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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, June 2

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, sauerkraut, 3 bean salad, chocolate pudding with bananas.
Legion hosts Lake Norden, 5 p.m. (1)
Jr. Legion hosts Lake Norden/Badger, 7 p.m. (1)

Saturday, June 3

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Legion at Milbank Tourney
Jr. Teener at Mobridge, 3 p.m. (2)

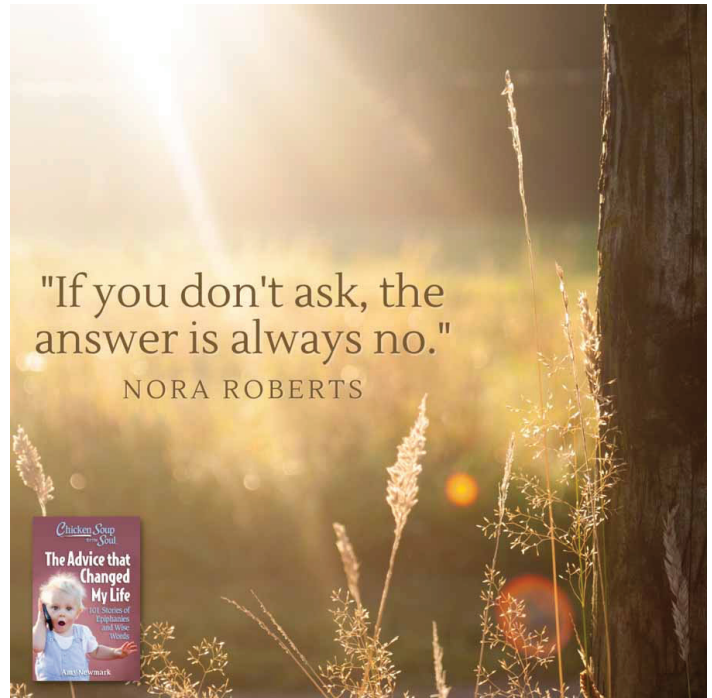
Sunday, June 4

United Methodist: Worship with communion: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran worship with communion, 9 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Wor-

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

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



ship 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.

St. John's worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Zion worship with communion, 11 a.m.

Amateurs at Redfield, 7 p.m.

Legion at Milbank Tourney

Belden wins Queen of Hearts

Greg Belden was the lucky winner of the first Queen of Hearts jackpot in Thursday night's drawing. He won half of the \$29,000 jackpot after his name was drawn and the number he choose was indeed, the Queen of Hearts.

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The Bulletin

by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists predict an average hurricane season, with up to four storms that could strengthen into major hurricanes of category 3 or stronger.

Foreign leaders of the BRIC nations asserted the group's ambitions to build up their influence over rival Western nations during a meeting in South Africa.

Prince Harry will testify next week in his lawsuit against Mirror Group Newspapers, making him the first senior British royal to provide evidence in 130 years.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the British Defense Ministry has claimed Russia faces an "acute dilemma" as its border regions came under attack for the second time in 10 days, first when the Freedom of Russia Legion occupied Russia's Belgorod regions, and second when Moscow blamed Ukraine for a large-scale drone attack on Russian soil.

The Senate voted to advance the debt ceiling bill to President Joe Biden's desk after 11 rounds of voting on a series of amendments proposed by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

The White House said President Biden is "fine" after he tripped over a sandbag and fell on stage during the U.S. Air Force Academy graduation in Colorado Springs.

The Senate and House passed a bill to block President Biden's student loan forgiveness plan; Biden said he will veto the legislation.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

Key employment figures are due at 8:30 a.m. ET. Economists expect nonfarm payrolls to rise 188,000 in May, down from a robust 253,000 jobs added in April. The unemployment rate will likely rise back to March levels of 3.5%, from 3.4% in April.

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Kyson Kucker, Keegan Kucker and Axel Abeln were busy selling lemonade and freezies on Wednesday in downtown Groton. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Employment Scams: Reports of job scams skyrocket in 2023, costing job seekers millions

BBB update finds job scams growing as workers seek remote work options.

Job seekers, beware. In the first three months of 2023, Better Business Bureau (BBB) Scam Tracker received reported losses of nearly \$840,000, up over 250% compared to the same time last year. With a median loss of over \$1,500 during that timeframe, job hunters tell BBB the financial impact is devastating.

Since BBB issued the 2021 study, Job Scams: BBB study finds job scams increased during pandemic and warns job seekers to verify employment offers to avoid illegal jobs, identity theft and fake checks, the blistering pace at which fraudsters ensnare the public in employment scams has increased each year, according to BBB data. In some of the most extreme cases, some individuals found themselves in a deep financial hole with little recourse.

For Donald from Lake Placid, Florida, it started off with an email. A woman calling herself Laura Hoffman said she worked for a company called Also International and wanted to offer him a reshipping job. All Donald needed to do was purchase and send computers overseas. The pay would be \$76,000 with bonuses.

Donald wanted to test the legitimacy of the offer, so he bought a single Apple computer and sent it to an address in Hong Kong. He eagerly waited for the reimbursement on his credit card, and, to his surprise, it came through quickly. After that, he threw himself into the job, buying and shipping over \$100,000 of computers.

Things were going exceptionally well until one day, in late January, the payments on his card disappeared. They were fraudulent, his bank said, and Donald immediately owed the total balance on his cards. He frantically reached out to Laura Hoffman, and Also International, but they were nowhere to be found. Donald had been scammed out of \$105,000. He still hasn't been able to resolve the issue with his bank.

"I am afraid to apply for another job," Donald told BBB in an interview.

How do employment scams work?

