graves, one of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's negotiators, was blunt when asked if Republicans might relent on the issue: "Hell no, not a chance," he said.

The later "X-date," laid out in a letter from Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, set the risk of a devastating default four days beyond an earlier estimate. Still, Americans and the world uneasily watched the negotiating brinkmanship that could throw the U.S. economy into chaos and sap world confidence in the nation's leadership.

Yet Biden was upbeat as he left for the Memorial Day weekend at Camp David, declaring, "It's very close, and I'm optimistic."

With Republicans at the Capitol talking with Biden's team at the White House, the president said: "There's a negotiation going on. I'm hopeful we'll know by tonight whether we're going to be able to have a deal." But a deal had not come together when McCarthy left the Capitol Friday evening.

In a blunt warning, Yellen said failure to act by the new date would "cause severe hardship to American families, harm our global leadership position and raise questions about our ability to defend our national security interests."

Anxious retirees and others were already making contingency plans for missed checks, with the next Social Security payments due next week.

Biden and Republican McCarthy have seemed to be narrowing on a two-year budget-slashing deal that would also extend the debt limit into 2025 past the next presidential election.

But talks over the proposed work requirements for recipients of Medicaid, food stamps and other aid programs seemed at a standstill Friday afternoon.

Biden has said the Medicaid work requirements would be a nonstarter. But he initially seemed open to possible changes on food stamps, now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

The Republican proposal would save \$11 billion over 10 years by raising the maximum age for existing standards that require able-bodied adults who do not live with dependents to work or attend training

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programs. While current law applies those standards to recipients under the age of 50, the House bill would raise the age to include adults 55 and under. The GOP proposal would also decrease the number of exemptions that states can grant to some recipients subject to those requirements.

Biden's position on the SNAP work requirements appeared to have hardened by Friday, when spokesman Bates said House Republicans are threatening to trigger an unprecedented recession "unless they can take food out of the mouths of hungry Americans."

Any deal would need to be a political compromise, with support from both Democrats and Republicans to pass the divided Congress. Failure to lift the borrowing limit, now \$31 trillion, to pay the nation's incurred bills, would send shockwaves through the U.S. and global economy.

But many of the hard-right Trump-aligned Republicans in Congress have long been skeptical of Treasury's projections, and they are pressing McCarthy to hold out.

As talks pushed into another late night, one of the negotiators, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., called Biden's comments "a hopeful sign." But he also cautioned that there's still "sticky points" impeding a final agreement.

While the contours of the deal have been taking shape to cut spending for 2024 and impose a 1% cap on spending growth for 2025, the two sides remain stuck on various provisions.

House Republicans had pushed the issue to the brink, displaying risky political bravado in leaving town for the Memorial Day holiday. Lawmakers are tentatively not expected back at work until Tuesday, but now their return is uncertain.

Weeks of negotiations between Republicans and the White House have failed to produce a deal — in part because the Biden administration resisted negotiating with McCarthy over the debt limit, arguing that the country's full faith and credit should not be used as leverage to extract other partisan priorities.

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

One idea is to set the topline budget numbers but then add a "snap-back" provision to enforce cuts if Congress is unable during its annual appropriations process to meet the new goals.

Lawmakers are all but certain to claw back some \$30 billion in unspent COVID-19 funds now that the pandemic emergency has officially been lifted.

McCarthy has promised lawmakers he will abide by the rule to post any bill for 72 hours before voting. The Democratic-held Senate has vowed to move quickly to send the package to Biden's desk.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Stephen Groves, Farnoush Amiri, Seung Min Kim and Kevin Freking and videojournalist Rick Gentilo contributed to this report.

Cannes closes Saturday with presentation of the Palme d'Or

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

After 21 world premieres, nearly two weeks of red-carpet parades and hundreds of thousands of camera flashes, the 76th Cannes Film Festival concludes Saturday with the presentation of its top prize, the Palme d'Or.

One of cinema's most sought-after awards will be decided by this year's jury, presided over by two-time Palme winner Ruben Östlund, the Swedish director. The brief ceremony will precede the festival's closing night film, the Pixar animation "Elemental."

Any of the 21 films that played in Cannes' main competition lineup can win the Palme. Among the critical favorites of this year's festival are Jonathan Glazer's "The Zone of Interest," a chilling Martin Amis adaptation about a German family living next door to Auschwitz; "Fallen Leaves," Finish filmmaker Aki Kaurismäki's deadpan romance; and "Anatomy of a Fall," Justine Triet's twisty French Alps courtroom drama.

Two of those — "Anatomy of a Fall" and "The Zone of Interest" — star German actor Sandra Hüller, a likely candidate for best actress.

The festival's Un Certain Regard section handed out its awards on Friday, giving the top prize to Molly Manning Walker's debut feature, "How to Have Sex."

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Saturday's ceremony draws to close a Cannes edition that hasn't lacked spectacle, stars or controversy. The biggest wattage premieres came out of competition. Martin Scorsese debuted his Osage murders epic "Killers of the Flower Moon," a sprawling vision of American exploitation with Leonardo DiCaprio and Lily Gladstone. "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," Harrison Ford's Indy farewell, launched with a tribute to Ford. Wes Anderson premiered "Asteroid City."

The festival opened on a note of controversy. "Jeanne du Barry," a period drama co-starring Johnny Depp as Louis XV, played as the opening night film. The premiere marked Depp's highest profile appearance since the conclusion of his explosive trial last year with ex-wife Amber Heard.

The selection of "Jeanne du Barry" added to criticisms of Cannes for being too hospitable to men accused of abusive behavior.

Cannes, which requires films in competition to abide by France's strict theatrical windowing rules, has remained at an impasse with Netflix in recent years. Yet, intriguingly, a Netflix release could feasibly win the Palme. After Todd Haynes' "May December," starring Natalie Portman and Julianne Moore, premiered in competition, Netflix acquired it for distribution in North America for a reported \$11 million.

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

For more coverage of this year's festival, visit: <https://apnews.com/hub/cannes-film-festival>

US: Chinese agents paid bribes in plot to disrupt anti-communist Falun Gong movement

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. authorities have arrested two suspected Chinese government agents in connection with an alleged plot by Beijing to disrupt and ultimately topple the exiled anti-communist Falun Gong spiritual movement.

John Chen and Lin Feng were charged in an indictment unsealed Friday with scheming to revoke a New York-based Falun Gong organization's tax-exempt status and paying bribes to a undercover officer posing as a U.S. tax agent.

The undercover officer recorded multiple conversations with Chen, and investigators obtained a wire tap to record phone calls in which Chen and Feng discussed instructions they purportedly received from Chinese government officials, prosecutors said.

In one recording, prosecutors said, Chen referred to Chinese government officials as akin to "blood brothers" and, in another, he said Beijing would be "very generous" in rewarding the undercover officer's help cracking down on Falun Gong's non-profit status.

Chen, a 70-year-old U.S. citizen, and Feng, a 43-year-old lawful permanent resident, are charged with acting as unregistered agents of a foreign government, bribing a public official and conspiracy to commit international money laundering.

Chen and Feng were both born in China but now live in the Los Angeles area, where they were arrested Friday. Information on an initial court appearance or lawyers who could speak on their behalf was not immediately available.

Messages seeking comment were left with the Chinese Embassy in Washington and with the Falun Gong movement.

China banned the Falun Gong movement in 1999, classifying it as an evil cult and one of the "Five Poisons," or chief threats to its rule. Since then, Falun Gong practitioners have found refuge at a 400-acre compound called Dragon Springs in upstate New York.

In the U.S., the Falun Gong movement is known mostly for its ties to Shen Yun, a touring performing arts group, and The Epoch Times, a newspaper that has been marketed as an alternative to traditional U.S. media while also coming under fire for amplifying misinformation and conspiracy theories.

The Justice Department has made a series of prosecutions in recent years to disrupt China's efforts in the

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U.S. to identify, locate and silence pro-democracy activists and others who are openly critical of Beijing's policies. Such practices by foreign governments are known as "transnational repression."

"The Chinese government has yet again attempted, and failed, to target critics of the (People's Republic of China) here in the United States," Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said in a statement.

The U.S., Garland added, will "continue to investigate, disrupt, and prosecute" China's efforts to "silence its critics and extend the reaches of its regime onto U.S. soil."

In seeking to undermine Falun Gong, federal prosecutors allege, Chen and Feng's urged the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the organization's non-profit tax status. In a whistleblower complaint to the tax agency in February, Chen described Falun Gong as a "gigantic mega cult" — echoing language China's government uses to describe the movement.

Chen and Feng then turned to the undercover officer to make sure the IRS acted on the complaint, offering a \$50,000 reward — and handing over \$5,000 in cash as a down payment — if the tax agency conducted an audit, prosecutors said.

Chen met with the officer at a restaurant north of New York City on May 14, prosecutors said. A few days later, the officer sent Chen a letter on fake IRS letterhead that stated the agency had opened a case on Falun Gong, prosecutors said. Chen relayed the news to Feng in a wire tapped phoned conversation, indicating that he was planning to update Chinese government officials on their progress, prosecutors said.

Chen and Feng's arrest comes a month after the Justice Department charged two men with establishing a secret police station in New York City on behalf of the Chinese government. Around the same time, federal prosecutors charged about three dozen officers with China's national police force with using social media to harass dissidents inside the U.S.

In 2020, the Justice Department charged more than a half-dozen people with working on behalf of the Chinese government in a pressure campaign aimed at coercing a New Jersey man wanted by Beijing into returning to China to face charges.

Associated Press reporter Eric Tucker in Washington contributed to this report.

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at twitter.com/mikesisak. Send confidential tips by visiting <https://www.ap.org/tips/>.

Biden says debt deal 'very close' with default deadline now set at June 5

By LISA MASCARO, SEUNG MIN KIM, KEVIN FREKING and FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden said a deal to resolve the government's debt ceiling crisis seemed "very close" late Friday, even as the deadline for a potentially catastrophic default was pushed back to June 5 and seemed likely to drag negotiations between the White House and Republicans into another frustrating week.

The later "X-date," laid out in a letter from Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, set the risk of a devastating default four days beyond an earlier estimate. It came as Americans and the world uneasily watched the negotiating brinkmanship that could throw the U.S. economy into chaos and sap world confidence in the nation's leadership.

Yet Biden was upbeat as he left for the Memorial Day weekend at Camp David, declaring, "It's very close, and I'm optimistic."

With Republicans at the Capitol talking with Biden's team at the White House, the president said: "There's a negotiation going on. I'm hopeful we'll know by tonight whether we're going to be able to have a deal." But a deal had not come together by the time Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy left the Capitol late Friday.

In a blunt warning, Yellen said failure to act by the new date would "cause severe hardship to American families, harm our global leadership position and raise questions about our ability to defend our national

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security interests.”

Anxious retirees and others were already making contingency plans for missed checks, with the next Social Security payments due next week.

Biden and McCarthy seemed to be narrowing on a two-year budget-slashing deal that would also extend the debt limit into 2025 past the next presidential election. After frustrating rounds of closed-door talks, a compromise had appeared to be nearing on Friday.

Republicans have made some headway in their drive for steep spending cuts that Democrats oppose. However, the sides are particularly divided over McCarthy’s demands for tougher work requirements on government food stamp recipients that Democrats say is a nonstarter.

Earlier Friday, McCarthy said his Republican debt negotiators and the White House had hit “crunch” time, straining to wrap up an agreement.

Any deal would need to be a political compromise, with support from both Democrats and Republicans to pass the divided Congress. Failure to lift the borrowing limit, now \$31 trillion, to pay the nation’s incurred bills, would send shockwaves through the U.S. and global economy.

But many of the hard-right Trump-aligned Republicans in Congress have long been skeptical of Treasury’s projections, and they are pressing McCarthy to hold out.

As talks pushed into another late night, one of the negotiators, Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C., called Biden’s comments “a hopeful sign.” But he also cautioned that there’s still “sticky points” impeding a final agreement.

While the contours of the deal have been taking shape to cut spending for 2024 and impose a 1% cap on spending growth for 2025, the two sides remain stuck on various provisions.

A person familiar with the talks said the two sides were “dug in” on whether or not to agree to Republican demands to impose stiffer work requirements on people who receive government food stamps, cash assistance and health care aid.

House Democrats have called such requirements for health care and food aid a nonstarter.

Asked if Republicans would relent on work requirements, Republican negotiator Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana fumed, “Hell no, not a chance.”

House Republicans displayed risky political bravado in leaving town for the holiday. Lawmakers are tentatively not expected back at work until Tuesday, but now their return date is uncertain.

“The world is watching,” International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said after meeting Friday with Yellen. “Let’s remember we are now in the 12th hour.”

Weeks of negotiations between Republicans and the White House have failed to produce a deal — in part because the Biden administration resisted negotiating with McCarthy over the debt limit, arguing that the country’s full faith and credit should not be used as leverage to extract other partisan priorities.

“We have to spend less than we spent last year. That is the starting point,” said McCarthy.

One idea is to set the topline budget numbers but then add a “snap-back” provision to enforce cuts if Congress is unable during its annual appropriations process to meet the new goals.

On work requirements for aid recipients, the White House is particularly resisting measures that could drive more people into poverty or take their health care, said the person familiar with the talks, who was granted anonymity to describe behind-closed-door discussions.

Over the Republican demand to rescind money for the Internal Revenue Service, it’s still an “open issue” whether the sides will compromise by allowing the funding to be pushed into other domestic programs, the person said.

In one potential development, Republicans may be easing their demand to boost defense spending beyond what Biden had proposed in his budget, instead offering to keep it at his proposed levels, according to another person familiar with the talks.

The teams are also eyeing a proposal to boost energy transmission line development from Sen. John Hickenlooper, D-Colo., to facilitate the buildout of an interregional power grid.

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.

Meanwhile, McCarthy is feeling pressure from the House's right flank not to give in to any deal, even if it means blowing past the Treasury deadline.

McCarthy said Donald Trump, the former president who is again running for office, told him, "Make sure you get a good agreement."

Watchful Democrats, though, are also pressing Biden. The top three House Democratic leaders, led by Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, spoke late Thursday with the White House.

McCarthy has promised lawmakers he will abide by the rule to post any bill for 72 hours before voting. The Democratic-held Senate has vowed to move quickly to send the package to Biden's desk.

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.

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.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Stephen Groves, Farnoush Amiri and videojournalist Rick Gentilo contributed to this report.

Judge: School district can bar student from wearing Mexican and American flag sash at graduation

By JESSE BEDAYN Associated Press/Report for America

DENVER (AP) — A federal judge ruled Friday that a rural Colorado school district can bar a high school student from wearing a Mexican and American flag sash at her graduation this weekend after the student sued the school district.

Judge Nina Y. Wang wrote that wearing a sash during a graduation ceremony falls under school-sponsored speech, not the student's private speech. Therefore, "the School District is permitted to restrict that speech as it sees fit in the interest of the kind of graduation it would like to hold," Wang wrote.

The ruling was over the student's request for a temporary restraining order, which would have allowed her to wear the sash on Saturday for graduation because the case wouldn't have resolved in time. Wang found that the student and her attorneys failed to sufficiently show they were likely to succeed, but a final ruling is still to come.

It's the latest dispute in the U.S. about what kind of cultural graduation attire is allowed at commencement ceremonies, with many focusing on tribal regalia.

Attorneys for Naomi Peña Villasano argued in a hearing Friday in Denver that the school district decision violates her free speech rights. They also said that it's inconsistent for the district to allow Native American attire but not Peña Villasano's sash representing her heritage. The sash has the Mexican flag on one side and the United States flag on the other.

"I'm a 200 percenter — 100% American and 100% Mexican," she said at a recent school board meeting in Colorado's rural Western Slope.

"The district is discriminating against the expression of different cultural heritages," said her attorney Kenneth Parreno, from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, at Friday's hearing.

An attorney representing the Garfield County School District 16 countered that Native American regalia is required to be allowed in Colorado and is categorically different from wearing a country's flags. Permitting Peña Villasano to sport the U.S. and Mexican flags as a sash, said Holly Ortiz, could open "the door to offensive material."

Ortiz further stated that the district doesn't want to prevent Peña Villasano from expressing herself and that the graduate could adorn her cap with the flags or wear the sash before or after the ceremony.

But “she doesn’t have a right to express it in any way that she wants,” Ortiz said.

Wang sided with the district, finding that “the School District could freely permit one sash and prohibit another.”

Similar disputes have played out across the U.S. this graduation season.

A transgender girl lodged a lawsuit against a Mississippi school district for banning her from wearing a dress to graduation. In Oklahoma, a Native American former student brought legal action against a school district for removing a feather, a sacred religious object, from her cap before the graduation ceremony in 2022.

What qualifies as proper graduation attire has been a source of conflict for Native American students around the country. Both Nevada and Oklahoma on Thursday passed laws allowing Native American students to wear religious and cultural regalia at graduation ceremonies.

This year, Colorado passed a law making it illegal to keep Native American students from donning such regalia. Nearly a dozen states have similar laws.

The legal arguments often come down to whether the First Amendment protects personal expression, in this case the sash, or if it would be considered school sponsored speech, and could be limited for educational purposes.

Bedayn 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.

Guatemala arrests former anti-corruption prosecutor

BY SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemalan police arrested the country’s prosecutor for crimes against migrants Friday, accusing him of alleged abuse of authority.

Stuardo Campos was formerly an anti-corruption prosecutor in the country during the administration of former President Jimmy Morales. It was not immediately clear whether the accusations pertain to his current position or the former.

The complaint against Campos was made by the far-right Foundation Against Terrorism, a group that started out defending military officers accused of war crimes, but has also targeted members of the justice system who worked corruption cases.

“This complaint is spurious,” Campos said. “I know that my work as an anti-corruption prosecutor earned me animosity in a lot of sectors.”

Campos was known for an investigation related to a government highway project during the Morales administration. A number of officials from that administration were arrested when repeated landslides and other problems were blamed on poor construction.

In recent years, a number of prosecutors and judges who handled anti-corruption cases have been investigated and charged. Many of them have fled the country to avoid prosecution by an Attorney General’s office the United States government and others have accused seeking revenge against members of the justice system.

More recently, as the lead prosecutor of migrant crimes, Campos was credited with dismantling migrant smuggling rings and oversaw the first extradition of Guatemalans to the U.S. accused of migrant smuggling.

Essay: A mega-fan's appreciation for Tina Turner's limitless energy and lessons of survival

By ADAM KEALOHA CAUSEY Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — When Tina Turner died at age 83, I found myself drifting back to the fourth grade, to the day I truly discovered her voice.

I was on Thanksgiving break — bored — when I decided to rummage through my parents' old cassette tapes in search of entertainment.

What I found was astonishing: an album called "Private Dancer."

"I look up to the stars with my perfect memory. I look through it all and my future's no shock to me."

"Who was this magnificent woman?" I thought as the lyrics of the song "I Might Have Been Queen (Soul Survivor)," flowed through the headphones of my Walkman. "What had she been through?"

I quickly consulted an expert on the matter: my mom, who as a teenager in the '60s, had been listening to Tina since she first made hits with her then-husband Ike.

Mom, like Tina, didn't sugarcoat the superstar's history: Off-stage, Ike was beating her. It was something she herself — and most others — didn't know when she and Dad first went to see her live in the '70s.

It was shocking and sickening to hear. But Mom also shared Tina's triumphs, how she continued to mesmerize and dazzle fans despite the hell she endured. She recalled seeing Tina and her backing vocalists and dancers, the Ikettes, go so hard onstage that the ribbon ties of Tina's sandals, starting out near her calves, ended up around her ankles. The concert was wild. Rapturous.

I wanted to experience this. Five years later, I did.

In 1997, Mom and Dad loaded my siblings and me into our 1987 Chevy Suburban and made the five-hour drive from our home in Doyline, Louisiana, to The Woodlands, Texas, to catch Tina on her "Wildest Dreams" world tour.

I was hypnotized. The burst of sparkling, silver sequins onstage. The voice that could go from the deepest growl to a tender coo. The infectious smile and air kisses to the audience that made it seem like she really was happy we were all there. The kicks. The shimmies. The staccato steps as she worked the entire stage. As my uncle who had waited in line for hours to buy the tickets for our lawn seats would say after the show: "Kids, tonight you've been in the presence of greatness."

That night was also a moment of personal awakening. It wasn't just an incredible performance from a Grammy winner and member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; it was the crowd of thousands of fans of all ages, bigger and more diverse than any a young teen from a small, Southern town had ever seen. The fans were Black, white and even hapa (mixed-race) Hawaiians like us. Some were gay. Some were straight. I bet there were also both Republicans and Democrats, singing and twirling together in harmony to "Proud Mary."

The experience, I realized years later, was part of my parents' design to broaden my worldview. Tina helped them to do that.

In 2008, I was able to repay my parents for the gift they had given me: I got us tickets to a San Jose, California, stop on Tina's farewell tour. Tina was nearing 70 at that point, but she still had the moves and the energy. Earlier this year, I took Mom and Dad to see "Tina: The Musical" in New Orleans during its post-Broadway run across the U.S.

As a mega-fan enamored by Tina the artist, I have also had to come to grips with the jolting reality of Tina the woman — a real flesh and blood person who had a violent upbringing in a home with fighting parents and later endured the physical abuse of her own husband.

I was awed by the story of this woman who was brave enough to talk, with grace, about domestic violence long before the rest of society did. How she snuck out of a Dallas hotel room one night in the late '70s while Ike Turner was sleeping, hurried across a nearby highway and checked herself into a Ramada Inn with a Mobil credit card. She had 36 cents to her name.

Watching the 2021 documentary that Tina called her goodbye to the public, I also understood how she was retraumatized over the decades by interviewers who asked her to describe, again and again, how she

got away from Ike, while overlooking greater career accomplishments that were disconnected from her ex-husband. And that was on top of the racism and sexism she faced in the music industry.

As Angela Bassett, who played the "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll" in an Oscar-nominated turn in "What's Love Got to Do With It" said in the documentary, "It's hard when the worst parts of your life have been an inspiration."

Bassett is right, and that's complicated.

I live in Dallas. So, it felt not only right, but necessary, after I heard about Tina's death, to make my way to the old Ramada Inn where she famously and heroically reclaimed her life.

I strolled into the lobby of what is now the boutique Lorenzo Hotel, said hi to a handful of other fans who were passing through, and approached the giant, arresting photo of Tina that hangs there, exuding all the confidence and attitude she's earned: fishnet stockings, big hair and a look that says, "Don't test me."

I reflected on the many moments of my life when Tina had inspired me, including this year when I ran a marathon and cranked up "Proud Mary" on my phone as my energy was draining during the last 2 miles.

In my hand was an orange-and-yellow rose — the shade that one of Queen Elizabeth II's rose growers had famously named after Tina — that I had plucked from a bouquet a thoughtful friend bought me when Tina died.

I smiled and tucked the bloom into a cleft in the portrait's ornate frame.

At 40, I had finally answered the burning question my 10-year-old self had asked and that Mom had tried to answer: I knew who that magnificent woman was, and what she had been through. And I knew that the lyrics to "I Might Have Been Queen" not only spoke to her ability to endure, but her belief in reincarnation.

Beautiful, Tina. For me, you will always live on.

Follow Adam Kealoha Causey on Twitter: @akcausey.

Indiana funeral director pleads guilty to 40 theft counts after decomposing bodies found

JEFFERSONVILLE, Ind. (AP) — The director of a southern Indiana funeral home where 31 decomposing bodies and the remains of 17 others were found pleaded guilty Friday to more than 40 counts of felony theft.

Randy Lankford, owner of Lankford Funeral Home and Family Center in Jeffersonville, faces a proposed sentence of 12 years: four years in prison and eight years of home incarceration, Clark County Circuit Court Judge N. Lisa Glickfield said.

Lankford was charged with theft for failing to complete the funeral services he was paid for, and must also pay restitution to 53 families totaling \$46,000.

Lankford was released to home incarceration following the hearing. A formal sentencing hearing is planned for June 23.

Jeffersonville Police began investigating the funeral home early last July after the county coroner's office reported a strong odor emanating from the building. The unrefrigerated bodies were found in various states of decomposition, and some had been at the funeral home since March.

Clark County Prosecutor Jeremy Mull said the many charges against Lankford and existing court backups from the COVID-19 pandemic complicated the process. He said he felt the state's move to eliminate about half of the counts will grant the most immediate form of relief.

"We wanted to get justice for these families," he said.

Derrick Kessinger attended Friday's court hearing. He said he trusted Lankford while the remains of three loved ones sat inside the funeral home.

"It's been tough, but I do forgive him for what he did," Kessinger said. "I hope he can find forgiveness." Kessinger eventually received the remains.

Texas AG Ken Paxton invites supporters to rally at state Capitol to protest vote to impeach

By ACACIA CORONADO, JIM VERTUNO and JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton on Friday urged his supporters to protest at the state Capitol when Republicans in the House of Representatives take up historic impeachment proceedings that threaten to oust him.

The House has set a Saturday vote to consider impeaching Paxton and suspending him from office over allegations of bribery, unfitness for office and abuse of public trust — just some of the accusations that have trailed him for most of his three terms.

Paxton, a 60-year-old Republican, decried the impeachment proceedings as “political theater” that will “inflict lasting damage on the Texas House,” adding to his earlier claims that it’s an effort to disenfranchise the voters who returned him to office in November.

“I want to invite my fellow citizens and friends to peacefully come let their voices be heard at the Capitol tomorrow,” he said at a news conference, without taking any questions. “Exercise your right to petition your government.”

The request echoes former President Donald Trump’s call for people to protest his electoral defeat on Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob violently stormed the U.S. Capitol in Washington. Paxton, who spoke at the rally that preceded that insurrection, called his supporters to the Texas Capitol on a day when the governor is supposed to deliver a Memorial Day address to lawmakers.

If impeached, Paxton would be suspended from office immediately and Republican Gov. Greg Abbott could appoint an interim replacement. The attorney general would be just the third person in the state’s nearly 200-year history to be impeached and the first statewide officer since former Gov. James “Pa” Ferguson in 1917.

The House will begin considering a resolution calling for Paxton’s impeachment at 1 p.m. Saturday, according to a statement released Friday by the House Committee on General Investigating.

The GOP-led committee spent months quietly investigating Paxton and recommended his impeachment Thursday on 20 articles. Paxton has said the charges are based on “hearsay and gossip, parroting long-disproven claims.”

Prominent conservatives had been notably quiet on Paxton, but some began to rally around him Friday. The chairman of the state Republican Party, Matt Rinaldi, criticized the process as a “sham” and urged the GOP-controlled Senate to acquit Paxton if he stands trial in that chamber.

“It is based on allegations already litigated by voters, led by a liberal speaker trying to undermine his conservative adversaries,” Rinaldi said, echoing Paxton’s criticism of Republican House Speaker Dade Phelan. He said the Senate will have to “restore sanity and reason” by acquitting Paxton.

The process in the House will start with opening statements Saturday, followed by four hours of debate, closing statements and then a vote, according to a memo from the committee.

Paxton faces grim math in the chamber, where he served five terms before becoming a state senator.

It’s unclear how many supporters he may have in the House, but only a simple majority is needed to impeach. That means just a small fraction of the 85 Republican members would need to vote against Paxton if all 64 Democrats do. Final removal would require two-thirds support in the Senate, where Paxton’s wife’s, Angela, is a member.

The move to impeach Paxton sets up what could be a remarkably sudden downfall for one of the GOP’s most prominent legal combatants, who in 2020 asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn President Joe Biden’s victory.

Paxton has been under FBI investigation for years over accusations that he used his office to help a donor. He was separately indicted on securities fraud charges in 2015, but has yet to stand trial.

When the five-member committee’s investigation came to light Tuesday, Paxton suggested it was a political attack by Phelan, accusing the speaker of being drunk on the House floor and calling for his resignation. Phelan’s office brushed this off as an attempt to “save face.”

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Paxton faces ouster just seven months after easily winning a third term. His challengers, including George P. Bush, had urged voters to reject a compromised incumbent but discovered that many didn't know about Paxton's litany of alleged misdeeds or dismissed them as political attacks.

Even with Monday's end of the regular session approaching, state law allows the House to keep working on impeachment proceedings. Both chambers could call themselves back into session later.

The articles of impeachment stem largely from Paxton's relationship with one of his wealthy donors, his alleged efforts to protect the donor from an FBI investigation and his attempts to thwart whistleblower complaints brought by his own staff.

In one sense, Paxton's political peril arrived with dizzying speed: After the committee investigation surfaced Tuesday, it was followed the next day by an extraordinary public airing of his alleged criminal acts.

But to Paxton's detractors, the rebuke was years in the making.

In 2014, he admitted to violating Texas securities law over not registering as an investment advisor while soliciting clients. A year later, Paxton was indicted on felony securities charges by a grand jury in his hometown near Dallas, accused of defrauding investors in a tech startup. He has pleaded not guilty to two felony counts carrying a potential sentence of five to 99 years in prison.

He opened a legal defense fund and accepted \$100,000 from an executive whose company was under investigation by Paxton's office for Medicaid fraud. An additional \$50,000 was donated by an Arizona retiree whose son Paxton later hired to a high-ranking job but was soon fired after displaying child pornography in a meeting.

What has unleashed the most serious risk to Paxton is his relationship with a wealthy donor, Austin real estate developer Nate Paul.

Several of Paxton's top aides in 2020 told the FBI that they were concerned the attorney general was misusing the powers of his office to help Paul over unproven claims that an elaborate conspiracy to steal \$200 million of his properties was afoot. The FBI searched Paul's home in 2019, but he has not been charged and his attorneys have denied wrongdoing. Paxton also told staff members that he had an affair with a woman who, it later emerged, worked for Paul.

The impeachment charges cover accusations related to Paxton's dealings with Paul; including attempts to interfere in foreclosure lawsuits; improperly issuing legal opinions to benefit Paul; and firing, harassing and interfering with staff who reported what was going on. The bribery charges stem from Paul allegedly employing the woman with whom Paxton had an affair in exchange for legal help and Paul allegedly paying for expensive renovations to Paxton's Austin home.

A senior lawyer for Paxton's office denied Friday that Paul paid for the work on the home, which also came under FBI scrutiny. "He paid for all his home repairs and renovations," Chris Hilton said at the news conference, in one of the only direct responses from Paxton's team to the impeachment articles.

Other charges date back to Paxton's still-pending 2015 felony securities fraud indictment, including lying to state investigators.

The eight aides who reported Paxton to the FBI were all fired or quit, and four later sued under Texas' whistleblower law. In February, Paxton agreed to settle the case for \$3.3 million, which must be approved by the House.

The investigative committee said Friday that it was Paxton seeking the payout that brought about their probe.

"We cannot over-emphasize the fact that, but for Paxton's own request for a taxpayer-funded settlement over his wrongful conduct, Paxton would not be facing impeachment by the House," the panel said.

Bleiberg reported from Dallas. Associated Press reporter Paul J. Weber contributed from Austin, Texas.

Bear helps itself to 60 cupcakes from Connecticut bakery, scares employees

AVON, Conn. (AP) — A hungry black bear barged into the garage of a Connecticut bakery, scared several employees and helped itself to 60 cupcakes before ambling away.

Workers at Taste by Spellbound in the town of Avon were loading cakes into a van for delivery on Wednesday when the bear showed up. There are between 1,000 and 1,200 black bears living in Connecticut, the state environmental agency says, with sightings last year in 158 of the state's 169 towns and cities.

Bakery owner Miriam Stephens wrote in an Instagram post that she heard employee Maureen Williams "screaming bloody murder" and yelling that there was a bear in the garage.

Williams told TV station WTNH that she shouted to scare the bear off but it retreated and came back three times.

Williams said the bear charged at her so she backed out of the garage and ran.

Surveillance video obtained by WTNH shows bakery workers walking around the side of the business to try to scare the bear, but then running away after it scares them.

The video shows the bear dragging a container of cupcakes from the garage into the parking lot. Stephens said the bear ate 60 cupcakes.

A baker finally got the bear to leave by honking a car horn, Williams said.

The four-footed thief was gone by the time police and officers from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection arrived.

No one was injured in the encounter — one in a series of troubling interactions between black bears and humans in Connecticut.

A 74-year-old woman suffered bites to her arms and legs last month when she was attacked by a bear while walking her dog in a Hartford suburb, the first such attack this year. There were two attacks last year, including one in October where a 10-year-old boy was mauled in a backyard.

"The frequency and severity of bear-human interactions is increasing," DEEP spokesperson Paul Copleman said Friday.

Statistics compiled by the department show that there were a record 67 reports of bears entering Connecticut homes in 2022. The previous record was 45 in 2020.

On Friday, a bear cub wandered into a neighborhood near downtown Hartford and climbed up a tree. Local residents were delighted and surprised, saying it was highly unusual for bears to come into the city. Police, animal control officers and state environmental authorities responded, creating a scene for several hours.

Authorities eventually tranquilized the young bear and planned to relocate it. Its destination was not disclosed.

Danny Masterson rape retrial deliberations drag on more than 6 days, will resume next week

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Jurors have deliberated for more than a week without reaching a verdict in the rape retrial of "That '70s Show" star Danny Masterson, and will have to return and resume talks after the long holiday weekend.

The Los Angeles County jury of seven women and five men went home Friday without reaching a verdict on any of the three counts of rape against the 47-year-old, who could get up to 45 years in prison if convicted of all three.

The jury got the case as closing arguments ended May 17. With planned time off, they have been talking for a total of 6 1/2 days and have had relatively few questions for the judge. Jurors have asked for the reading back of some testimony — including part of the cross-examination of Masterson's former girlfriend, who is one of the three accusers. But the requests have shed little light on the state of deliberations.

Jurors will return to court Wednesday morning after taking the weekend, Memorial Day and another

planned day off.