Like many scams, those perpetuating employment fraud are seeking at least one of two things from their potential marks: money or personal and financial information. Because normal employers have close access to both regularly, it leaves many with their guard down.

In some cases, scammers strike immediately upon making contact by extracting personal information. In others, the fraudsters lay a trail of deception for weeks or even months, slowly taking money from an unaware victim.

The BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust found those in the 18-34 age range at the most at risk for employment scams. About 15% of reports to BBB Scam Tracker showed a monetary loss, meaning anyone contacted for an employment scam is at significant risk.

Job seekers should always have their guard up when considering new employment opportunities

Scammers contact consumers through a variety of means, including phone calls, text messages, emails, chat platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram, job sites like Craigslist and Indeed, and social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

Several reports to BBB describe how scammers found resumes on job listing sites like Indeed and tailored their scams to an individual's background. Scammers sometimes impersonate real companies, tarnishing the names of legitimate businesses.

According to BBB Scam Tracker reports for employment scams in 2022, job hunters said they often encountered fraudsters on Indeed. Over 700 reports referenced Indeed, with LinkedIn (288) and Telegram (250) trailing behind.

In an email, Indeed said it "removes tens of millions of job listings each month that do not meet our quality guidelines. A representative from Indeed said its number of reports was likely tied to the large size of the internet job board, and the company "will not do business with an employer if their job listings do not pass our stringent quality guidelines."

Craigslist, Meta, LinkedIn and Indeed warn consumers extensively about scams and urge them to report

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cases to the websites as well as the authorities.

In an interview with BBB, a LinkedIn representative said the company works proactively to curb scam profiles and postings. In the latter half of 2022, the company removed over 91 million instances of scams or spam. Over 99% of that work was done automatically by the company's "automated defenses".

"Scams and fraudulent activity are something we take seriously," said Adele Austin, spokesperson for LinkedIn. "There has definitely been a rise in fraudulent activity over the last couple years."

To combat the rise, LinkedIn debuted several new features, including one showing the age of a profile and when it was last updated. Job hunters should also look to see if a business has a verified email and phone number, Austin said.

Facebook and Craigslist did not respond to requests for an interview.

In many cases reported to BBB, scammers set up a job interview over email, phone or voice chat. They ask serious interview questions and give their (intended) target the impression the job is legitimate.

At this point, the interviewee is already at risk, as the fraudster may ask for their social security number, bank account numbers or other personal information to "do a background check" or "set up direct deposit".

Others may run a slower scam, ending the interview and later offering a job. That offer might even come with an acceptance letter and an attractive salary, all on official-looking letterhead.

Most common employment scams reported to BBB

Reshipping scams

In these scams, fraudsters hire people to ship items, almost always outside of the country. They may use excuses about different laws in their country or the difficulty in obtaining certain pieces of technology, like computers. They will convince their target to purchase high-priced goods on their own credit cards before instructing them to send the items overseas. Scammers submit a fraudulent payment to their victim's credit card, knowing it will bounce. Before it does, they instruct the "employee" to purchase more items, cranking up the debt owed once the false payments are clawed back by the bank.

In another twist, some scammers may recruit their targets to simply be the address to which they send stolen goods or money. The worker believes they are part of the logistics team for an international shipping business, but in reality, they are serving as so-called money mules. Money mules themselves can be prosecuted for their participation in scams, even if they claim to be unwitting victims. Legitimate businesses run reshipping in-house, and never send checks to employees through the mail as a part of accounting practices.

Mystery shopping, car wrap

While it may seem different, these scams use fake checks meant to convince potential employees of the legitimacy of the company. These types of scams are well-known to law enforcement agencies and regulators, but the scams' effectiveness means fraudsters continue to deploy them widely.

Mystery Shopping

In mystery shopping scams, the fraudsters ask a victim to participate in an "undercover" review of a money order company like Moneygram or Western Union or to rate a company's practices around selling gift cards.

When someone claiming to be "Jerry Wallace" supposedly hired Nydia in Highland Falls, New York to be a mystery shopper at Whole Foods, she was excited. She received a packet which contained her work to-do list and a check for purchasing American Express gift cards. Wallace told Nydia to review several stores on how they sell the gift cards and report back to him.

Nydia deposited the check and quickly went off to the stores to start her work. Everything seemed fine, and she submitted a report which included the gift card numbers. A few days later, Nydia checked her bank account and the check had bounced. Jerry Wallace disappeared with the cash, but Nydia remains on the hook for over \$1,000 in purchases.

Car Wrapping

In a car wrap scam, a check is sent, deposited, and the victim is asked to send a money order or buy gift cards to pay a company to put temporary advertisements on their car. The victim is actually send-

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ing money to the scammers, and the check will be pulled from their account shortly afterward. In some reports, the fraudsters sent "extra" on the check, meant to serve as payment for the job. In other cases, they promised regular paychecks as long as the wrap stayed on the worker's car.

Rebecca in Alpine, Virginia went looking online for work from home opportunities after being out of the job since November 2022. She came across a company offering her cash to wrap her car with various advertisements. The installation would cost more than \$15,000, she was told, and the company sent her a check.

It cleared three days later, and Rebecca believed the company was legitimate, so she sent a money order for wrap installation. Soon after, however, her bank told her the check was bad and she owed \$15,000 to cover the charge. Rebecca was scammed.

Previously, car wrapping scams were one of the most reported scam types. That type of scam appears to have decreased in popularity since BBB published its job scam study in 2021.

New reports skyrocket, millions lost

Employment scams have been one of the three riskiest scams for the public out of all those tracked by the BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust since 2016. "Though the susceptibility of employment scams remained the same, the number of employment scams reported to BBB Scam Tracker increased 23.1%, from 7.8% of all reported scams in 2021 to 9.6% in 2022," the report notes.