In the actor's first trial, long deliberations led to a mistrial in December, when jurors couldn't come to consensus on any counts. A majority voted to acquit him on each. A retrial began in April.

Prosecutors allege that Masterson drugged and raped the three women, including a former longtime girlfriend, at his Hollywood-area home between 2001 and 2003, when he was at the height of his fame for the Fox TV sitcom "That '70s Show."

Masterson has pleaded not guilty. The defense said Masterson had consensual sex with the women, and attempted to discredit their stories by pointing to inconsistencies.

Golden Knights aim for closeout win; Stars eye comeback entering Game 5 of Western final

By MARK ANDERSON AP Sports Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Alec Martinez was part of the 2014 Los Angeles Kings team that erased a 3-0 first-round series deficit and beat Joe Pavelski and the San Jose Sharks in Game 7.

Pavelski and coach Pete DeBoer were the centerpiece of a Sharks comeback from 3-1 down in the opening round of the 2019 playoffs to knock off the Vegas Golden Knights.

And now, the Dallas Stars are trying to repeat history trailing 3-1, though the odds remain heavily against them at plus-750 at FanDuel Sportsbook entering Game 5 of the Western final on Saturday at Vegas. The Stars, however, have given themselves a chance by winning 3-2 on Thursday on Pavelski's power-play goal in overtime to remain alive.

Should they beat the Knights and force a Game 6 in Dallas, that could shift the pressure in this series to Vegas.

"We'll get some rest and we'll look to do it again and keep trying to put a little doubt in their minds," Pavelski said.

Pavelski knows what it's like to be in the Knights' position. In 2014, the Sharks won the first three games of their series against the Kings. Then, Los Angeles rolled off four victories in a row, including a 5-1 victory in Game 7 at San Jose, to become the fourth team in NHL history to rally from 3-0 down in a series.

Martinez said he doesn't put as much stock in that experience in trying to prevent Dallas from doing the same to the Knights. Instead, it's the experience of closing out series he said would serve him better.

And the Knights, until Thursday at least, have been on a roll in closeout games. They had won four in a row, all by at least three goals, including two this year.

"It's finding that balance between knowing what's at stake and also approaching it as another playoff game," Martinez said. "I think you're better off focusing on the process, knowing that if you play a good game ... if you stick to your game, the end result will take care of itself. I think the guys have done a good job of going into games with that opportunity."

Martinez wasn't on the 2019 Vegas team that allowed a big lead to get away. Vegas took a 3-1 series advantage before San Jose came back to force a Game 7. But the Knights seemed to have victory well in hand with a 3-0 lead midway through the third period.

Then, Vegas' Cody Eakin was called for a cross-checking major that bloodied Pavelski, and the Sharks stormed back with four goals in 4:01 to stun the Golden Knights. Vegas tied the game late before the Sharks won in overtime.

It was a questionable decision by the officials to call a major, so much so that the result of the play led to the NHL two months later to mandate all majors undergo video review. That was too late to help the Knights, but for the handful of players still on the roster from that game, seeing Pavelski and DeBoer on the other side could be a little unsettling if Dallas builds on its Game 4 victory.

"I don't think anyone anticipated anyone getting swept on either side of things," Martinez said. "This is playoff hockey. Punches are thrown one way and then reciprocated. They threw a good one (Thursday) night. It's up to us to come back (Saturday) and be ready for that, play our A-game, and try to dictate our pace at home."

The Stars will again be without captain Jamie Benn, who will serve the last of a two-game suspension

for cross-checking Vegas captain Mark Stone, who was prone on the ice Tuesday night. Forward Evgenii Dadonov, who played for the Knights last season, is not on the trip because of a lower-body injury that DeBoer said is worse than originally thought.

Should the Stars win to send the series back to Dallas for Game 6, they would get back Benn and inject even more intensity into this matchup.

And perhaps give themselves a real chance to make history.

"Three out of four games in overtime shows you how tight these two teams are," Dallas goalie Jake Oettinger said. "Hopefully, (Thursday's victory) gives us belief we can beat these guys."

AP Sports Writer Stephen Hawkins in Dallas contributed to this report.

AP NHL playoffs: <https://apnews.com/hub/stanley-cup> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Biden celebrates LSU women's and UConn men's basketball teams at separate White House events

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — All of the past drama and sore feelings associated with Louisiana State's invitation to the White House were seemingly forgotten or set aside Friday as President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden welcomed the championship women's basketball team to the mansion with smiles, hugs and lavish praise all around.

The visit had once appeared in jeopardy after Jill Biden suggested that the losing Iowa team be invited, too. But none of that was mentioned as both Bidens heralded the players for their performance and the way they have helped advance women's sports.

"Folks, we witnessed history," the president said. "In this team, we saw hope, we saw pride and we saw purpose. It matters."

The ceremony was halted for about 10 minutes after forward Sa'Myah Smith appeared to collapse as she and her teammates stood behind Biden. A wheelchair was brought in and coach Kim Mulkey assured the audience that Smith was fine.

LSU said in a statement that Smith felt overheated, nauseous and thought she might faint. She was evaluated by LSU and White House medical staff and was later able to rejoin the team. "She is feeling well, in good spirits, and will undergo further evaluation once back in Baton Rouge," the LSU statement said.

Since the passage of Title IX in 1972, Biden said, more than half of all college students are women, and there are now 10 times more female athletes in college and high school. He said most sports stories are still about men, and that that needs to change.

Title IX prohibits discrimination based on sex in federally funded education programs and activities.

"Folks, we need to support women sports, not just during the championship run but during the entire year," President Biden said.

After the Tigers beat Iowa for the NCAA title in April in a game the first lady attended, she caused an uproar by suggesting that the Hawkeyes also come to the White House.

LSU star Angel Reese called the idea "A JOKE" and said she would prefer to visit with former President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, instead. The LSU team largely is Black, while Iowa's top player, Caitlin Clark, is white, as are most of her teammates.

Nothing came of Jill Biden's idea and the White House only invited the Tigers. Reese ultimately said she would not skip the White House visit. She and co-captain Emily Ward presented team jerseys bearing the number "46" to Biden and the first lady. Hugs were exchanged.

Jill Biden also lavished praise on the team, saying the players showed "what it means to be a champion."

"In this room, I see the absolute best of the best," she said, adding that watching them play was "pure magic."

"Every basket was pure joy and I kept thinking about how far women's sports have come," the first lady added, noting that she grew up before Title IX was passed. "We've made so much progress and we still have so much more work to do."

The president added that "the way in which women's sports has come along is just incredible. It's really neat to see, since I've got four granddaughters."

After Smith was helped to a wheelchair, Mulkey told the audience the player was OK.

"As you can see, we leave our mark where we go," Mulkey joked. "Sa'Myah is fine. She's kind of, right now, embarrassed."

A few members of Congress and Biden aides past and present with Louisiana roots dropped what they were doing to attend the East Room event, including White House budget director Shalanda Young. Young is in the thick of negotiations with House Republicans to reach a deal by the middle of next week to stave off what would be a globally calamitous U.S. financial default if the U.S. can no longer borrow the money it needs to pay its bills.

The president, who wore a necktie in the shade of LSU's purple, said Young, who grew up in Baton Rouge, told him, "I'm leaving the talks to be here." Rep. Garret Graves, one of the House GOP negotiators, also attended.

Biden closed sports Friday by changing to a blue tie and welcoming the UConn's men's championship team for its own celebration. The Huskies won their fifth national title by defeating San Diego State, 76-59, in April.

"Congratulations to the whole UConn nation," he said.

EU official says Twitter abandons bloc's voluntary pact against disinformation

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Twitter has dropped out of a voluntary European Union agreement to combat online disinformation, a top EU official said Friday.

European Commissioner Thierry Breton tweeted that Twitter had pulled out of the EU's disinformation "code of practice" that other major social media platforms have pledged to support. But he added that Twitter's "obligation" remained, referring to the EU's tough new digital rules taking effect in August.

"You can run but you can't hide," Breton said.

San Francisco-based Twitter responded with an automated reply, as it does to most press inquiries, and did not comment.

The decision to abandon the commitment to fighting false information appears to be the latest move by billionaire owner Elon Musk to loosen the reins on the social media company after he bought it last year. He has rolled back previous anti-misinformation rules, and has thrown its verification system and content-moderation policies into chaos as he pursues his goal of turning Twitter into a digital town square.

Google, TikTok, Microsoft and Facebook and Instagram parent Meta are among those that have signed up to the EU code, which requires companies to measure their work on combating disinformation and issue regular reports on their progress.

There were already signs Twitter wasn't prepared to live up to its commitments. The European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's executive arm, blasted Twitter earlier this year for failing to provide a full first report under the code, saying it provided little specific information and no targeted data.

Breton said that under the new digital rules that incorporate the code of practice, fighting disinformation will become a "legal obligation."

"Our teams will be ready for enforcement," he said.

US cities hope crime strategies keep homicide numbers dropping and prevent summer surge

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — An expected bump in violent crime this summer has mayors and police officials around the U.S. rolling out familiar strategies of making officers more visible and engaging with community groups, in some cases leaning on civilians to enforce curfews and keep the peace.

Chicago is among the U.S. cities under scrutiny following a mayoral race that focused on public safety in response to demands for change. Violence often surges during summer months, so this holiday weekend will undoubtedly ramp up pressure on Mayor Brandon Johnson's new administration to deliver short-term improvement along with the long-term strategies that the former union organizer advocated while campaigning to lead the nation's third-largest city.

"It's going to take all of us, not just the police, not just city government, to ensure that our communities can live and thrive in peace and safety," Johnson said at a lakefront press conference promoting the city's Memorial Day weekend strategy.

Most large U.S. cities are reporting fewer homicides this year, according to data collected by the Council on Criminal Justice, which created a Crime Trends Working Group this spring in hopes of providing more real-time information on crime.

The shift is a tentative reprieve following those spikes that began in 2020 and began to come down last year. The totals remain far higher than pre-pandemic reports and are "cause for serious concern but not for panic," said Thomas Abt, founding director of the Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction at the University of Maryland.

"Where cities are seeing success, they're generally investing in a balanced approach that includes policing but ... also supports community-based approaches," Abt said. "They have recognized the need for enforcement but also emphasize prevention and intervention."

Officials in Cleveland; Newark, New Jersey; and Philadelphia have announced summer plans to make officers more of a visible presence in locations where violent crimes have happened, while also promoting community efforts to prevent violence and provide alternative activities.

In Baltimore, city officials — not police officers — will enforce curfews on teenagers starting Friday and continuing through Labor Day weekend. The controversial policy has long been on the books but rarely enforced.

"We are going back to the old days," Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott said in announcing the summer enforcement, after two teens were wounded as hundreds gathered on a Sunday night in the city's popular Inner Harbor district.

That shooting in April, which unfolded while officers were trying to break up a fight at the scene, added to a significant spike in youth violence, which has persisted even as overall shootings and homicides trend downward in Baltimore.

According to Scott's plan, non-law enforcement staff will approach children and teens violating the curfew policy on weekend and holiday nights. First, they'll encourage kids to go home, but if that doesn't work, the children will be brought to a youth engagement center that provides a supervised environment where they can hang out.

In Detroit, federal prosecutors are expanding efforts to help local police this summer by taking armed carjacking cases and business robberies in high-crime areas, in addition to certain gun crimes. Federal convictions typically bring longer sentences.

"The most dangerous people will be prosecuted immediately in federal court," U.S. Attorney Dawn Ison said Wednesday.

Following a half-dozen shootings — including one fatality — in the downtown Detroit area over one weekend in April, Police Chief James White instituted a crowd control strategy including increased police presence. Curfews for minors also will be enforced.

In Chicago, mayors face annual pressure to demonstrate a proactive approach to violent crime ahead

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of Memorial Day, the traditional kickoff to warm weather and summer events where crowds gather.

Johnson promised to move away from a policing-first strategy as he took office at the start of May, but he's also distanced himself from calls to cut money for policing. He chose a retired department veteran as interim police chief.

Federal data shows that Chicago's homicide rate remains lower than other Midwestern cities such as St. Louis and Detroit, with 211 killings reported so far this year, lower than the same period in 2022 and 2021.

Johnson's holiday weekend strategy includes making officers a visible presence, and even having them check bags at crowded beaches, parks and events. Police rushed to Chicago's North Avenue Beach on Friday afternoon after a report of gunshots following a large fight. The department said one juvenile was in custody but didn't provide more information. No injuries were reported.

Philanthropic and business groups have donated to anti-violence groups organizing events aimed at young people. And the state of Illinois has authorized a team of 30 "peacekeepers" — not police — who have training and experience in deescalating conflict, to roam Chicago aiming to prevent outbreaks of violence.

Community groups with similar strategies have operated for years across Chicago, focusing on specific neighborhoods or blocks with a history of violence. State officials said their team would be mobile and able to respond anywhere, including downtown, where large gatherings of teens during a warm April weekend ended with several shootings and other violence.

Norman Livingston Kerr led a Chicago anti-violence organization before he became assistant deputy mayor for public safety under Johnson's predecessor, Lori Lightfoot. He now consults with cities and nonprofits to develop anti-violence strategies that rely on deescalation or intervention. He's encouraged by signs that the city and state are committing long-term resources to efforts such as the peacekeepers program.

"This violence intervention work, it can take time for people to see it work and believe in it," Kerr said. "I'm not going to dwell on the fact it took years to happen; I'm going to say this is a new day."

Johnson has promised to give a variety of community organizations a larger role in his administration's public safety strategy and devoted much of Thursday's city presentation to promoting plans for basketball tournaments, neighborhood barbecues and karaoke contests.

Tamar Manasseh, founder of Mothers/Men Against Senseless Killings, said her organization has worked to prevent crime around a South Side intersection for nearly 10 years using "positive loitering." This weekend is no exception, with a neighborhood barbecue and other activities planned.

"We built a community center, our pop-up community center, in a vacant lot," Manasseh said. "And since then we've seen crime drop astronomically. And we feel like that can happen anywhere."

Associated Press writers Lea Skene in Baltimore and Corey Williams and Ed White in Detroit contributed to this report.

Court monitor warned of medical care issues at Border Patrol stations before girl's death

By VALERIE GONZALEZ and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas (AP) — A court-appointed monitor said in January that child migrants held in medical isolation may be overlooked when Border Patrol stations get too crowded, a warning issued five months before an 8-year-old girl with a heart condition died in custody during an unusually busy period in the same Texas region he inspected.

Dr. Paul H. Wise, a pediatrics professor at Stanford University, called the death of Anadith Tanay Reyes Alvarez of Panama "preventable" during an interview this week while in Texas' Rio Grande Valley to look into the circumstances.

"Any child who is ill, but particularly kids with chronic problems, there should be little hesitation to refer them to local hospitals, preferably a children's hospital or hospital with good pediatric capabilities," Wise told The Associated Press.

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U.S. Customs and Border Protection has acknowledged the girl was seen at least three times by medical personnel the day she died — complaining of vomiting, a stomachache and suffering what appeared to be a seizure — before she was taken to a hospital. CBP did not respond to a request for comment on Wise's January report or his latest comments.

Wise authored a lengthy report in January on Border Patrol custody conditions for children in the Rio Grande Valley and El Paso, Texas, that gave satisfactory reviews on many counts but also flagged serious concerns. Last year, a federal judge asked him to examine custody conditions in the two busy regions as part of a 1997 court settlement to ensure safe treatment of child migrants.

Wise plans to submit a report soon on the May 17 death of the girl, who died on her ninth day in custody after being transferred to a station in Harlingen, Texas, with her family after being diagnosed with influenza. The agency limits custody to 72 hours under its own policy.

While his findings are not yet known — he declined to discuss them — some of his earlier warnings may resurface.

Wise previously expressed concern about crowding of children in medical isolation. His January report tells how "one medical team" in El Paso was responsible for 125 ill patients, a number that "far surpasses" the team's capabilities.

The Border Patrol also struggled to meet a requirement to conduct regular medical assessments of children when they came in families and were in crowded stations, Wise said in January.

"The 5-day repeat medical assessment is most important when families are being held for protracted periods in overcrowded conditions," he wrote. "However, because of other important demands on available medical staff, this medical protocol appears to be given relatively low priority under these conditions."

Wise further raised concerns about chronic conditions going undetected and "relevant medical information" being unknown or not shared among staff.

CBP's relatively detailed public account of the girl's time in custody does not directly address the requirement for exams every five days or how crowded the Harlingen station was when she was there.

The government's responsibilities for medical care of children is clearly defined in the recently updated agreement for the El Paso and Rio Grande Valley sectors. "CBP shall promptly activate the 911 system or refer juveniles to the local health system whenever appropriate for evaluation and treatment. Further, CBP shall refer juveniles with urgent or emergent medical issues to the local health system," the agreement stipulates.

During his visit, Wise interviewed Anadith's mother, Mabel Alvarez Benedicks, who told the AP that agents repeatedly ignored pleas to hospitalize her medically fragile daughter as she felt pain in her bones, struggled to breathe and was unable to walk.