According to the most recent BBB Scam Tracker data in which a consumer filled out the contact method category, fraudsters initial outreach is most likely to occur through email (41% of reports) or text message (18%). Messaging platforms, like WhatsApp, and phone calls were the next most popular at 9%.

Online classified like Craigslist, social media such as Facebook and postal mail all showed slight declines in 2022's BBB Scam Tracker data compared to the previous year.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

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Noem orders National Guard troops to Mexican border again

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 1, 2023 5:28 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem announced plans Thursday to deploy more South Dakota National Guard troops to the nation's southern border this summer.

Noem has sent South Dakota soldiers to the border previously. She said the new deployment comes in response to Texas Gov. Greg Abbott's request for assistance. Noem is joining 12 other Republican governors who have pledged their support.

"Across the country, crime rates, drug overdoses, and human trafficking have all increased due to the ongoing challenges at the border," Noem said in a press release.

The move follows President Joe Biden's decision to end Title 42 in early May. The COVID-era policy prevented migrants seeking asylum from entering the country because of concerns about the spread of coronavirus.

In April 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the monthly number of migrants taken into custody or immediately sent back dropped to 16,182, which was the second-lowest total in more than 20 years. But encounters with migrants have soared since then, reaching 206,239 in November.

Earlier deployment

In 2021, a billionaire Republican donor from Tennessee, Willis Johnson, reached out to Noem and offered \$1 million to help fund a South Dakota National Guard deployment to the southern border. She accepted the call and deployed 48 Guard members soon after.

The deployment cost \$1.45 million, according to records obtained by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit.

At the time, Noem said the troops would stop drug smugglers and human traffickers. However, the records obtained by CREW and reported on by The Associated Press showed that in the first two months of deployment, the troops didn't seize any drugs, and mission logs did not contain any confirmed encounters with "transnational criminals." Some days, the records showed, the troops had little if anything to do.

Noem's news release about the new deployment did not say how much it will cost or how it will be funded.

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

COMMENTARY

New Democratic leader faces challenge filling blank spots on ballots

DANA HESS

The South Dakota Democratic Party has a new executive director. Let's resist the urge to make a comparison to the captain of the Titanic. While the Titanic sank, at this point there's no place for the South Dakota Democratic Party to go but up.

Dan Ahlers of Dell Rapids is the new executive director and he brings with him an impressive resume as he takes over the day-to-day operation of the state's minority party. Ahlers served as the administrator of the Dell Rapids Chamber of Commerce, but, more importantly, he's a former legislator and once chal-

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lenged Mike Rounds in a U.S. Senate election.

When Ahlers' hiring was announced on KELO, he said he looked "forward to continuing the legacy of past executive directors." Here's hoping Ahlers sets the bar higher than his predecessors.

It's hard to imagine a state political party in worse shape than Democrats are in South Dakota. They hold no statewide or national elected office. None. Their representation in the Legislature is minimal with seven members in the House and four members in the Senate.

Political parties rely on elections for their power, yet South Dakota's Democratic Party has placed little emphasis on getting candidates on the ballot. In 2022, Republicans were guaranteed majorities in both chambers of the Legislature before a single ballot was cast. Democrats didn't field any legislative candidates for 26 of 35 Senate seats and failed to run candidates for 32 of 70 House races.

Legislative races weren't the only ones that Democrats shied away from. In 2022, they failed to field candidates for U.S. House as well as state attorney general and auditor.

This isn't meant to be a call for a heaping helping of Democratic-endorsed policies. But it's hard to even know what those policies are when most South Dakota voters aren't allowed a candidate debate on the issues, because there's a blank spot on the ballot where the Democratic candidate should be.

In announcing Ahlers' appointment, The Dakota Scout offered a quote from the new executive director in which he recalled the party's "rich history," noting the successes of Dick Kneip, Jim Abourezk, George McGovern, Tom Daschle, Tim Johnson and Stephanie Herseth Sandlin. That amounts to a crowded Mount Rushmore of Democratic politics in South Dakota. The last of them to hold office was Tim Johnson in 2015.

Perhaps Ahlers is the right man for the job of lifting up a sorely diminished political party. Aside from his work background and familiarity with the Legislature, Ahlers has experience at something that the Democratic Party desperately needs: being a candidate.

He was successfully elected to both the House and Senate in the Legislature and, as mentioned, even challenged Sen. Mike Rounds in 2020. It takes courage for a minority party candidate to take on one of the most popular Republicans in recent history. Ahlers showed that courage, though he probably had a pretty good idea of what the outcome would be.

South Dakota deserves a robust two-party system. Maybe Dan Ahlers, through his experience as a candidate, will be able to lead by example and attract more Democratic candidates to the ballot. Success in that area could quell the temptation to use the Democratic Party as a punchline and help bring the party back to relevance.

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

U.S. Senate sends Biden debt limit legislation ahead of Monday default deadline

South Dakota's Thune and Rounds both vote for bill

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JUNE 1, 2023 10:30 PM

WASHINGTON — The bipartisan debt limit bill is on its way to President Joe Biden after the U.S. Senate voted Thursday to clear the measure for his signature.

The 63-36 vote followed several amendment votes, all of which were rejected. Biden is expected to quickly sign the package, preventing a default on the debt that otherwise would have begun as early as Monday.

Senators said during debate the legislation was far from perfect, though many opted to support it despite their reservations over some of its provisions. South Dakota Republican Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds both voted for the bill, and Republican South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson voted for it earlier in the House.