Agents said her daughter's diagnosis of influenza did not require hospital care, Benedicks said. They knew the girl had a history of heart problems but was told to return if she fainted, the mother said.

Troy Miller, CBP's acting commissioner, has since ordered a review of all medically fragile detainees to ensure limited time in custody. Wise said he spoke with U.S. officials, including medical staff, to convey concerns from his recent visit.

"I have enough information at this point to make urgent recommendations to CBP, (the Department of Homeland Security) and to the court. And this will be focused around the steps that should be taken, in my view, to ensure that no preventable deaths occur to children in CBP custody," he said.

Russia says its border regions attacked; Moscow's forces hit clinic in central Ukrainian city

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia's southern Belgorod region bordering Ukraine came under attack Friday from Ukrainian artillery fire, mortar shells and drones, authorities said, hours after two drones struck a Russian city in an area next to the annexed Crimea Peninsula.

Moscow's forces, meanwhile, struck a building containing psychology and veterinary clinics in the city of

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Dnipro, in central Ukraine, killing two people and wounding 30, including two children, Ukrainian officials said.

Video released by regional Gov. Serhiy Lysak showed fire engulfing the three-story building that appeared almost destroyed, with only parts of a wall standing, as firefighters battled the flames.

A Russian S-300 missile hit a dam in the Karlivka district of Donetsk province in eastern Ukraine, threatening nearby settlements with flooding.

The town of Graivoron in Russia's Belgorod region, about 7 kilometers (more than 4 miles) from the Ukrainian border, came under fire for several hours, damaging four houses, a store, a car, a gas pipeline and a power line, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov reported.

Closer to the frontier, a recreation center, a shop and an empty house were damaged in the village of Glotovo. One woman was wounded when nearby Novaya Tavolzhanka was shelled, Gladkov said.

Earlier this week, the Belgorod region was the target of one of the most serious cross-border attacks from Ukraine since the war began 15 months ago. Details of the raid were murky. Russia blamed the Ukrainian armed forces, but two Russian groups said they were involved, with the aim of bringing down Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Officials in Russia's southern city of Krasnodar, in the region of the same name bordering Crimea, said two drones struck there. Witnesses told local media they heard something like the sound of a moped and then two explosions.

The blasts smashed a hole in the roof of one building and blew out windows in an apartment building. "We just went to bed and then there was such a strong, terrible boom," said resident Tatiana Safonova. "We ran outside. There were people running, but nothing else was going on."

She said described the sound beforehand "like a growling, noisy moped driving by."

Krasnodar regional Gov. Veniamin Kondratyev wrote on Telegram that there were no casualties and that some buildings were damaged but essential infrastructure was unharmed.

Krasnodar Mayor Yevgeny Naumov said a residential building and an office building were damaged.

Drone attacks against Russian border regions have been a regular occurrence since the start of the invasion in February 2022, with attacks increasing last month. Earlier this month, an oil refinery in Krasnodar was attacked by drones on two straight days.

At a meeting in Estonia, German and Baltic leaders played down concerns about fighting spilling over into Russia.

"Russia attacked Ukraine, and so Ukraine can defend itself," said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. "It is clear that the weapons we have delivered will only be used on Ukrainian territory."

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas noted that "Ukraine does not have any wish to invade Russia," and Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte added: "I'm somewhat puzzled by the worry of Russia, because Russia is at war — so it's quite strange to think that the war can only be in that other territory that you invaded."

Ukraine's Defense Ministry on Thursday published video that appeared to show a marine drone heading for Russia's Ivan Khurs reconnaissance ship in the Black Sea. The video didn't show the drone hitting the ship.

The video followed reports by Russia's Defense Ministry on Wednesday that Ukraine had launched an unsuccessful attack on the Ivan Khurs using three unmanned speedboats, with all three destroyed prior to reaching the ship. Moscow released video allegedly showing the destruction of one of the marine drones.

At least two civilians were killed and three others wounded in Russian attacks on Ukraine in the previous 24 hours, the Ukrainian president's office reported Friday.

Late Friday, officials in the Russian-held sector of Donetsk reported two missile strikes on the city of Mariupol, where a months-long siege early in the war left much of the city in ruins.

Russia's state news agency Tass cited an unnamed official as saying the missiles were long-range Storm Shadows, which the United Kingdom delivered to Ukraine this month.

In Moscow, China's special envoy Li Hui met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and they exchanged "opinions on the situation around Ukraine and prospects for resolving the conflict," according to

the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Lavrov cited "serious obstacles to the resumption of peace talks created by the Ukrainian side and its Western handlers," the statement said, but it did not disclose what Li said or proposed.

Li visited Kyiv earlier this month. Chinese leader Xi Jinping's government says it's neutral and wants to serve as mediator in the conflict, but has supported Moscow politically. Beijing released a proposed peace plan in February, but Ukraine's allies largely dismissed it, insisting that Russian President Vladimir Putin must first withdraw his forces.

Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, and Elise Morton in London, contributed.

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

Presidential hopeful DeSantis inspires push to make book bans easier in Republican-controlled states

By ANDREW DeMILLO, ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Florida (AP) — As he vies for the Republican presidential nomination, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is touting a series of measures he has pushed that have led to an upswing in banned or restricted books — not just in Florida schools but in an increasing number of other conservative states.

Florida last year became the first in a wave of red states to enact laws making it easier for parents to challenge books in school libraries they deem to be pornographic, deal improperly with racial issues or in other ways be inappropriate for students.

Books ensnared in the Florida regulations include explicit graphic novels about growing up LGBTQ+, a children's book based on a true story of two male penguins raising a chick in a zoo and "The Bluest Eye," a novel by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison that includes descriptions of child sexual abuse. Certain books covering racial themes also have been pulled from library shelves, sometimes temporarily, as school administrators try to assess what material is allowed under the new rules.

The day before DeSantis entered the presidential race earlier this week, a K-8 school in Miami-Dade County put the poem "The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman on a restricted list for elementary students after a parent complained. The reasons for the objection to the poem, which Gorman read during President Joe Biden's inauguration, were not clear. The book version remains available to the middle school students, but Gorman criticized the decision to restrict it for younger grades, saying it robbed "children of the chance to find their voices in literature."

While efforts to ban books or censor education material have come up sporadically over the years, critics and supporters credit DeSantis with inspiring a new wave of legislation in other conservative states to regulate the books available in schools — and sometimes even in public libraries. The number of attempts to ban or restrict books across the U.S. last year was the highest in the 20 years the American Library Association has been tracking such efforts.

EveryLibrary, a national political action committee, said it's tracking at least 121 different proposals introduced in state legislatures this year targeting libraries, librarians, educators and access to materials. The group said 39 of those proposals would allow for criminal prosecution.

"He really is blazing a trail," said Tiffany Justice, the Florida-based co-founder of the conservative parents group Moms for Liberty, whose members have filed challenges to books in libraries in several states. "What Ron DeSantis does that I think is effective is he uses all the levers of power to make long-term change happen."

"Other governors," Justice said, "are paying attention and following suit."

In Arkansas, Republican Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed a law, set to take effect this summer, that could impose criminal penalties on librarians who knowingly provide "harmful" materials to minors. The law also would establish a process for the public to challenge materials and ask they be relocated to a section minors can't access.

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"It's a perverse world when we're talking about trying to criminalize librarians," said Nate Coulter, executive director of the Central Arkansas Library System in Little Rock, which is expected to sue over Arkansas' law.

In Indiana, school libraries will be required by July 1 to publicly post a list of books they offer and provide a complaint process for community members under a law Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb signed this month. In Texas, a bill creating new standards for banning books from schools that the government considers too explicit has been sent to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's desk.

In Oklahoma, the state school board has approved new rules that prohibit "pornographic materials and sexualized content" in school libraries and allow parents to submit formal complaints. The rules still must be approved by Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt. On Friday, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed a bill that includes removing all books depicting sex acts, except religious texts, from school libraries.

DeSantis insists books aren't actually being "banned" in his state's schools, preferring to call the forced removal of some books "curation choices that are consistent with state standards."

"There has not been a single book banned in the state of Florida," DeSantis said during a live appearance on Twitter Wednesday when he announced his campaign. He later said "our mantra in Florida is education, not indoctrination."

Librarians, free speech advocates and some parents and educators say the push is driven by a small, conservative minority that happens to have outsized clout in Republican primaries, like the one DeSantis is now competing in.

"This is all part of his plan to run for president, and he believes his vilification of books and what's happening in public schools is his path to the presidency," said Andrew Spar, president of the Florida Education Association, the state's main teachers union.

Kasey Meehan, who directs the Freedom to Read program at the writers' organization PEN America, said that, when books are targeted in Florida, they later become the subject of complaints filed by parents in other states.

"It's something that continues to cause alarm for individuals who are advocating for the freedom to read or for a diversity of knowledge, ideas and books to be available to students across the country," Meehan said.

PEN earlier this month sued the Escambia school district in Florida over the removal of 10 books, including "The Bluest Eye" and "Lucky," a bestselling memoir by Alice Sebold about her rape when she was 18 years old.

There have been challenges to books in schools for decades — "The Bluest Eye" has been targeted in various states for years, long before DeSantis became governor. But the restrictions accelerated in Florida after DeSantis signed bills last year barring discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third-grade classrooms, a ban that has since expanded through 12th grade. He also created a mechanism for parents to challenge books in school libraries and has targeted how race is taught in Florida schools.

Many teachers and districts complain that the laws' standards are so vague they don't know what books might place them in legal jeopardy.

Michael Woods, a special education teacher in Palm Beach County, said new rules compelling him to catalog books in his classroom led him to empty a small library he set up where students could choose to read something that interested them. Now those volumes are stored in a box he's stashed in his closet for fear of getting in trouble.

"That kind of positive connection to reading is no longer there," he said.

The individual challenges to books might be coming from a fairly narrow segment of the population, according to PEN and the American Library Association, which track requests to pull books. The library association said 40% of all requests challenged 100 or more books at a time.

Raegan Miller of Florida Freedom to Read, a group fighting the book restrictions, said she has talked about education issues with fellow parents of all political persuasions for years, and no one has ever complained about inappropriate material in their children's schools. She contends the issue has been ginned up by a small group of conservative activists.

"Do you really think we are all just happily dropping our kids off (for) Marxist indoctrination and pornography?" Miller said. "You only hear this stuff at school board meetings."

Moms for Liberty, which boasts 285 chapters, has a strong presence at school board meetings in the state and nationwide. It also has successfully backed several candidates for school board.

Justice, the group's co-founder, notes the books are still available in public libraries and through book-sellers. The question, she said, is whether it's appropriate for taxpayer-funded schools to provide them to children.

Some books don't belong in certain settings, she said: "A seminary library would have different books than a medical school library."

It's the local, elected officials, she added, who should determine what's appropriate.

"That's representative government," Justice said.

Associated Press writers Sean Murphy in Oklahoma City and Arleigh Rodgers in Indianapolis contributed to this report.

2 more Oath Keepers sentenced to prison terms for Jan. 6 Capitol attack

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Two Army veterans who stormed the U.S. Capitol in a military-style formation with fellow members of the Oath Keepers were sentenced Friday to prison terms, a day after the far-right extremist group's founder received a record-setting 18-years behind bars in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta sentenced Jessica Watkins, of Woodstock, Ohio, to eight years and six months behind bars and sentenced Kenneth Harrelson, of Titusville, Florida, to four years in prison.

A federal jury acquitted Watkins and Harrelson of the seditious conspiracy charge that Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes was found guilty of in November. But jurors convicted Watkins and Harrelson of other Jan. 6 charges, including obstructing Congress' certification of President Joe Biden's victory.

Rhodes' 18-year term is the longest prison sentence that has been handed down so far in the hundreds of Capitol riot cases. The charges against leaders of the Oath Keepers and another extremist group, the Proud Boys, are among the most serious brought in the Justice Department's massive investigation of the riot.

Mehta agreed with the Justice Department that Rhodes and the other Oath Keepers' actions could be punished as "terrorism," increasing the recommended sentence under federal guidelines.

But the judge ultimately gave Watkins and Harrelson far less time than prosecutors were seeking. The Justice Department had requested 18 years for Watkins and 15 for Harrelson.

Watkins and Harrelson marched toward the Capitol with other Oath Keepers members in "stack" formations as a mob of Trump supporters clashed with outnumbered police officers. Harrelson was the group's "ground team lead" on Jan. 6. Watkins, who formed a separate Ohio-based militia group, recruited others to join the Oath Keepers in Washington that day.

Mehta said that while Watkins was not a top leader, like Rhodes, she was more than just a "foot soldier," noting that at least three others charged in the riot wouldn't have been there if she hadn't recruited them to join.

"Your role that day was more aggressive, more assaultive, more purposeful than perhaps others," he told her.

Watkins tearfully apologized for her actions before the judge handed down her sentence. She condemned the violence by rioters who assaulted police, but conceded that her presence at the Capitol "probably inspired those people to a degree." She described herself as "just another idiot running around the Capitol" on Jan. 6.

"And today you're going to hold this idiot responsible," she told the judge.

The judge said Watkins' personal story of struggling for years to come to terms with her identity as a

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transgender woman made it especially difficult for him to understand why she has shown “a lack of empathy for those who suffered” on Jan. 6. Watkins testified at trial about hiding her identity from her parents during a strict Christian upbringing and going AWOL in the Army after a fellow soldier found evidence of her contact with a support group for transgender people.

Harrelson told the judge he went to Washington after another Oath Keeper offered him a “security job,” but said he has never voted for a president in his life and doesn’t care about politics. Some of the Oath Keepers provided security for Trump ally Roger Stone and other right-wing figures at events before the riot.

“I have totally demolished my life,” he said as he broke down in tears. “I am responsible, and my foolish actions have caused immense pain to my wife and our children.”

Mehta said he doesn’t agree with the government’s portrayal of Harrelson as a “mid-level organizer” for the Oath Keepers. Unlike many other group members charged in the attack, Harrelson didn’t send any messages “that anyone would consider extremist,” the judge said.

But the judge said he was struck by an image of Harrelson patting down a police officer on his way out of the Capitol.

“You weren’t just there that day because you got swept in,” the judge told him.

During a nearly two-month trial in Washington’s federal court, lawyers for Watkins and the other Oath Keepers argued there was no plan to attack the Capitol. On the witness stand, Watkins told jurors she never intended to interfere with the certification and never heard any commands for her and other Oath Keepers to enter the building.

Evidence shown to jurors showed Watkins after the 2020 election messaging with people who expressed interest in joining her Ohio militia group about “military-style basic” training. She told one recruit, “I need you fighting fit” by the inauguration, which was Jan. 20, 2021.

On Jan. 6, Watkins and other Oath Keepers wearing helmets and other paramilitary gear were seen shouldering their way through the crowd and up the Capitol stairs in military-style stack formation. She communicated with others during the riot over a channel called “Stop the Steal J6” on the walkie-talkie app Zello, declaring, “We are in the main dome right now.”

Harrelson screamed “Treason!” — an epithet directed at members of Congress — as he entered the Capitol on Jan. 6, a prosecutor said.

One of their other co-defendants, Florida chapter leader Kelly Meggs, was sentenced Thursday to 12 years behind bars for seditious conspiracy and other charges.

Rhodes, 58, of Granbury, Texas, was the first Jan. 6 defendant convicted of seditious conspiracy to receive his punishment for what prosecutors said was a weeklong plot to forcibly block the transfer of power from former President Donald Trump to Biden. Four other Oath Keepers convicted of the sedition charge during a second trial in January will be sentenced next week.

During his sentencing Thursday, Rhodes defiantly claimed to be a “political prisoner,” criticized prosecutors and the Biden administration and tried to play down his actions on Jan. 6. The judge described Rhodes as a continued threat to the United States who clearly “wants democracy in this country to devolve into violence.”

The Oath Keepers’ sentences this week could serve as a guide for prosecutors in a separate Jan. 6 case against leaders of the Proud Boys. Earlier this month, a different jury convicted former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrio and three other group leaders of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors said was another plot to keep Trump in the White House.

Before Thursday, the longest sentence in the more than 1,000 Capitol riot cases was 14 years and two months 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.

Richer reported from Boston.

After yearslong delay, DEA revokes license of drug distributor over opioid crisis failures

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration stripped one of the nation's largest drug distributors of its license to sell highly addictive painkillers Friday after determining it failed to flag thousands of suspicious orders at the height of the opioid crisis.

The action against Morris & Dickson Co. that threatens to put it out of business came two days after an Associated Press investigation found the DEA allowed the company to keep shipping drugs for nearly four years after a judge recommended the harshest penalty for its "cavalier disregard" of rules aimed at preventing opioid abuse.

The DEA acknowledged the time it took to issue its final decision was "longer than typical for the agency" but blamed Morris & Dickson in part for holding up the process by seeking delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its lengthy pursuit of a settlement that the agency said it had considered. The order becomes effective in 90 days, allowing more time to negotiate a settlement.

DEA Administrator Anne Milgram said in the 68-page order that Morris & Dickson failed to accept full responsibility for its past actions, which included shipping 12,000 unusually large orders of opioids to pharmacies and hospitals between 2014 and 2018. During this time, the company filed just three suspicious order reports with the DEA.

Milgram specifically cited testimony of then-president Paul Dickson Sr. in 2019 that the company's compliance program was "dang good" and he didn't think a "single person has gotten hurt by (their) drugs."

"Those statements from the president of a family-owned and operated company so strongly miss the point of the requirements of a DEA registrant," she wrote. "Its acceptance of responsibility did not prove that it or its principals understand the full extent of their wrongdoing ... and the potential harm it caused."

Shreveport, Louisiana-based Morris & Dickson traces its roots to 1840, when its namesake founder arrived from Wales and placed an ad in a local newspaper selling medicines. It has since become the nation's fourth-largest wholesale drug distributor, with \$4 billion a year in revenue and nearly 600 employees serving pharmacies and hospitals in 29 states.

In a statement, the company said it has invested millions of dollars over the past few years to revamp its compliance systems and appeared to hold out hope for a settlement.

"Morris & Dickson is grateful to the DEA administrator for delaying the effective date of the order to allow time to settle these old issues," it said. "We remain confident we can achieve an outcome that safeguards the supply chain for all of our healthcare partners and the communities they serve. ... Business will continue as usual and orders will continue to go out on time."

Morris & Dickson's much larger competitors, a trio of pharmaceutical distributors known as the Big Three, have already agreed to pay the federal government more than \$1 billion in fines and penalties to settle similar violations. Cardinal Health, AmerisourceBergen and McKesson also agreed to pay \$21 billion over 18 years to resolve claims as part of a nationwide settlement.

While Morris & Dickson wasn't the only drug distributor who the DEA accused of fueling the opioid crisis, it was unique in its willingness to challenge those accusations in the DEA's administrative court.

In a scathing recommendation in 2019, Administrative Law Judge Charles W. Dorman said Morris & Dickson's argument that it has changed its ways was too little, too late.

Anything less than the most severe punishment, the judge 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."

But as the ensuing years passed, neither the Biden-nominated Milgram nor her two predecessors took any enforcement action. Past DEA officials told the AP such decisions usually take no more than two years.

As the pills kept flowing, Morris & Dickson attempted to stave off punishment, appealing directly to Milgram to order a reopening of the proceedings, arguing it would introduce new evidence showing it had implemented an "ideal" compliance program with the help of a consultant who is now second-in-command

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at the DEA, Louis Milione. The DEA said that Milione has recused himself from all agency business related to Morris & Dickson.

Milione retired from the DEA in 2017 after a 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 went to work as a consultant for some of the same companies he had been tasked with regulating.

Milione was hired by Morris & Dickson in 2018 as part of a \$3 million contract and later testified that the company "spared no expense" to overhaul its compliance systems, cancel suspicious orders and send daily emails to the DEA spelling out its actions.

A footnote of the DEA's order Friday said that since Milione returned to the DEA as principal deputy administrator in 2021, he has not had any contact with Milgram or other agency staff about the Morris & Dickson case due to his prior involvement with the company.

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

Farmer-turned-policeman is Mexico's eyes and ears at Popocatepetl volcano

By MARÍA VERZA Associated Press

SANTIAGO XALITZINTLA, Mexico (AP) — When the Popocatepetl volcano reawakened in 1994, Mexican scientists needed people in the area who could be their eyes and ears. State police helped them find one, Nefi de Aquino, a farmer then in his 40s who lived beside the volcano. From that moment on, his life changed.

He became a police officer himself, but with a very specific job: watching Popocatepetl and reporting everything that he saw to authorities and researchers at diverse institutions.

For nearly three decades, de Aquino says he has been "taking care of" the volcano affectionately known as "El Popo." And for the past 23 of those years, he has been sending scientists daily photographs.

Collaboration between researchers and local residents — usually people of limited means — is crucial to Mexico's volcano monitoring. Hundreds of villagers collaborate in different ways. Often local residents are the only witnesses to key events. Sometimes scientists install recording devices on their land, or have them collect ash samples.

One evening this week, the thin 70-year-old policeman with a hoarse voice stopped his patrol truck near the cemetery overlooking his home town, one of the area's best vantage points. At his feet lay the town of Santiago Xalitzintla. Directly in front at a distance of 14 miles (23 kilometers) sat Popocatepetl, puffing smoke, the rim of its crater aglow.

Since it appeared calm, de Aquino didn't stay long. Over the previous week, he had been busy sending digital volcano photographs to a slew of researchers at universities and government agencies as the mountain's activity increased and authorities raised the alert level. Once again the world's eyes were on the 17,797-foot Popocatepetl, including those of the 25 million people living within 60 miles of its crater.

On Friday, officials said the volcano's activity had decreased somewhat although they maintained the same alert level.

A farmer who was a meat packer for three years in Utah in his late 20s when he illegally emigrated to the United States, de Aquino's life took a radical turn one day in 1994 when someone in his home town told him police were looking for him.

At first he was afraid to go to the police, but eventually did. The interview was brief.

"Do you know how to read?" "Yes." "Write?" "Yes." "Do you drive?" "Yes." "Do you have a license?" "Yes." "Heck, this one will work."

Officers told de Aquino that the government was looking for people to monitor the volcano and that he, then 41, had certain advantages. He appeared serious, he had finished high school and during his short

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stay in the United States he had learned how to take photographs.

At first he was given a volunteer civil defense role, and he took some courses at National Center for Disaster Prevention, or CENAPRED where he was "immersed in the volcano." But he wasn't thrilled with doing the work without pay. So authorities offered to send him to the police academy.

Although de Aquino became an officer with some normal police duties, he was an odd cop. He almost always worked alone, patrolling remote mountain roads, taking photos of the volcano.

The ways that local people who help monitor the volcano are compensated are seldom straightforward, because they are not on the payrolls of universities or other research institutions, despite "becoming our eyes close to the volcano," said Carlos Valdés, a researcher at the UNAM's Geophysics Institute and former head of CENAPRED.

As an example, Valdés said that the key person when the seismic monitoring system was installed on Popocatepetl was a mountain climber who lived in the town of Amecameca. The man, since deceased, knew the safest routes to climb and how to avoid putting instruments in locations that were sacred to locals.

The way to compensate the man, was "to buy tires for his jeep, repair the vehicle, get him coats," because it was otherwise difficult to pay him.

Paulino Alonso, a technician at CENAPRED who does fieldwork at Popocatepetl, said collaboration with locals also has given researchers a better understanding of how locals perceive risks.

"A machine is never going to speak to the human perception of danger," Alonso said.

In 2000, when Popocatepetl grew more active, authorities declared a red alert and thousands of people were evacuated. De Aquino's monitoring work intensified.

"They gave me cameras, a patrol car and binoculars and every day I had to send three photos: one in the morning, one at midday and one at night," the policeman said.

He continues that work to this day, filling up his adobe-walled home with thousands of photographs. De Aquino lives alone on a modest ranch on the volcano's slopes, where he has some fruit trees growing beside a stream, and also raises corn and a few animals.

De Aquino helps keep locals informed about the volcano and assists during evacuations. Once, his house becomes an impromptu shelter for soldiers, police and government officials, he said.

De Aquino has gotten to go along on overflights of the crater, the first time terrified. "You see the whole base, how it lights up, how its puts out smoke ... it felt strange," he said.

He has continued in his job despite being past retirement age.

"What I have learned from (Popocatepetl) is that while it's calm, it doesn't do anything, but when it gets mad, it goes crazy," he said.

Heat still lead East finals, but Celtics roaring back with eye on history

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — Maybe Kevin Garnett was right. Maybe, as he screamed in celebration of Boston's 2008 NBA championship, anything truly is possible.

Even the impossible.

The Celtics are halfway to history, and that alone has gotten them entry into a very small club. Of the first 150 teams that trailed a best-of-seven series 3-0 in NBA history, just 14 — 9.3% — found a way to extend the matchup to Game 6. None of them have won the series, and most are usually eliminated by now.

Not the Celtics. They have cut the deficit in the Eastern Conference finals against the Miami Heat to 3-2, simultaneously trailing the series yet seeming to have all the momentum going into Game 6 in Miami on Saturday night.

"Obviously, we didn't imagine being in this position, being down 3-0, but when adversity hits, you get to see like what a team is really made of," Celtics forward Jaylen Brown said. "I mean, it couldn't get no worse than being down 3-0, but we didn't look around, we didn't go in separate directions. We stayed together. We doubled down on what we're good at on defense, and now I think it's a series."

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Only three teams have gone from down 3-0 to tied 3-3; the Celtics could be the fourth with a win on Saturday. No NBA team has ever fully escaped the 3-0 hole, but a win on Saturday would give Boston a chance to change that in Game 7 — which would be Monday on its home floor.

“One of our assistants put it in great perspective: The seasons are like nine months long, and we just had a bad week,” Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. “Sometimes you have a bad week at work. We obviously didn’t pick the best time to have a bad week, but we did, and we’re sticking together and fighting like hell to keep it alive.”

Meanwhile, the Denver Nuggets are waiting for an opponent. If Boston wins the series, the Nuggets will visit the Celtics for Game 1 of the NBA Finals. If Miami wins the East, the Heat are headed to Denver for Game 1. Either way, the title series starts June 1, somewhere.

“We have to shore up who we are and address the areas that we have not been maybe good enough or areas that we can clean up,” Nuggets coach Michael Malone said Friday, after the team’s first real practice since sweeping the Los Angeles Lakers for the Western Conference title. “But it’s really hard to keep your rhythm when you’re not playing NBA games.”

The Heat had a nine-point lead in the third quarter of Game 4, in position to perhaps win in a sweep. The lead was gone 2-1/2 minutes later and the Celtics haven’t trailed since. An 18-0 run in Game 4 put Boston on top of that game for good, a 12-0 run by the Celtics later in that game ended all doubt, and then they started Game 5 with a 20-5 burst.

Add that all up, and from the start of the third-quarter run in Game 4 to the end of the start-of-game spurt in Game 5, the Celtics outscored the Heat 84-43 in a span of 27 minutes.

“The last two games are not who we are. It just happened to be that way,” Heat forward Jimmy Butler said. “We stopped playing defense halfway because we didn’t make shots that we want to make. But that’s easily correctable. You just have to come out and play harder from the jump. Like I always say, it’s going to be all smiles and we are going to keep it very, very, very consistent, knowing that we are going to win next game.”

At least the confidence isn’t ailing. Everything else is.

Heat coach Erik Spoelstra flatly shot down the notion that Miami has an excuse for the way it played in Game 5 — “there’s no excuses. Not at all,” he insisted — even though the training room is as crowded as a scrum for a loose ball under a basket right now. The Heat have been shorthanded in the backcourt for the entirety of the playoffs after injuries to shooting guards Tyler Herro and Victor Oladipo, plus they didn’t have starting guard Gabe Vincent for Game 5 and watched Kyle Lowry play through some sort of hand issue.

Miami’s starters were outscored 95-44 in Game 5, and since the start of Boston’s comeback-sparking burst in Game 4 the Heat have been outscored 75-33 from 3-point range, allowed the Celtics to shoot 54% from the field, 44% from 3-point range while committing 26 turnovers to Boston’s 12.

Pick a number. They’re all bad for the Heat, except the one that matters most — 3-2, the series score that means Miami is still only one win from capping its own improbable run of being a No. 8 seed that found its way into the NBA Finals.

“It’s a competitive series,” Spoelstra said. “You always expect things to be challenging in the conference finals. One game doesn’t lead to the next game. ... We beat them by whatever in Game 3. It just doesn’t matter. It’s about collectively preparing and putting together a great game. We’ll play much better on Saturday. That’s all we just have to focus on right now.”

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

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What to watch this weekend: 'Succession' finale, John Wick, Matchbox Twenty, 'American Born Chinese'

By The Associated Press undefined

Sure, lots of folks are eagerly anticipating this Sunday's "Succession" finale. But what if you haven't followed the Roy family drama? There's plenty of new don't miss new television, movies, music and games headed to a device near you.

Among the offerings worth your time as selected by The Associated Press' entertainment journalists this week are streaming arrival of the latest "John Wick" film, the end of a long drought of new Matchbox Twenty music, a video game that lets you play one of Middle Earth's most recognizable characters and a television adaptation of the graphic novel "American Born Chinese."

NEW MOVIES TO STREAM

— It can be hard to believe when corporate folks make genuinely altruistic gestures, especially involving their fortunes, but neither Kris McDivitt Tompkins, the first CEO of Patagonia, nor her late husband, Doug Tompkins, the founder the North Face and Esprit, were ones to play by the rules. "Wild Life," a new documentary from the Oscar-winning "Free Solo" filmmakers, tells the story of this couple, their love of the outdoors, their adventurous spirits and how they funneled their fortunes to "rewilding" conservation efforts by buying up roughly 2.2 million acres in Argentina and Chile. "Wild Life" starts streaming on Disney+ and Hulu on Friday.

— It's a robust week for Sundance documentaries on streaming as "Victim/Suspect" debuted on Netflix on Tuesday. This film from director Nancy Schwartzman follows reporter Rae de Leon's investigation into a disturbing pattern: That in the United States, women reporting sexual assaults often become suspects. The film delves into possible flaws and loopholes in the system that may be enabling the chilling trend.

— For more escapism, Keanu Reeves' tireless assassin John Wick returns for a fourth film, which made its way to video on demand on Tuesday. This time, Wick goes to Paris. He's still being hunted but has also gone on the offensive. AP's Mark Kennedy wrote in his review that this installment elevates and expands the franchise. "The fourth installment is more stylish, more elegant and more bonkers — kind of like Paris itself," Kennedy said. It also serves as a bittersweet farewell to the Continental Hotel concierge Charon, played by Lance Reddick, who died shortly before the film came out.

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

NEW MUSIC TO STREAM

— Pop-rockers Matchbox Twenty end over a decade away with their fifth studio album, "Where The Light Goes," out Friday. It's an upbeat collection, opening with a horn-drenched, sing-along "Friends" — the chorus goes "All my friends are here" and the song features the vocals from bandmember Paul Doucette's son — and other highlights include singer-songwriter Amanda Shires' duet with frontman Rob Thomas on the cheerful "No Other Love" and the single "Wild Dogs (Running In a Slow Dream)," which captures that time in your youth when you finally find your people.

— Diddy is looking to jam just in time for summer. He teamed up with duo rap group City Girls — which includes JT and Yung Miami — and rapper Fabolous on his new song "Act Bad." The single, which was product Diddy and Papyrus, revolves around the concept of being fearlessly unapologetic. Diddy has already enlisted "Darkest Before Dawn" director Kid Art to direct the music video in hopes of capturing Miami's wild nightlife.

— Celebrate the end of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" by singing along with an album of the fifth and final season's music. The album features songs like "Relax Max" by Dinah Washington, "I Love The Way You Say Goodnight" by Doris Day with The Page Cavanaugh Trio, Barbra Streisand's "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" and Tony Bennett's "I Wanna Be Around." Fans will appreciate actor Hank Azaria doing "Nancy (With The Laughing Face)" and the cast belting out "Everything Grows!"

— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

NEW SERIES TO STREAM

— Dinosaurs once again come to life in the second season of "Prehistoric Planet" on Apple TV+. Executive

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produced by Jon Favreau and the team behind "Planet Earth," the docuseries uses the latest technology to not only create dinosaurs that look real, but also to immerse viewers into their habitat. Sir David Attenborough returns to narrate. "Prehistoric Planet" season two is presented as an event series, debuted Monday and is completely out now.

— Each episode of the "SmartLess" podcast hosted by Jason Bateman, Sean Hayes and Will Arnett features an entertaining conversation with a guest, but one of the best parts about the trio is their banter with each other. These longtime friends bicker and rib one another like family. The guys took their show on the road in 2022 to six cities, hosting conversations in front of a live, sold-out audience with surprise guests. If you weren't one of the lucky ones to see them live, it turns out cameras were rolling. "Smartless: On the Road" debuted Tuesday on Max.

— The new action-comedy series "American Born Chinese" is based on the graphic novel by Gene Luen Yang. It stars Ben Wang as a high schooler trying to survive the daily life as a first generation American in a Chinese family. He meets an exchange student from Taiwan and finds himself caught up in a war of ancient Chinese Gods. The series strikes a balance between a coming-of-age story and mythology with the spirit of the graphic novel. It also boasts a cast that includes Oscar winners Ke Huy Quan and Michele Yeoh, plus Chin Han and Daniel Wu. Recurring cast members include Stephanie Hsu, Ronnie Chieng and Jimmy O. Yang. "American Born Chinese" premiered Wednesday on Disney+.