Republicans expressed frustration the 102-page bill caps defense spending and Democrats lamented it makes changes to work requirements on some safety net programs.

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington Democrat, said the package "fails to meet our current moment," though she said she would vote for the bill to avoid a default on the debt.

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"But I do so with deep concern and with a determination to prevent us from ever being in this situation again," Murray said, adding she hopes to lessen the impact of the spending caps "at every possible opportunity."

Murray said she would work with the White House and Republicans to reduce the impact on domestic priorities and national security, though she said if Congress decides to pass a separate emergency funding bill it shouldn't focus solely on defense priorities and aid for Ukraine.

Spending on border security, natural disaster aid, education assistance and other nondefense accounts, Murray said, have a real impact on people's lives.

"The funding decisions we make right here in this chamber are not just numbers on a page," she said. "The policy we write and sign into law has a direct consequence on people's lives and every member of Congress needs to recognize that."

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, the top Republican on the Appropriations Committee, said her two primary issues with the legislation were that it had a "completely inadequate" spending level for defense and included a provision that would institute a 1% across-the-board cut to discretionary spending if Congress doesn't approve all dozen annual government funding bills by Jan. 1.

Collins called for Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., to publicly commit that he would carve out floor time for the appropriations bills and for the Biden administration to agree to an emergency defense supplemental spending bill.

"The defense budget submitted by President Biden and included ... as the topline in this package is insufficient to the task of fully implementing the national defense strategy at a time when we face serious and growing threats around the world," Collins said.

Schumer later entered a joint statement with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, into the official record.

Schumer said the agreement clarified the debt limit bill didn't prevent the Senate from passing emergency spending bills to address defense and national security issues, including the war in Ukraine. It also doesn't affect the chamber's ability to approve emergency spending bills to address national issues, such as natural disaster response or the Fentanyl crisis.

"The Senate is not about to ignore our national needs, nor abandon our friends and allies who face urgent threats from America's most dangerous adversaries," Schumer said.

A written statement from Schumer and McConnell addressed Collins second concern. The two leaders said they "will seek and facilitate floor consideration of" the dozen annual government funding bills "with the cooperation of Senators of both parties."

The U.S. House voted 314-117 on Wednesday to approve the debt limit package, which would suspend the country's debt limit until January 2025 and set caps on discretionary spending for the next two years.

The bipartisan agreement, brokered during weeks of closed-door meetings between Hill negotiators and the White House, would limit the federal government to spending \$886 billion for defense and \$704 billion for nondefense during the fiscal year that's set to begin Oct. 1.

The next year, fiscal 2025, the bill would set the ceiling at \$895 billion for defense and \$711 billion for nondefense.

McConnell said before the vote the defense funding levels are "certainly disappointing."

"So while the coming votes are an important step in the right direction, we cannot neglect our fundamental obligation to address the nation's most pressing national security challenges," McConnell said.

Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine spoke out against a provision in the bill that would approve the natural gas Mountain Valley Pipeline from West Virginia into Virginia.

Kaine argued that it was inappropriate for Congress to intervene, essentially overruling the regulatory process as well as the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals, which he said ruled "the agency didn't do what they were supposed to do" so they had to "go back and do it right this time." Kaine's amendment to remove that section of the bill was unsuccessful following a 30-69 vote.

"The permitting process isn't just about building, but it's about holding the developer to strict standards so that when they build the pipeline, they minimally disturb the land, they minimally affect species, they

minimally affect creeks and streams and river crossings," Kaine said, noting the pipeline would cut through about 110 miles in the western part of the state.

"In the Appalachian region of Virginia, a lot of people don't have very much. For many of them, their land is what they have. And for many of them, that land has been in their family for generations," Kaine added.

"They are entitled to a fair process that would look about the need for the pipeline and what is the best route and then would insist that the pipeline be built to a high standard to maximally protect their property," Kaine said.

In addition to raising the debt ceiling and capping discretionary spending, the legislation would make several other changes to federal programs.

It would rescind \$28 billion in COVID-19 funding that hasn't yet been spent and about \$2 billion in funding for the Internal Revenue Service that Democrats approved in August.

The bill would change work requirements for people participating in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the legislation would lower the deficit by \$1.5 trillion during the next decade.

Capping some federal spending would lower costs by \$1.3 trillion and taking back the COVID-19 budget authority would lower spending by \$11 billion. Interest on the debt would go down by \$188 billion.

But reducing the amount of money the IRS has, CBO said, would increase the deficit by \$900 million since "rescinding those funds would result in fewer enforcement actions over the next decade and in a reduction in revenue collections."

And changes to SNAP would increase federal spending by \$2.1 billion, the CBO said.

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.

Experts: Predicting CO2 pipeline rupture threats can be extremely costly

BY: JARED STRONG - JUNE 1, 2023 5:53 PM

DES MOINES, Iowa — A carbon dioxide plume modeling software did not anticipate the threat a pipeline break in 2020 posed to a small Mississippi town, largely because it did not take land topography into account.

That break near Satartia, Mississippi, resulted in emergency responders scrambling to save people from a "green gas" and "rotten egg smell" with no preparation and no immediate notification from the pipeline company about what had occurred, according to a federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration report.

"We didn't know there was a CO2 pipeline running through my county," Jack Willingham, director of Yazoo County's emergency management and who oversaw the response, recounted on Thursday.

His comments were part of a two-day meeting PHMSA hosted to discuss carbon dioxide pipeline safety and potential regulatory changes to help prevent a similar incident as Satartia.

The incident exposed a lapse in anticipation of and preparation for such a rupture. About 200 people were evacuated from the area — including the town of Satartia's 50 residents. Three people nearly died, Willingham said, and a total of 45 sought hospital treatment.