— Alicia Rancilio

NEW VIDEO GAMES TO PLAY

— You're off to visit Middle-Earth. Which character do you want to be? Frodo? Gandalf? Legolas? Daedalic Entertainment is betting on a more conflicted protagonist with The Lord of the Rings: Gollum. Instead of wielding cool weapons and flashy spells, Gollum has to rely on stealth and spiderlike climbing skills to survive. He also has to put up with kibitzing from his alter ego, Smeagol, the kindhearted hobbit Gollum was before being corrupted by his "precioussss" One Ring. The German studio Daedalic is best known for story-heavy adventures like its Deponia series, so it could be interesting to see how it tackles a tale set in J.R.R. Tolkien's sprawling world. Gollum's journey begins Friday on Xbox X/S/One, PlayStation 5/4 and PC.

— In a typical post-apocalyptic video game like Fallout or The Last of Us, there are still plenty of people wandering the planet. Private Division's After Us isn't messing around — in its future, human beings have been wiped off the face of the Earth. You play as Gaia, the "spirit of life," and your mission is to gather the lost souls of all the species that have been driven to extinction. Oil-drenched monsters called Devourers are out to stop any hope of revival. Despite the grim setting, After Us looks gorgeous, evoking the haunted wasteland of the 2012 classic Journey. And Barcelona-based Piccolo Studio says it's a story of "sacrifice and hope," so Earth may not be done just yet. It arrived Tuesday on Xbox X/S, PlayStation 5 and PC.

— Lou Kesten

Catch up on AP's entertainment coverage here: <https://apnews.com/apf-entertainment>.

See the moments after a passenger opened a plane door during flight

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A passenger opened an emergency exit door during a plane flight in South Korea on Friday, causing air to blast inside the cabin and slightly injure 12 people, officials said. The plane landed safely.

Some people aboard the Asiana Airlines Airbus A321 aircraft tried to stop the person, who was able to partially open the door, the Transport Ministry said.

The person was detained by airport police on suspicion of violating the aviation security law, a ministry statement said. The person's identity and motive weren't immediately released.

The law bars passengers from handling exit doors and other equipment on board and provides for pen-

alties of up to 10 years in prison, the ministry said.

The plane with 194 people aboard was heading to the southeastern city of Daegu from the southern island of Jeju. The flight is normally about an hour, and the incident occurred when the plane was reaching the Daegu airport at an altitude of 700 feet (213 meters).

A video apparently taken by a person on board that was posted on social media shows some passengers' hair being whipped by the air blowing into the cabin through the open door.

The passengers included teenage athletes on their way to a track and field competition. Some screamed and cried in panic, Yonhap news agency reported, citing their unidentified coach.

Yonhap quoted other passengers as saying they suffered severe ear pain after the door opened. It said some cabin crew shouted for help from passengers to prevent the door from being opened.

Twelve people were taken to hospitals for treatment, according to the Transportation Ministry. Emergency officials in Daegu said the injured people suffered breathing problems and other minor symptoms.

Threat to Queen Elizabeth during 1983 US trip detailed in FBI documents

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI has disclosed a potential threat to Queen Elizabeth II during her 1983 trip to the United States.

The documents were released this week on the FBI's records website. Queen Elizabeth II died last September after a 70-year reign.

The queen's West Coast visit with her husband, Prince Philip, included a stop in San Francisco in March 1983. The FBI said that a San Francisco police officer who frequented a bar popular with sympathizers of the Irish Republican Army had received a phone call in February 1983 from a man who claimed his daughter had been killed in Northern Ireland by a rubber bullet.

According to the documents, the man said he was going to "attempt to harm Queen Elizabeth" by either dropping an object off the Golden Gate Bridge onto the queen's royal yacht or try to kill her during a visit to Yosemite National Park. The documents said the Secret Service intended to close the bridge's walkways as the yacht drew near.

The names of the officer and the caller were redacted in the documents, which did not indicate whether precautions were taken at Yosemite or whether any arrests were made. A March 7, 1983, memo indicated the queen completed the U.S. visit "without incident" and that "no further investigation is warranted."

The documents detailed other security concerns involving the queen's visits to various U.S. cities. When she attended a Baltimore Orioles game with President George H.W. Bush in May 1991, several dozen demonstrators in the park chanted slogans condemning Britain's policy in Northern Ireland.

Texas parents fret over Winnie the Pooh being used to teach kids about school shootings

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Cindy Campos' 5-year-old son was so excited about the Winnie the Pooh book he got at school that he asked her to read it with him as soon as he got home. But her heart sank when she realized it was a tutorial about what to do when "danger is near," advising kids to lock the doors, turn off the lights and quietly hide.

As they read the "Stay Safe" book the school sent home without explanation or a warning to parents, she began crying, leaving her son confused.

"It's hard because you're reading them a bedtime story and basically now you have to explain in this cute way what the book is about, when it's not exactly cute," Campos said.

She said her first-grader, who goes to the same elementary school as her pre-K son, also got a copy of the book last week. After posting about it in an online neighborhood group, she found other concerned parents whose kids had also brought the book home.

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The district's decision to send kids home with the book has made waves. California's Democratic governor, Gavin Newsom, tweeted: "Winnie the Pooh is now teaching Texas kids about active shooters because the elected officials do not have the courage to keep our kids safe and pass common sense gun safety laws."

It sparked enough of a reaction to warrant an explanation from the Dallas Independent School District, which said in a statement Friday that it works "hard every day to prevent school shootings" by dealing with online threats and improving security measures. It also conducts active shooter drills.

"Recently a booklet was sent home so parents could discuss with their children how to stay safe in such cases," the district said. "Unfortunately, we did not provide parents any guide or context. We apologize for the confusion and are thankful to parents who reached out to assist us in being better partners."

The district did not say how many schools and grades in the district received the books.

Campos said the book was "haunting" her and that it seemed especially "tone deaf" to send it home with kids without explanation around the time the state was marking the anniversary of last year's mass shooting at an elementary school in Uvalde, when a gunman killed 19 children and two teachers. It also comes as Texas' Republican-controlled Legislature wraps up a session in which it rejected virtually all proposals to tighten gun laws but did pass legislation banning school libraries from having books that contain descriptions, illustrations or audio depicting sexual conduct not relevant to the required school curriculum.

Active shooter drills have become common in American schools, though there's disagreement over whether they do more harm than good.

Campos said that although she doesn't disagree with the book's intent, she wished it would have come with a warning to parents so that she could introduce it to her kids at the right time and in the right way. She said she has discussed school shootings with her kids, and that she might have chosen to wait to read them the book until there was another attack.

"I would have done it on my own time," said Campos, who first spoke to the Oak Cliff Advocate.

The book's cover says: "If there is danger, let Winnie the Pooh and his crew show you what to do." Inside, it includes passages such as "If danger is near, do not fear. Hide like Pooh does until the police appear. Doors should be locked and the passage blocked. Turn off the light to stay out of sight."

The book was published by Praetorian Consulting, a Houston-based firm that provides safety, security and crisis management training and services. The company, which didn't respond to messages seeking comment, says on its website that it uses age-appropriate material to teach the concepts of "run, hide, fight" — the approach authorities say civilians should take in active shooter situations.

The company also says on its website that its K-6 curriculum features the characters of Winnie the Pooh, which are now in the public domain and even featured in a recent horror movie.

Country singer Tyler Hubbard's growth expands beyond Florida Georgia Line

By KRISTIN M. HALL AP Entertainment Writer

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Singer-songwriter Tyler Hubbard was fully prepared to hang up his boots so to speak when his duo partner in Florida Georgia Line, Brian Kelley, said he wanted to go solo.

The pair had been together more than a decade, and whether you were a fan of their bro country sound or not, their music ("Cruise," "Meant To Be," "Round Here") set the tone for a generation of country fans. Hubbard, who had notched more than a dozen hits as a songwriter for FGL and other artists like Jason Aldean, thought he'd focus on just writing for other artists.

"That's a really big transition in one's career, 10 years or 12 years, and to say we're going to pivot right now," Hubbard said. "I didn't expect it to come then. And it took me a minute, you know, it really did. But we were also in the middle of a pandemic. And so I didn't have a choice anyway."

But the COVID-19 pandemic made him realize that his need to perform and record was as strong as ever. Now a year after launching his solo career, Hubbard has reintroduced himself to fans with two No. 1 songs and a debut record.

"I'm thankful that (Brian) had the courage to step into this new space and to make that decision that ultimately kind of pushed me to make the same decision and lead me to where I'm at now," said Hubbard.

Both Kelley and Hubbard have said there's no bad blood between them and that FGL isn't breaking up, but rather "taking a break." Now the two seem set on exploring music that they couldn't make together. Kelley, the Florida-born singer, has been exploring his coastal country music, while Hubbard's self-titled solo debut record released in January gave him an opportunity to reflect on his personal life, being a father and a husband and his faith.

But Hubbard acknowledges that there's always skepticism when an artist goes solo after unprecedented success in a group or band. The Georgia-born singer took that as a challenge.

"I had quite a few people tell me that it couldn't be done and that I should definitely continue with FGL," Hubbard said. "And it sort of lit a spark in me, a fire."

Hubbard's two singles, the platinum-certified "5 Foot 9," about his wife and "Dancin' in the Country," which was co-written with Keith Urban, show that fans haven't forgotten Hubbard, or possibly that he's changing minds of people who never considered themselves FGL fans.

Producer and songwriter Jordan Schmidt was the first person signed to Hubbard and Kelley's publishing company Tree VibeZ, and he recalls that they instilled in him a strong work ethic. The duo would bring their writers out on a bus with them as they toured and spend time before or after shows just writing and creating songs.

So Schmidt was a natural fit as a co-producer and co-writer for Hubbard's solo album.

"Naturally it's going to be different, he's calling all the shots," said Schmidt. "But in the grand scheme, it's the same mentality and work ethic he had with FGL in terms of 'I want to write songs that move the needle.' He's still putting out songs that do sound unique and different, just like 'Cruise' back in the day."

And he's putting in his dues just like any newer act. Hubbard opened for Urban on his tour last fall and is hitting the festivals and fairs this summer, a somewhat different vibe from the high-energy, big pyro arena shows of Florida Georgia Line.

"I've really enjoyed being able to strip it back and play these smaller shows and really have little to no production," said Hubbard.

And just as Hubbard's grown up, so have his fans.

"I hope they can evolve with me, because I feel like it was a season," said Hubbard. "It was a chapter of my life, probably a chapter of a lot of the fans' lives, probably a soundtrack to a lot of memories."

Follow Kristin M. Hall at <https://twitter.com/kmhall>

From the Civil War to today's mattress sales, Memorial Day is full of contradiction

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Memorial Day is supposed to be about mourning the nation's fallen service members, but it's come to anchor the unofficial start of summer and a long weekend of discounts on anything from mattresses to lawn mowers.

Auto club AAA said in a travel forecast that this holiday weekend could be "one for the record books, especially at airports," with more than 42 million Americans projected to travel 50 miles (80 kilometers) or more. Federal officials said Friday that the number of air travelers had already hit a pandemic-era high.

But for Manuel Castañeda Jr., 58, the day will be a quiet one in Durand, Illinois, outside Rockford. He lost his father, a U.S. Marine who served in Vietnam, in an accident in California while training other Marines in 1966.

"Memorial Day is very personal," said Castañeda, who also served in the Marines and Army National Guard, from which he knew men who died in combat. "It isn't just the specials. It isn't just the barbecue."

But he tries not to judge others who spend the holiday differently: "How can I expect them to under-

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stand the depth of what I feel when they haven't experienced anything like that?"

WHAT IS THE OFFICIAL PURPOSE OF MEMORIAL DAY?

It's a day of reflection and remembrance of those who died while serving in the U.S. military, according to the Congressional Research Service. The holiday is observed in part by the National Moment of Remembrance, which encourages all Americans to pause at 3 p.m. for a moment of silence.

WHAT ARE THE HOLIDAY'S ORIGINS?

The holiday stems from the American Civil War, which killed more than 600,000 service members — both Union and Confederate — between 1861 and 1865.

There's little controversy over the first national observance of what was then called Decoration Day. It occurred May 30, 1868, after an organization of Union veterans called for decorating war graves with flowers, which were in bloom.

The practice was already widespread on a local level. Waterloo, New York, began a formal observance on May 5, 1866, and was later proclaimed to be the holiday's birthplace.

Yet Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, traced its first observance to October 1864, according to the Library of Congress. And women in some Confederate states were decorating graves before the war's end.

But David Blight, a Yale history professor, points to May 1, 1865, when as many as 10,000 people, many of them Black, held a parade, heard speeches and dedicated the graves of Union dead in Charleston, South Carolina.

A total of 267 Union troops had died at a Confederate prison and were buried in a mass grave. After the war, members of Black churches buried them in individual graves.

"What happened in Charleston does have the right to claim to be first, if that matters," Blight told The Associated Press in 2011.

In 2021, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel cited the story in a Memorial Day speech in Hudson, Ohio. The ceremony's organizers turned off his microphone because they said it wasn't relevant to honoring the city's veterans. The event's organizers later resigned.

HAS MEMORIAL DAY ALWAYS BEEN A SOURCE OF CONTENTION?

Someone has always lamented the holiday's drift from its original meaning.

As early as 1869, The New York Times wrote that the holiday could become "sacrilegious" and no longer "sacred" if it focuses more on pomp, dinners and oratory.

In 1871, abolitionist Frederick Douglass feared Americans were forgetting the Civil War's impetus — slavery — when he gave a Decoration Day speech at Arlington National Cemetery.

"We must never forget that the loyal soldiers who rest beneath this sod flung themselves between the nation and the nation's destroyers," Douglass said.

His concerns were well-founded, said Ben Railton, a professor of English and American studies at Fitchburg State University in Massachusetts. Even though roughly 180,000 Black men served in the Union Army, the holiday in many communities would essentially become "white Memorial Day," especially after the rise of the Jim Crow South, Railton said.

Meanwhile, how the day was spent — at least by the nation's elected officials — could draw scrutiny for years after the Civil War. In the 1880s, then-President Grover Cleveland was said to have gone fishing — and "people were appalled," said Matthew Dennis, an emeritus history professor at the University of Oregon.

By 1911, the Indianapolis 500 held its inaugural race on May 30, drawing 85,000 spectators. A report from The Associated Press made no mention of the holiday — or any controversy.

HOW HAS MEMORIAL DAY CHANGED?

Dennis said Memorial Day's potency diminished somewhat with the addition of Armistice Day, which marked World War I's end on Nov. 11, 1918. Armistice Day became a national holiday by 1938 and was renamed Veterans Day in 1954.

An act of Congress changed Memorial Day from every May 30th to the last Monday in May in 1971. Dennis said the creation of the three-day weekend recognized that Memorial Day had long been transformed into a more generic remembrance of the dead, as well as a day of leisure.

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In 1972, Time Magazine said the holiday had become "a three-day nationwide hootenanny that seems to have lost much of its original purpose."

WHY IS MEMORIAL DAY TIED TO SALES AND TRAVEL?

Even in the 19th century, grave ceremonies were followed by leisure activities such as picnicking and foot races, Dennis said.

The holiday also evolved alongside baseball and the automobile, the five-day work week and summer vacation, according to the 2002 book, "A History of Memorial Day: Unity, Discord and the Pursuit of Happiness."

In the mid-20th century, a small number of businesses began to open defiantly on the holiday.

Once the holiday moved to Monday, "the traditional barriers against doing business began to crumble," authors Richard Harmond and Thomas Curran wrote.

These days, Memorial Day sales and traveling are deeply woven into the nation's muscle memory. This weekend, 2.7 million more people will travel for the unofficial start of summer compared to last year — despite inflation, according to AAA.

The Transportation Security Administration said it screened 2.66 million people at airport checkpoints on Thursday, about 2,500 more than last Friday, and the highest number since the Sunday after Thanksgiving in 2019. The Federal Aviation Administration had predicted that Thursday would be the busiest travel day of the holiday period, with more than 51,000 airline flights.

Meanwhile, Jason Redman, 48, a retired Navy SEAL who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, said he'll be thinking of friends he's lost. Thirty names are tattooed on his arm "for every guy that I personally knew that died."

He wants Americans to remember the fallen — but also to enjoy themselves, knowing lives were sacrificed to forge the holiday.

A previous version of this article misquoted Matthew Dennis, the University of Oregon professor, regarding veterans' reaction to Memorial Day being moved to Monday. The quote has been removed.

Associated Press airlines writer David Koenig in Dallas contributed to this report.

Elon Musk's brain implant company Neuralink says it has US approval to begin trials in people

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Elon Musk's brain implant company Neuralink says it's gotten permission from U.S. regulators to begin testing its device in people.

The company made the announcement on Twitter Thursday evening but has provided no details about a potential study, which was not listed on the U.S. government database of clinical trials.

Officials with the Food and Drug Administration wouldn't confirm or deny whether the agency granted the approval, but press officer Carly Kempler said in an email that the FDA "acknowledges and understands" that Musk's company made the announcement.

Neuralink is one of many groups working on linking the nervous system to computers, efforts aimed at helping treat brain disorders, overcoming brain injuries and other applications.

Earlier this week, for example, researchers in Switzerland published research in the journal Nature describing an implant that restores communication between the brain and spinal cord to help a man with paralysis to stand and walk naturally. There are more than 30 brain or spine computer interface trials underway, according to clinicaltrials.gov.

Musk — who also owns Twitter and is the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX — said last December that his team was in the process of asking regulators to allow them to test the Neuralink device.

The device is about the size of a large coin and is designed to be implanted in the skull, with ultra-thin wires going directly into the brain. Musk has said the first two applications in people would be to attempt

to restore vision and try to help people with little or no ability to operate their muscles rapidly use digital devices. He also said he envisions that signals from the brain could be bridged to Neuralink devices in the spinal cord for someone with a broken neck.

After Musk made a presentation late last year about the device, Rajesh Rao, co-director of the Center for Neurotechnology at the University of Washington, said he doesn't think Neuralink is ahead of other teams in terms of brain-computer interface achievements but is "quite ahead" in terms of the hardware in the devices.

It's unclear how well this device or similar interfaces will ultimately work, or how safe they might be. Neuralink's interface is considered an "investigational device" at this point, and clinical trials are designed to collect data on safety and effectiveness.

In its tweet this week, Neuralink said that it's not yet recruiting participants for the study and will provide more information soon.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Iowa law limits gender identity instruction, removes books depicting sex acts from school libraries

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa teachers will be banned from raising gender identity and sexual orientation issues with students through grade six, and all books depicting sex acts will be removed from school libraries, under a bill Republican Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed Friday.

The new law is among similar measures that have been approved in other Republican-dominated statehouses around the country. As with many of those proposals, Iowa Republicans framed their action as a commonsense effort to ensure that parents can oversee what their children are learning in school and that teachers not delve into topics such as gender and sexuality.

Despite the opposition of all Democratic legislators, Republicans who hold large majorities in Iowa's state House and Senate approved the measure in April and there was little doubt that Reynolds would sign it; she had made issues related to gender identity and sexuality a focal point of her legislative agenda this year.

"This legislative session, we secured transformational education reform that puts parents in the driver's seat, eliminates burdensome regulations on public schools, provides flexibility to raise teacher salaries, and empowers teachers to prepare our kids for their future," Reynolds said in a statement.

Under the new law, school administrators also would be required to notify parents if students asked to change their pronouns or names. Religious texts will be exempt from the library ban on books depicting sex acts.

Democrats and LGBTQ groups argued that the restrictions would hurt children by limiting their ability to be open with teachers about gender and sexuality issues and to see their lives reflected in books and other curriculum.

The law's passage was not a surprise, said Keenan Crow, director of policy and advocacy at the LGBTQ equality group One Iowa. "But we are still very disappointed by it."

"Like many other pieces of her agenda, this legislation punches down on a vulnerable group of kids, and it benefits no one," Crow said of Reynolds.

The law also requires schools to post online a list of books in libraries, along with instructions for parents on how to review them and classroom instructional material, and to request that any material be removed. Schools would need parental approval before they could give surveys to students related to numerous topics, including mental health issues, sex and political affiliation.

Earlier this year, Reynolds signed two bills into law restricting the restrooms transgender students can use and banning gender-affirming medical care, such as puberty blockers, for people younger than 18. Last year, Reynolds signed a Republican-backed measure that prohibits transgender females from participating

in girls high school and women's college athletics. Like the newest law, both measures echo bills passed by Republican states around the country.

Connecticut lawmakers absolve accused colonial-era witches, apologize for "miscarriage of justice"

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

With distant family members looking on, Connecticut senators voted Thursday to absolve the 12 women and men convicted of witchcraft -- 11 of whom were executed — more than 370 years ago and apologize for the "miscarriage of justice" that occurred over a dark 15-year-period of the state's colonial history.

The Senate voted 33-1 in favor of a resolution that officially proclaimed their innocence. It marked the culmination of years of effort by a group called the CT Witch Trial Exoneration Project, made up of history buffs and descendants. Some of the descendants recently learned through genealogy testing that they were related to the accused witches and have since lobbied the state's General Assembly to officially clear their names.

"People can say we're wasting our time this afternoon, maybe we could be doing other things," said Republican state Sen. John Kissel, acknowledging early criticism of the legislative effort. "But I think it's a small step to acknowledge our history and move forward together, Democrat, Republican, men and women into a brighter future."

The resolution, which lists the nine women and two men who were executed and the one woman who was convicted and given a reprieve, already passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 121-30. Because it's a resolution, it does not require the governor's signature.

Republican state Sen. Rob Sampson cast the lone no vote on Thursday. He said it was wrong and child-like to suggest "somehow we have a right to dictate what was right or wrong about periods in the past that we have no knowledge of."

"I don't want to see bills that rightfully or wrongfully attempt to paint America as a bad place with a bad history," Sampson added. "I want us to focus on where we're going, which is a brighter and better future. And I don't want to see anyone try and put a stain on the country that I love."

Advocates of the resolution argued it's important to raise public awareness about the witch trials in Connecticut, which occurred decades before the infamous Salem witch trials in Massachusetts.

"It's important to right the wrongs of the past so we learn from them and move on and not repeat those mistakes," said Joshua Hutchinson, of Prescott Valley, Arizona, who traced his ancestry to accused witches in Salem and is the host of the "Thou Shalt Not Suffer: The Witch Trial Podcast."

Sen. Saud Anwar, a Democrat who advocated for the resolution on behalf of a constituent who learned he was a descendant of a witch accuser, said lawmakers heard testimony during the public hearing process about witch trials still happening around the world, including in African countries, and the need to draw attention to the problem.

"It's relevant, even to this time as well," he said.

Else Young, who was killed at the gallows in Connecticut, was the first person on record to be executed in the American colonies for witchcraft. The Windsor town clerk registered the death on May 26, 1647, in a diary entry that read: "Else Young was hanged."

The courts in the early British colonies of Connecticut and New Haven ultimately indicted at least 34 women and men for the crimes of witchcraft and familiarities with the devil.

Other states and countries have attempted to atone for a history of persecuting people as witches. Last year, Scotland's prime minister issued a formal apology to the estimated 4,000 Scots, mostly women, who were accused of witchcraft up until 1736. Of the 4,000, about 2,500 were killed. A Scottish member of parliament last year called for posthumously pardoning them.

In 2022, Massachusetts lawmakers formally exonerated Elizabeth Johnson Jr., who was convicted of witchcraft in 1693 and sentenced to death at the height of the Salem Witch Trials. Johnson is believed to

be the last accused Salem witch to have her conviction set aside by legislators.

Many historians believe fear and anxiety among the religiously strict English settlers led to the witch trials, noting how life was very difficult, given epidemics, floods, cold winters and starvation. Often, accusations started as a quarrel, or the death of a child or a cow, or even butter that couldn't be churned.

Many of the people executed as witches were poor, single mothers.

Hugh Grant's lawsuit alleging illegal snooping by The Sun tabloid cleared for trial

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A London court on Friday rejected an attempt by the publisher of The Sun tabloid to throw out a lawsuit by actor Hugh Grant alleging that journalists and investigators it hired illegally snooped on him.

Justice Timothy Fancourt said a trial will have to determine whether Rupert Murdoch's News Group Newspapers carried out unlawful information gathering that included tapping Grant's home phone, bugging his car and breaking into his home.

"If true — which will be a matter for the trial due to take place in January 2024 — these allegations would establish very serious, deliberate wrongdoing at NGN, conducted on an institutional basis on a huge scale," Fancourt wrote. "Of particular relevance ..., they would also establish a concerted effort to conceal the wrongdoing by hiding and destroying relevant documentary evidence, repeated public denials, lies to regulators and authorities, and unwarranted threats to those who dared to make allegations or notify intended claims against The Sun."

During a hearing last month, News Group argued that claims of unlawful information gathering by Grant and Prince Harry should be thrown out because they weren't brought within a six-year time limit.

The ruling didn't address the Duke of Sussex's case because the judge wants to hear more at a hearing in July about Harry's allegations that he was prevented from bringing his phone hacking claims much sooner because of a "secret agreement" between Buckingham Palace and News Group executives.

The judge dismissed Grant's phone hacking claims on time limitation grounds, saying the actor, who has played a key role in the Hacked Off press reform group, was well aware of the voicemail interception scandal and could have brought such a claim much sooner.

Grant previously settled a phone hacking case with News Group's former publication News of the World. That paper was closed in 2011 at the height of the hacking scandal after it was revealed that the tabloid had intercepted voicemails of a murdered girl, in addition to those of celebrities, athletes, politicians and members of the royal family.

News Group has asserted no unlawful information gathering occurred at The Sun.

But the judge said the case could proceed on other allegations the actor said he only became aware of in 2021 after private investigator Gavin Burrows began disclosing alleged acts of phone tapping, bugging and burglary on behalf of the paper.

"In addition to hacking my phone and tapping my landline, (Burrows) was aware that my premises had been burgled by people working for The Sun and that a tracking device had been placed in my car," Grant said in a witness statement. "I found this astonishing."

Grant said he could never piece together who had broken into his fourth-floor apartment in 2011. The door had been pried off its hinges and the interior looked like there had been a fight but nothing was missing. Two days later, The Sun had a story detailing the interior and "signs of a domestic row."

Prince Harry alleged last month that the royal family had agreed to settle their cases with News Group out of court after phone hacking litigation against News of the World had wrapped up. He said the deal — allegedly agreed to by his grandmother, the late Queen Elizabeth II — was intended to keep the royals from testifying in court. He said the deal called for an apology.

In court papers, Harry said he brought his lawsuit in 2019 — against the wishes of his father, now King

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Charles III — when he became frustrated the settlement wasn't happening. He said his brother, Prince William, heir to the throne, subsequently received a "huge" settlement over phone hacking allegations against News Group.

NGN has denied there was a "secret agreement." The palace hasn't responded to messages seeking comment on that or William's alleged settlement.

A spokesperson for News Group issued a statement Friday saying it was pleased that the court threw out Grant's phone hacking allegations.

"NGN strongly denies the various historical allegations of unlawful information-gathering contained in what remains of Mr. Grant's claim," the statement said.

Harry's case against News Group is one of three phone hacking suits he has brought against British tabloid publishers.

Fancourt is currently hearing evidence by a lawyer for Harry and three others against the publisher of the Daily Mirror for alleged acts of unlawful information gathering dating to the 1990s. Harry is due to testify in the case next month.

A different judge is currently reviewing whether cases brought by the duke, Elton John, actor and model Elizabeth Hurley, and others against the publisher of the Daily Mail should go to trial.

Can't get Taylor Swift tickets? See all of Swift's eras on display at this costume exhibit

By ELISE RYAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Swift has been breaking records and delighting fans on the U.S. leg of her Eras Tour, a splashy celebration of her career and new releases since the pandemic.

It's become a notoriously tough ticket to get.

But on the second floor of the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York City, fans can catch glimpses of Swift's "eras" for much cheaper. "Taylor Swift: Storyteller," features dozens of costumes and objects spanning her music videos, tours and awards show performances — from the lace gown she wore when performing "All Too Well" on the Red Tour to the "key to the castle" featured in the video for "Bejeweled."

The goal, museum director Tim Rodgers said, was to explore how Swift uses clothing and props to tell stories — almost as much as she does lyrics. "It's different than stars that use costumes or fashion in order to enhance themselves," Rodgers said. "Taylor Swift is using costumes and props like a vocabulary."

Rodgers said Swift's team came to MAD with the idea because of another exhibit they hosted — "Queer Maximalism X Machine Dazzle" — featuring the work of artist, performer and costume designer Matthew Flower, also known as Machine Dazzle. "It was totally unexpected," Rodgers said.

"Taylor Swift: Storyteller" opened ahead of Swift's three-night stop nearby at New Jersey's MetLife Stadium. Like her concerts, the collection walks visitors through her genre- and decade-spanning career. There's the crystal-encrusted guitar she used when performing her 2010 album "Speak Now," a hooded bodysuit she wore during her Reputation Stadium Tour, the striped T-shirt she wore in a 2020 photoshoot for "folklore."

"She's a visual storyteller. Everything she does ... it feels very intentional," said Teresa Bocalan, a fan visiting the museum. "So it's really cool to see those outfits up close."

The exhibit, on display through Sept. 4, is accompanied by a playlist of Swift's music videos — including her short film for the 10 minute version of "All Too Well" — which are projected on screens around the room. Lyrics scrawled in Swift's handwriting adorn key walls in the space.

But perhaps the centerpiece of it all is a more recent piece of Swift's lore: the flowing red wedding dress she wore in the 2021 video for "I Bet You Think About Me (Taylor's Version) (From the Vault)," directed by Blake Lively and co-starring Miles Teller. The song, featuring Chris Stapleton, was an addition to the re-released version of her 2012 album "Red." Adorned with tulle roses, the dress was custom made for Swift by Nicole + Felicia Couture.

In the video, the red gown is a showstopper — or, more literally, a wedding stopper.

In the exhibit, it seems to hold the same power.

"We had people come in and look at that red wedding dress over there and literally start to cry," Rodgers said of the exhibit's opening weekend. "It is, for a lot of people, almost like a religious experience to see this clothing that Taylor once wore."

"I'm also super excited to see the 'I Bet You Think About Me' dress over there," said Greta Myers, a student at the Fashion Institute of Technology. "We haven't looked at it yet. I'm saving it."

Céline Dion cancels European concerts 'until I'm really ready to be back on stage'

By The Associated Press undefined

Céline Dion has canceled all her scheduled tour dates through April 2024 as she continues treatment for a rare neurological disorder.

"I'm so sorry to disappoint all of you once again," the singer said in a statement on social media. "I'm working really hard to build back my strength, but touring can be very difficult even when you're 100%. It's not fair to you to keep postponing the shows, and even though it breaks my heart, it's best that we cancel everything now until I'm really ready to be back on stage again."

A total of 42 European dates have been canceled, including stops in the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Austria, England, Scotland and Ireland.

Earlier this year, Dion said stiff person syndrome was causing spasms that affect her ability to walk and sing.

"Unfortunately, the spasms affect every aspect of my daily life, sometimes causing difficulties when I walk and not allowing me to use my vocal cords to sing the way I'm used to," she said.

Stiff person syndrome causes rigid muscles and painful muscle spasms, which can be triggered by such things as loud noises or light touch. The cause isn't known, but it is thought to be an autoimmune disorder. Severe cases can cause difficulty walking and hunched posture.

Dion, who has five Grammy Awards and two Academy Awards, is the bestselling female artist of all time with hits like "I'm Alive" and "My Heart Will Go On."

Special counsel Durham to testify before Congress next month about his report on Trump-Russia probe

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former special counsel John Durham is scheduled to testify before a House committee next month about his recently completed report on the FBI's investigation of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign.

Durham is due to appear on June 20 in a closed-door session with the House intelligence committee and will testify publicly the following day before the House Judiciary Committee, according to a person who discussed the dates on the condition of anonymity because they had not been publicly announced.

Durham was appointed in 2019 by then-Attorney General William Barr to investigate possible government mistakes and misconduct in the investigation into potential ties between Russia and the Trump campaign.

His report concluded that the FBI acted too hastily and without sufficient justification to launch a full investigation in 2016. But many of the errors that it identified were also flagged in an earlier 2019 report by the Justice Department's inspector general.

Durham's four-year investigation produced just three criminal prosecutions — one that resulted in a guilty plea from an FBI lawyer and a sentence of probation, and two others that ended with acquittals before a jury.

After Durham's report was released, Rep. Jim Jordan, the Republican chairman of the House Judiciary

Committee, wrote on Twitter that he had invited Durham to appear before his panel the following week. The committees have been in negotiations since then over the testimony, and finalized the dates Thursday evening, the person said.

Durham no longer works for the Justice Department, and a spokesperson there declined to comment Friday.

Indiana doctor reprimanded, fined \$3,000 for talking publicly about Ohio 10-year-old's abortion

By TOM DAVIES Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — An Indiana board decided Thursday night to reprimand an Indianapolis doctor after finding that she violated patient privacy laws by talking publicly about providing an abortion to a 10-year-old rape victim from neighboring Ohio.

The state Medical Licensing Board voted that Dr. Caitlin Bernard didn't abide by privacy laws when she told a newspaper reporter about the girl's treatment in a case that became a flashpoint in the national abortion debate days after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last summer.

The board, however, rejected accusations from Indiana's Republican attorney general that Bernard violated state law by not reporting the child abuse to Indiana authorities. Board members chose to fine Bernard \$3,000 for the violations, turning down a request from the attorney general's office to suspend Bernard's license. The board issued no restrictions on her practice of medicine.

Bernard has consistently defended her actions, and she told the board on Thursday that she followed Indiana's reporting requirements and hospital policy by notifying hospital social workers about the child abuse — and that the girl's rape was already being investigated by Ohio authorities. Bernard's lawyers also said that 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 last summer's *Roe v. Wade* decision put 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. During an event at the White House, President Joe Biden nearly shouted his outrage over the case.

Medical board President Dr. John Strobel said he believed Bernard went too far in telling a reporter about the girl's pending abortion and that physicians need to be careful about observing patient privacy.