Predicting where a carbon dioxide release from a pipeline will go can be a costly, time-consuming venture, according to a panel of experts assembled by PHMSA to discuss what is called "dispersion modeling" on Thursday in Des Moines.

That's because of all the factors that can affect the heavier-than-air gas, which, in the case of the Satartia incident, pooled near the break and eventually migrated northwest toward the town. The surrounding air had been very still at the time.

Those carbon dioxide plumes can be affected by air temperature, wind strength and direction, the lay of the land, the size of the pipe rupture — even whether there is standing corn in nearby fields.

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"The fact that under the current regulations and the current standards, the fact that (the pipeline operator) did not identify Satartia as potentially being impacted by a failure on that pipeline says volumes," said Bill Caram, executive director of the Pipeline Safety Trust.

His comments were part of a two-day meeting PHMSA hosted to discuss carbon dioxide pipeline safety and potential regulatory changes to help prevent a similar incident as Satartia.

The agency plans to propose new rules in early 2024 with the potential to have them finalized by the end of that year.

Because those rule changes are pending, pipeline opponents say states should halt their issuances of new permits to construct the pipelines. There are three pending proposals in Iowa, and one of them could get a final permit hearing yet this year.

PHMSA does not determine where the pipelines can be built but oversees their construction and operation.

Expensive modeling

There is more sophisticated plume modeling software than what was initially used to evaluate the risks near Satartia, but it can require tremendous computational capacity.

Simon Gant, who studies fluid dynamics for a British regulatory agency, said he estimated that a comprehensive evaluation of a 100-kilometer pipeline could take 44 years for his equipment to complete.

Jeremy Fontenault, of RPS Group, who has experience with the different modeling software, estimated that it could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars just to evaluate one location along a pipeline for all of the potential variables.

"When you start applying that along the entire pipeline — hundreds of locations — it just raises exponentially," he said.

Max Kieba, director of program development for PHMSA who moderated the talk, said changes to modeling requirements are under consideration but that the costs of the modeling must be weighed against its benefits.

PHMSA is sponsoring university research to develop a computational fluid dynamics modeling system that would improve threat identifications and be cost effective, but it might not be complete for years.

Dean Kluss, a Wright County supervisor, said it is "absurd" to not require pipeline companies to use the advanced modeling techniques to ensure the safety of residents.

"If we know what's best, why don't we do the modeling?" he said. "Figure it out. If we can send a man to the moon, we can figure this out."

Gant said real world pipeline leak simulations are also needed to verify whether the modeling software is accurate and to determine how much the gas can penetrate different types of dwellings.

Rural Iowa 'not prepared' for ruptures

In a separate discussion Thursday, the emergency management director of Cedar County said rural counties such as hers will struggle to prepare for a large pipeline leak because of the specialized equipment and training that is required.

Emergency responders in Satartia, for example, relied on breathing apparatuses that cost more than \$6,000 apiece that allowed them to rescue people from the carbon dioxide plume. Willingham said one rescuer who did not use an apparatus eventually collapsed from breathing too much of the gas.

That is an unaffordable cost for most rural volunteer fire departments, said Jodi Freet, the emergency management director of Cedar County.

"So, what happens if there's a CO2 emergency?" Freet said. "I can't send my firefighters or my (emergency medical) people to respond. I have to call in a specialized hazardous materials team."

She said that team comes from a different county and is a 45-minute drive away.

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Half a million people in less than a dozen states have lost Medicaid coverage since April

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - JUNE 1, 2023 4:16 PM

More than 500,000 people across 11 states have lost their Medicaid coverage since the unwinding of a policy that allowed people to stay in the program throughout the pandemic.

The data, reported by the states and tracked by health policy researcher KFF, shows that of the five states providing data on people who lost Medicaid coverage for procedural reasons rather than not meeting eligibility requirements, Indiana and Arkansas have the largest share. The rate of disenrollment is highest in Florida among the nine states that provided public data for the number of people renewed for Medicaid and the number of people who lost coverage.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Congress passed legislation that boosted Medicaid funds to the states. In return, the legislation required state Medicaid programs to guarantee recipients continuous coverage and suspended a requirement for patients to prove annually that they qualified.

In April, KFF researchers estimated that between 8 million and 24 million people would lose their coverage by May 2024. They also pointed out that many people eligible for Medicaid would lose coverage simply because of problems with paperwork or other procedural reasons.

That has proved true in several states. In Indiana and Arkansas, 88.5% of those who lost coverage did so because they did not complete the enrollment process. The numbers were also high in Florida, with the state unable to confirm eligibility for more than 82.2% of those dropped.

Jennifer Tolbert, director of state health reform and an associate director for the program on Medicaid and the uninsured at KFF, said there needs to be more data to understand how widespread the procedural problems are. But nearly two-thirds of Medicaid enrollees said they did not have a change in circumstances that would make them ineligible in a survey from KFF taken in February and March.

"Even among these states where we have early data, I think we need another month or two of data to understand whether what we're seeing is sort of a trend and indicative of ... an underlying issue or whether the people some of these states are targeting were people that hadn't responded to requests, and that the groups going forward, the subsequent renewals, people will be more likely to respond, and so we won't see such high procedural disenrollment rates," she said.

Nearly 250,000 Floridians have been disenrolled since the process began in April. In Arkansas, 72,800 people lost Medicaid and 53,000 people were disenrolled in Indiana. The lowest disenrollments were in Idaho, Pennsylvania, and Nebraska. Idaho paused disenrollments in April because of technical problems and Pennsylvania decided to only report disenrollments for people who had maintained coverage because of continuous enrollment, not the full number of people who lost coverage, according to KFF. The disenrollment rate also ranges widely from state to state, with a 54% disenrollment rate in Florida compared to 10% in Virginia and Pennsylvania.

"We don't know exactly why that is the case, but possibly because states are taking different approaches to these early renewals, and you have states like Florida and Arkansas that are targeting people they think are no longer eligible," Tolbert said.. "Other states like Pennsylvania, like Virginia, are just doing a time-based approach where they're renewing people in the month that their renewal is due. So they're not targeting individuals who they think are no longer eligible. That could partially explain some of the differences."

Tolbert cautioned that it's important not to wait too long to assess the data for possible policy issues that are contributing to people losing Medicaid.

"I think the challenge is you don't want it to go too far because if it truly is a problem that warrants addressing in some way, you don't want to get to the point where you're six months down the road and millions of people have lost coverage inappropriately."

KFF has not revised its estimate for the Medicaid coverage loss from its April analysis. The timeline for people losing Medicaid began in some states earlier than others. In April, five states started the disenrollment process and in May, 14 states began theirs. By October, the last state to start its process, Oregon,

will join the rest of the country. But that doesn't mean we'll know the disenrollment numbers when the states have them. Although states are required to communicate that data to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), states won't necessarily release it to the public immediately, Tolbert said. However, CMS is required to make this data public.

CMS has the ability to pause procedural disenrollment if states have "compliance issues," Tolbert said, but it's unclear what kinds of problems would be severe enough to warrant CMS taking action or how long that pause could last.

"... That's a little bit of a subjective decision, to decide when the state has taken enough steps to correct whatever issues that CMS has identified, Tolbert said. "That hasn't come into play yet."

Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.

U.S. Senate votes to block student loan relief, White House will veto

Thune calls program a 'government handout'

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JUNE 1, 2023 3:59 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Thursday voted to overturn the Biden administration's one-time student debt relief plan that is on hold due to a pending Supreme Court decision.

President Joe Biden has vowed to veto the resolution, but the 52-46 vote (with yes votes from South Dakota Republican Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds) forced vulnerable Senate Democrats up for reelection in 2024 to take a public stance on loan forgiveness that Republicans have lambasted as a "bailout."

The resolution, brought under the Congressional Review Act that allows Congress to reverse certain administration actions, was one of several maneuvers Republicans have used to block the one-time cancellation of up to \$20,000 in federal student loan debt for borrowers who qualify. The resolution passed the U.S. House last week and now goes to the White House.

In a statement ahead of the House vote, the White House blasted the student loan measure.

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

Senators up for reelection next year who voted with Republicans, include Democrats Jon Tester of Montana and Joe Manchin III of West Virginia and independent Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona.

Partisan split

Though some Democratic senators crossed party lines Thursday, several others have criticized the resolution for not only blocking student debt relief, but requiring borrowers to pay back interest from the pause on student loan repayments first implemented by the Trump administration in 2020 due to the coronavirus and extended several times.

"My Republican colleagues talk a big game about helping working families, but this legislation shows how callous and uncaring they are, by trying to block relief that would immediately improve the lives of millions of borrowers," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on the floor Wednesday.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, the Louisiana Republican who introduced the resolution, argued on the Senate floor Wednesday that the Biden administration did not have the authority to enact its debt relief program. Cassidy pointed to how Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. expressed skepticism during oral arguments in February about the policy.

Several members of the court's conservative majority questioned whether the president could enact a program that would approve \$400 billion in relief without congressional approval.

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Cassidy said the Biden administration's plan will "transfer the burden from those who willingly took out loans for college in order to make more money when they graduated, to Americans who never attended college or already fulfilled their commitment to pay off their loans."

"It is unfair to the hundreds of millions of Americans who will bear the burden of paying off hundreds of billions of dollars of someone else's student debt," he said.

Sen. John Thune, the Senate minority whip, called the student loan forgiveness policy a "government handout" in a Thursday floor speech.

"It's something of a slap in the face to Americans who chose more affordable college options or worked their way through school to avoid taking loans, or whose parents scrimped and saved to put them through college," the South Dakota Republican said.

Latest reversal attempt

Even though the plan was announced last year, Congress can take action following a March Government Accountability Office report that classified the policy as a regulation under the Congressional Review Act, or CRA.

The CRA is a procedural tool that can be used to overturn agency actions and needs only 51 votes to pass the Senate, unlike the usual 60 votes required to defeat a filibuster.

The CRA is the latest attack from congressional Republicans on the Biden administration's student loan policy. A provision in the debt ceiling bill the House passed would codify the end of the pause on federal student loan repayments by the end of August and bar the administration from reinstating a pause on repayments unless approved by Congress.

The Senate is expected to clear that bill, which Biden and Republican U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy negotiated.

The White House last year announced its plans to resume requiring repayments on student loans either 60 days after the Supreme Court's decision on the administration's student debt cancellation policy or 60 days after June 30.

Democratic Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, said on the Senate floor Thursday that the relief approved for 16 million student loan applicants could be "life-changing for so many borrowers."

"This relief is targeted to reach those who need it the most," Murray, who chairs the Senate Committee on Appropriations, said.

In order to qualify for relief, a single adult has to make under \$125,000 a year, and married couples have to make less than \$250,000. The policy would forgive up to \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for borrowers, and those who received Pell Grants are eligible for an additional \$10,000 in forgiveness of federal student loans.

Murray said about 90% of relief would go toward borrowers making \$75,000 or less.