"I don't think she expected this to go viral," Strobel said of Bernard. "I don't think she expected this attention to be brought to this patient. It did. It happened."

Bernard's lawyer Alice Morical told the board Thursday that the doctor reported child abuse of patients many times a year and that a hospital social worker had confirmed with Ohio child protection staffers that it was safe for the girl to leave with her mother.

"Dr. Bernard could not have anticipated the atypical and intense scrutiny that this story received," Morical said. "She did not expect that politicians would say that she made the story up."

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

Deputy Attorney General Cory Voight argued Thursday that the board needed to address what he called an "egregious violation" of patient privacy and Bernard's failure to notify Indiana's Department of Child Services and police about the rape.

"There's been no case like this before the board," Voight said. "No physician has been as brazen in pursuit of their own agenda."

Voight asked Bernard why she discussed the Ohio girl's case with the newspaper reporter and later in other news media interviews rather than using a hypothetical situation.

"I think that it's incredibly important for people to understand the real-world impacts of the laws of this country about abortion," Bernard said. "I think it's important for people to know what patients will have

to go through because of legislation that is being passed, and a hypothetical does not make that impact.”

Board member Dr. Bharat Barai opposed finding that Bernard violated privacy laws, saying that she released no direct protected identifying information such as the girl’s name or address. He disagreed with the board majority’s view that the combination of information about the rare instance of a pregnant 10-year-old girl could have exposed her identity.

“We are trying to suppose that yeah this could have been done and maybe somebody could have discovered it,” Barai said.

During Thursday’s hearing lasting some 13 hours, Rokita’s office kept up a running commentary on its official Twitter account, with one post saying: “When Bernard talked about the high priority she puts on legislation and speaking to the public, she did so at the expense of her own patient. This shows where her priorities are as an activist rather than a doctor.”

Bernard objected to Voight saying her choice to publicly discuss the case led to the misconduct allegations.

“I think if the attorney general, Todd Rokita, had not chosen to make this his political stunt we wouldn’t be here today,” Bernard said.

Lawyers for the attorney general’s office repeatedly raised questions about whether the policy of Bernard’s employer, Indiana University Health, to report suspected child abuse to authorities in the state where the abuse occurred complied with Indiana law. Officials of IU Health, which is the state’s largest hospital system, testified that the Indiana Department of Child Services has never objected to the hospital policy.

The Indiana board — with five doctors and one attorney present who were appointed or reappointed by Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb — had wide latitude under state law allowing it to issue reprimand letters or suspend, revoke or place on probation a doctor’s license.

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. Indiana’s Republican-dominated Legislature approved a statewide abortion ban weeks after the Ohio girl’s case drew attention, but abortions have continued to be permitted in the state while awaiting an Indiana Supreme Court decision on the ban’s constitutionality.

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.

Rights groups slam severe Taliban restrictions on Afghan women as ‘crime against humanity’

By RAHIM FAIEZ Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Two top rights groups on Friday slammed the severe restrictions imposed on women and girls by the Taliban in Afghanistan as gender-based persecution, which is a crime against humanity.

In a new report, Amnesty International and the International Commission for Jurists, or ICJ, underscored how the Taliban crackdown on Afghan women’s rights, coupled with “imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment,” could constitute gender persecution under the International Criminal Court.

The report by Amnesty and ICJ, titled, “The Taliban’s war on women: The crime against humanity of gender persecution in Afghanistan,” cited the ICC statute, which lists gender-based persecution as a crime against humanity.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021 as U.S. and NATO troops were in the final weeks of their withdrawal from the country after two decades of war.

Despite initial promises of a more moderate rule, the Taliban started to enforce restrictions on women and girls soon after their takeover, barring them from public spaces and most jobs, and banning education for girls beyond the sixth grade. The measures harked back to the previous Taliban rule of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, when they also imposed their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia.

The harsh edicts prompted an international outcry against the already ostracized Taliban, whose administration has not been officially recognized by the United Nations and the international community.

In the report, Santiago A. Canton, the ICJ secretary general, said the Taliban’s actions are of such

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"magnitude, gravity and of such a systematic nature," that they qualify "as a crime against humanity of gender persecution."

Both organizations called on the International Criminal Court to include this crime in their ongoing investigation into what is happening in Afghanistan and take legal action. They also called on countries "to exercise universal jurisdiction" and hold the Taliban accountable under international law.

The report also accused the Taliban of targeting women and girls who have taken part in peaceful protests by detaining, forcibly disappearing them and subjecting them to torture in custody. The Taliban have also forced them to sign "confessions" or "agreements" not to protest again, the report said.

What is happening in Afghanistan is "a war against women," which amounts to "international crimes" that are "organized, widespread, systematic," said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty's secretary general.

Without elaborating, she called for the international community to dismantle "this system of gender oppression and persecution."

Amnesty also documented cases of women and girls being forcibly married to members of the Taliban, as well as attempts to force them into such marriages. The report said those who refused such marriages were "subjected to abduction, intimidation, threats and torture."

The report cited the case of a 15-year-old girl who was forced to marry a Taliban figure despite her family's objections in the northeastern province of Takhar in August 2021, and that of a 33-year-old female journalist and social activist who was forcibly married to a Taliban commander the following month.

"We simply cannot afford to fail the women and girls of Afghanistan," said Canton of ICJ.

The report said the Taliban have also perpetrated human rights violations against Afghan men.

Several monitoring groups have documented reports of "extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearances, and torture" of those associated with the former, Western-backed Afghan government that crumbled in the face of the Taliban takeover of the country.

The Taliban have also targeted journalists, the LGBTQ community, rights activists and ethnic minorities, the report said.

Amnesty and ICJ also shared a summary of the report's findings with the Taliban-appointed foreign ministry in Kabul, requesting a response. None was immediately provided, the groups said.

Flight cancellations, strikes raise fears of new summer travel chaos in Europe

By KELVIN CHAN and DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British Airways canceled dozens of flights Friday, blaming computer problems for disrupting plans for thousands of passengers at the start of a busy holiday weekend — a rocky kickoff to the summer travel season in Europe.

The technical glitches and strikes by airport staff across Europe are stirring concerns about a repeat of last summer's post-pandemic air travel chaos that unleashed delays, cancellations and mountains of lost luggage from London to Sweden to Amsterdam.

Most of the 42 affected flights in London were on short-haul routes to and from Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport. Computer issues on Thursday caused planes and crew to be out of position Friday, which was expected to be the busiest day for U.K. air travel since before the coronavirus pandemic.

Other flights were delayed, with some passengers unable to check in online. Travel is expected to be especially busy over the next few days as a three-day weekend coincides with the start of a weeklong holiday for most schools in Britain.

"We're aware of a technical issue, which we have been working hard to fix," British Airways said on its website.

The industry is gearing up for a busy summer season and hoping to avoid a repeat of the disorder last year, when airports and airlines struggled to keep up with demand that came roaring back after pandemic restrictions eased.

"While some disruptions can be expected, there is a clear expectation that the ramping-up issues faced

at some key hub airports in 2022 will have been resolved," the International Air Transport Association, or IATA, said this month.

"To meet strong demand, airlines are planning schedules based on the capacity that airports, border control, ground handlers, and air navigation service providers have declared. Over the next months, all industry players now need to deliver," the airline industry group said.

IATA warned that strikes, including by airport staff such as air traffic controllers, are "cause for concern," particularly in places like France. Labor action by French workers battling the government over pension reforms has resulted in as many as 30% of flights canceled at Paris' second busiest airport, Orly, on some days.

In Britain, Heathrow security guards launched a three-day strike Thursday over pay after walking off their jobs over busy periods earlier this year, including Easter.

The strikes have been an issue, but "mitigation measures that have been implemented has meant that in the vast majority of cases, people have been able to travel from the U.K. as expected, and we expect the same to be the case over the summer months," said Julia Lo Bue-Said, CEO of Advantage Travel Partnership, which represents about 350 U.K. travel agents.

"The industry is made of many moving parts and navigating some of the issues outside of our control at exceptionally busy periods does put increased pressure on the entire ecosystem," she said.

California's epic melting snowpack means cold, deadly torrents ahead of Memorial Day weekend

By HAVEN DALEY and JOHN ANTCZAK Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California rivers fed by this winter's massive Sierra Nevada snowpack have been turned into deadly torrents, drawing warnings from public safety officials ahead of the Memorial Day weekend's traditional start of outdoor summer recreation.

At least seven people, including two children, have died or gone missing this spring in the grasp of powerful rivers plunging down from California's towering mountain range, and there have been numerous rescues.

"This year we're seeing higher water, faster water and colder water," said Capt. Justin Sylvia, a fire spokesperson in Sacramento, which is crossed by the American River.

Sacramento has already had 20 water rescues this year, nearly as many as all of 2022, Sylvia said Tuesday as crews practiced swift-water rescues on the lower American River near its confluence with the Sacramento River.

Memorial Day weekend is typically one of the busiest, if not the busiest, times of the year, and "floating down the American River is like a quintessential Sacramento activity," said Ken Casparis, spokesperson for Sacramento County regional parks.

"Probably thousands of people use the river for floating or swimming or rafting, what have you, and this weekend conditions are shaping up to be pretty dangerous, so we have been urging people to stay off the river," he said.

Even just wading along the shore is being discouraged, said Casparis, who was hoping for chilly weather to discourage river use. Forecasters predicted mild weather in the interior of Northern California except for chances of thunderstorms in the mountains.

With Californians expected to flock to the outdoors, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services on Thursday issued a broad caution about conditions they might encounter, including fast-moving water, following months of severe weather.

An extraordinary series of storms this past winter buried the Sierra range in deep snow that is now melting, swelling Central Valley rivers that just months ago were running low because of years of extreme drought.

Reservoirs that store water and provide flood control must release high flows into rivers to maintain room for incoming runoff. That, in turn, changes rivers. Sandbars and ledges may become steep drop-offs and lead to an unexpected plunge into cold water.

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"It can really give a shock to the body," said Daniel Bowers, Sacramento city's director of emergency management. Experts say muscle control can be lost in minutes.

The recent tragedies include an 8-year-old girl and her 4-year-old brother, who were swept away by the Kings River on Sunday. The girl's body was found that afternoon and the boy's body was found nearly 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) downstream on Monday, the Fresno County Sheriff's Office said.

The fatal accident occurred even though both the Kings and San Joaquin Rivers have been ordered closed to recreational users since March 14.

In the Sierra northeast of Sacramento, a man was swept away by the American River on April 29, two days after Placer County authorities first issued warnings. His body was found Friday in a lake miles away. Another man who vanished in the river on Mother's Day remains missing.

Placer County's messaging about the risk is blunt. "If the public doesn't listen to our warnings this year, people are going to die, more people than we've seen over the last few years," sheriff's Sgt. Kevin Griffiths says in a public service announcement video.

The American River has not been closed to recreation in Sacramento but Bowers, the emergency management official, urged all river users to wear life jackets, even if they're using another flotation device.

American River Raft Rentals of suburban Rancho Cordova has temporarily suspended its operations on the lower segment of the river because the rate of flow is too high, co-owner Kent Hansen said Thursday.

"We definitely understand that this is part of the business and that's why we would never put profits over safety," Hansen said. "We're hoping that all of our guests will choose a safe time to go soon when water flows get back a normal, raftable flow."

Sylvia, the fire captain, emphasized that people should immediately call 911 if someone gets in trouble in the water.

"If you have a rope or if you have a life jacket that you can throw to them, do that, but do not go in the water after them because you will become a second victim," he said.

In Yosemite National Park, waterfalls have been thundering with runoff bound for the Merced River. The park has advised visitors to keep their distance from all waterways and stay off slick rocks.

"We shouldn't have to say it, but do not try to wade, swim, or float on any rivers or creeks," the park said via Facebook.

With summer approaching, the Kern County Sheriff's Office on Friday planned to carry out a ritual intended to warn people about the southern Sierra's notorious Kern River, which country legend Merle Haggard called "a mean piece of water" in his song "Kern River."

A sign at the mouth of the Kern River Canyon, which tallies the number of lives lost in the river since 1968, is updated each spring to add deaths that occurred over the previous 12 months. This year, the total was to be raised from 317 to 325.

Antczak reported from Los Angeles.

Today in History: May 27, Queen Mary's maiden voyage

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, May 27, the 147th day of 2023. There are 218 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 27, 1935, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, unanimously struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act, a key component of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" legislative program.

On this date:

In 1861, Chief Justice Roger Taney, sitting as a federal circuit court judge in Baltimore, ruled that President Abraham Lincoln lacked the authority to suspend the writ of habeas corpus (Lincoln disregarded the ruling).

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In 1896, 255 people were killed when a tornado struck St. Louis, Missouri, and East St. Louis, Illinois.

In 1936, the Cunard liner RMS Queen Mary left England on its maiden voyage to New York.

In 1937, the newly completed Golden Gate Bridge connecting San Francisco and Marin County, California, was opened to pedestrian traffic (vehicles began crossing the next day).

In 1941, the British Royal Navy sank the German battleship Bismarck off France with a loss of some 2,000 lives, three days after the Bismarck sank the HMS Hood with the loss of more than 1,400 lives. Amid rising world tensions, President Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed an "unlimited national emergency" during a radio address from the White House.

In 1942, Doris "Dorie" Miller, a cook aboard the USS West Virginia, became the first African-American to receive the Navy Cross for displaying "extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety" during Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

In 1957, the single "That'll Be the Day" by Buddy Holly's group The Crickets was released by Brunswick Records.

In 1968, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *United States v. O'Brien*, upheld the conviction of David O'Brien for destroying his draft card outside a Boston courthouse, ruling that the act was not protected by freedom of speech.

In 1993, five people were killed in a bombing at the Uffizi museum of art in Florence, Italy; some three dozen paintings were ruined or damaged.

In 1994, Nobel Prize-winning author Alexander Solzhenitsyn returned to Russia to the emotional cheers of thousands after spending two decades in exile.

In 1998, Michael Fortier (FOR'-tee-ur), the government's star witness in the Oklahoma City bombing case, was sentenced to 12 years in prison after apologizing for not warning anyone about the deadly plot. (Fortier was freed in January 2006.)

In 2020 protests over the death of George Floyd in police custody rocked Minneapolis for a second night, with some people looting stores and setting fires. Protests spread to additional cities; hundreds of people blocked a Los Angeles freeway and shattered windows of California Highway Patrol cruisers. The U.S. surged past a milestone in the coronavirus pandemic, with the confirmed death toll topping 100,000.

Ten years ago: The European Union decided to lift an arms embargo on the Syrian opposition while maintaining all other sanctions against President Bashar Assad's regime. U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a proponent of arming Syrian rebels, quietly slipped into Syria for a meeting with anti-government fighters. A coordinated wave of car bombings tore through mostly Shiite areas of Baghdad, killing dozens.

Five years ago: LeBron James reached his eighth straight NBA Finals as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Boston Celtics 87-79 in Game 7 of the semifinals. Danica Patrick ended her auto racing career at the track that made her famous, losing traction on a slippery surface and crashing out of the Indianapolis 500; the race was won by Will Power.

One year ago: Authorities said that students trapped inside a classroom with a gunman repeatedly called 911 during his attack that killed 19 students and two teachers at a Texas elementary school. One of the students pleaded, "Please send the police now," as officers waited in the hallway for more than 45 minutes. Moscow-backed separatists pounded eastern Ukraine's industrial Donbas region, claiming the capture of a railway hub as concerns grew that besieged cities in the region would undergo the same horrors experienced by the people of Mariupol in the weeks leading up to that port's capture.

Today's Birthdays: Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is 100. Author John Barth is 93. Actor Lee Meriwether is 88. Actor Louis Gossett Jr. is 87. Actor Bruce Weitz is 80. Former Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) is 79. Singer Bruce Cockburn (KOH'-burn) is 78. South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster is 76. Singer-actor Dee Dee Bridgewater is 73. Actor Richard Schiff is 68. Singer Siouxsie Sioux (The Creatures, Siouxsie and the Banshees) is 66. Rock singer-musician Neil Finn (The Finn Brothers) is 65. Actor Peri Gilpin is 62. Actor Cathy Silvers is 62. Comedian Adam Carolla is 59. Actor Todd Bridges is 58. Rock musician Sean Kinney (Alice In Chains) is 57. Actor Dondré Whitfield is 54. Actor Paul Bettany is 52. Rock singer-musician Brian Desveaux (Nine Days) is 52. Country singer Jace Everett is 51. Actor Jack McBrayer

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is 50. Rapper Andre 3000 (Outkast) is 48. Rapper Jadakiss is 48. TV chef Jamie Oliver is 48. Alt-country singer-songwriter Shane Nicholson is 47. Actor Ben Feldman is 43. Actor Michael Steger is 43. Actor Darin Brooks is 39. Actor-singer Chris Colfer is 33. Actor Ethan Dampf is 29. Actor Desiree Ross (TV: "Greenleaf") is 24. U.S. Olympic gold-medal-winning gymnast Jade Carey is 23.