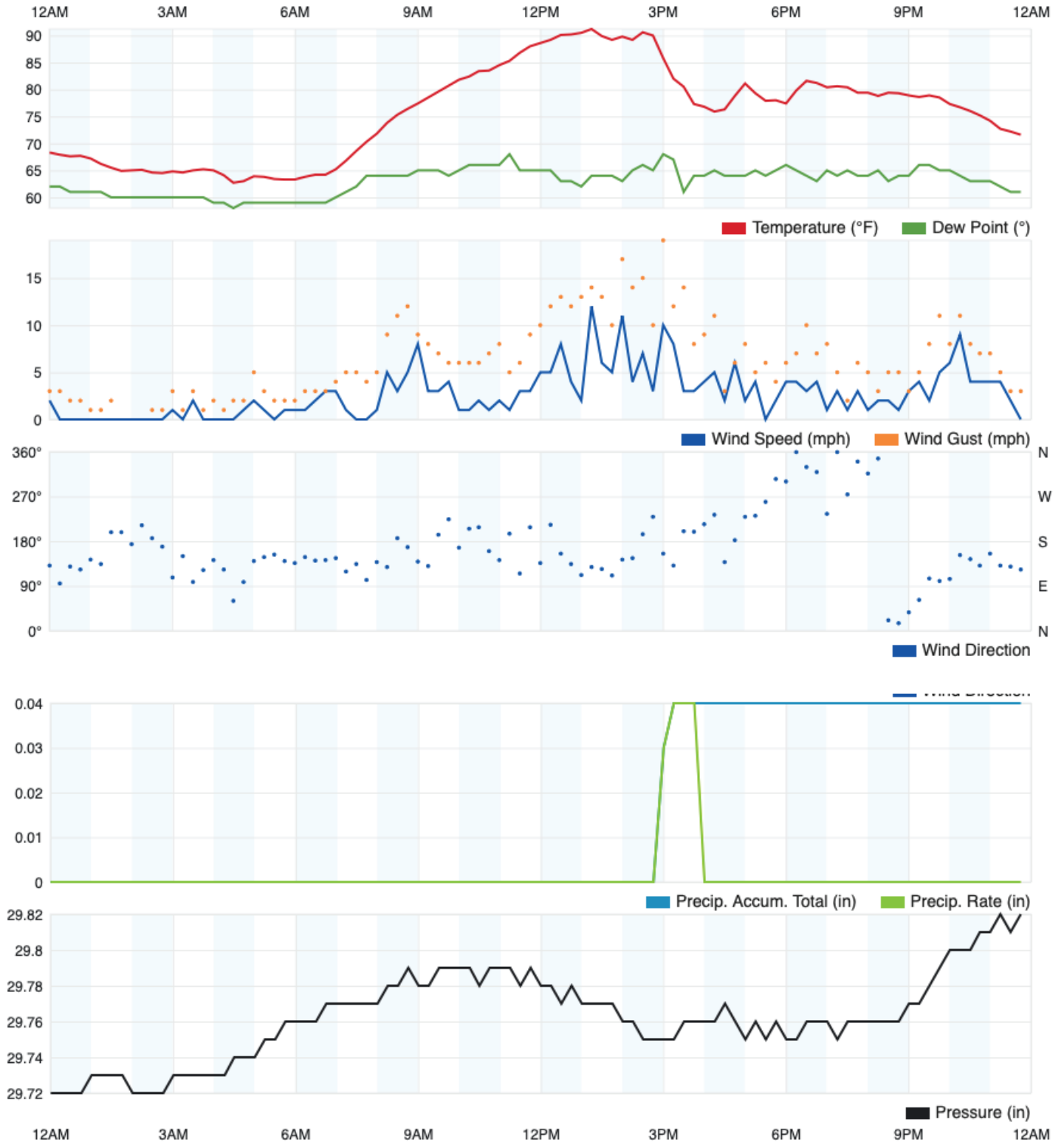
The debt relief program was initially halted in October by an appeals court following an emergency request from Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds of Iowa, and Republican attorneys general in Nebraska, Arkansas, Missouri, South Carolina and Kansas.

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

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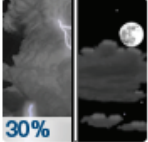



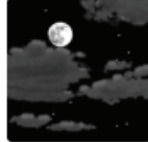

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Partly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms then Partly Cloudy	Sunny then Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms	Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms
High: 92 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 91 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 89 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 91 °F



Heat of the Afternoon Storms Through the Weekend

June 2, 2023
3:25 AM

Today: Scattered Afternoon storms with locally gusty winds...
Highs around 90

Tonight: Isolated weak storms...
Lows around 60

Sat/Sun: Scattered Afternoon storms with locally gusty winds...
Highs around 90 & Lows around 60



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Heat of the afternoon storms are expected to continue today and through the weekend with highs right around 90 degrees. Potential for severe weather is low, though we cant rule out locally gusty winds with some of the stronger storms.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 91 °F at 2:35 PM

Low Temp: 63 °F at 4:31 AM

Wind: 19 mph at 2:53 PM

Precip: : 0.04

Day length: 15 hours, 31 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 100 in 2017

Record Low: 30 in 1946

Average High: 77

Average Low: 51

Average Precip in June.: 0.21

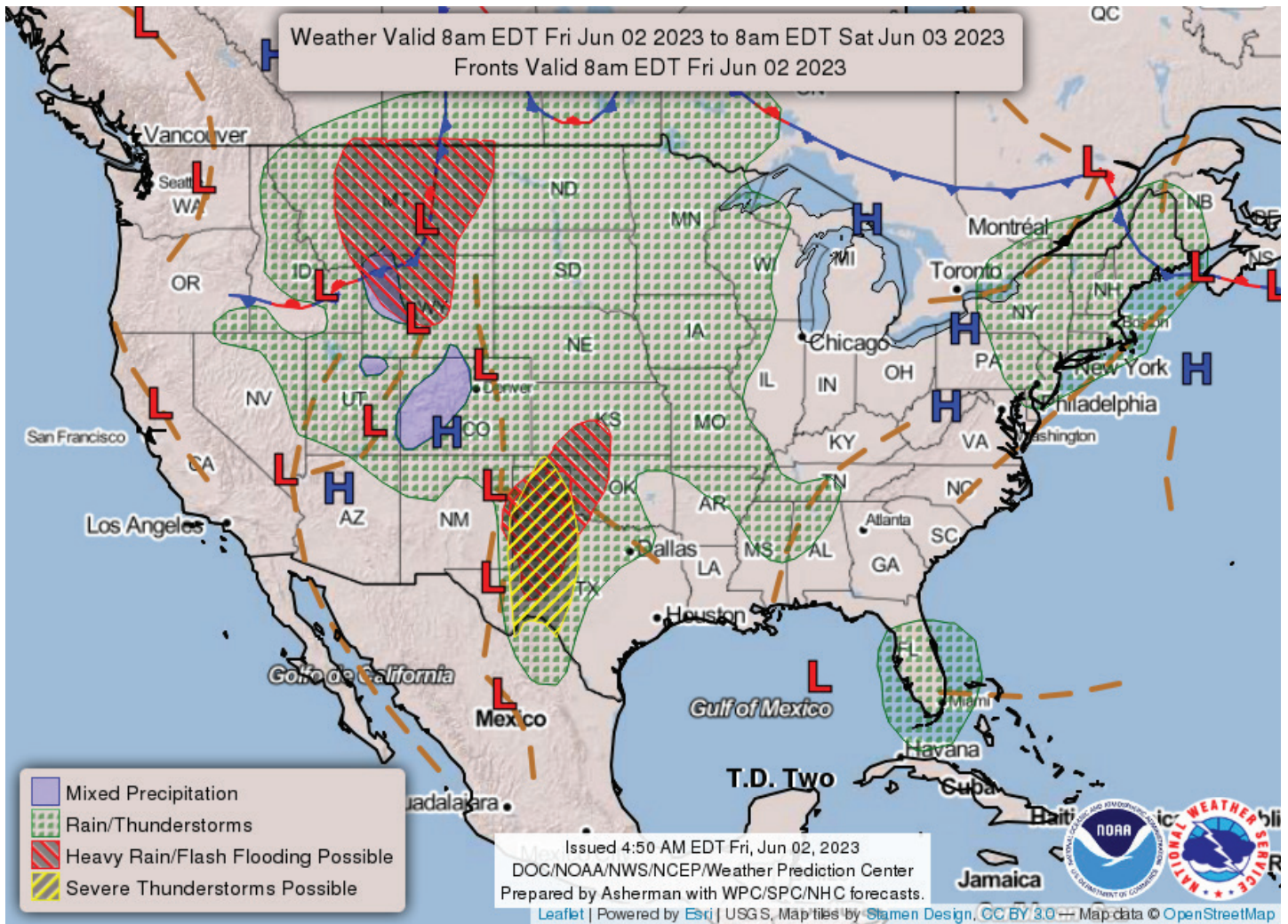
Precip to date in June.: 0.04

Average Precip to date: 7.46

Precip Year to Date: 7.95

Sunset Tonight: 9:15:58 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:44:21 AM



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Today in Weather History

June 2, 1891: An estimated F3 tornado moved northeast, passing one mile south of Hazel in Hamlin County, where three people were killed in a barn. The farm home was entirely swept away. A horse was seen being carried in the air for 400 yards. The tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 5 miles.

After touching down, an estimated F2 tornado moved northeast along the eastern edge of Watertown, where a barn was destroyed, and debris was scattered for a half mile. Two homes were leveled 5 miles northeast of Watertown. Near Waverly, one person was injured in the destruction of a flour mill. This tornado was estimated to be on the ground for about 15 miles.

June 2, 1964: Some bitter cold temperatures were observed during the early morning hours on the 2nd. Some low temperatures include; 27 degrees 12 miles SSW of Harrold; 28 degrees in Andover and 23 N of Highmore; 29 degrees 4 NW of Gann Valley, Redfield, and 2 NW of Stephan; 30 degrees in Castlewood and 1 W of Highmore; 31 degrees in Britton, 1 NW of Faulkton, and in Kennebec; and 32 degrees in McLaughlin.

June 2, 2008: Several supercell thunderstorms rolled southeast from northwest South Dakota into central South Dakota bringing large hail, damaging winds, and flash flooding during the late afternoon and evening hours. The large hail, up to baseball size, and high winds killed a large number of birds, pheasants, grouse, and rabbits. Thousands of acres of grassland and cropland along with many shelter belts received minor to major damage in Stanley and Hughes County. The large hail also knocked out many windows and damaged the siding of tens of buildings and homes in both Stanley and Hughes counties. Many roads and cropland were also affected by flash flooding throughout Hughes and Stanley counties. Very heavy rain of over 3 inches caused flash flooding in many parts of Pierre into the early morning hours. Many roads were reportedly flooded with 1 to 2 feet of water. Several homes in southeast Pierre received sewer backup. Also, several houses on Grey Goose Road received flood damage. A Federal Disaster Declaration was issued for Hughes and Stanley counties mainly for the flooding. Tennis ball hail broke most of the west side windows out of the house near Mission Ridge in Stanley County. Hail up to the size of baseballs fell in Pierre breaking some windows out of homes and vehicles. Very heavy rains of 2 to 4 inches fell across much of Stanley County causing extensive flash flooding. Seventeen roads also sustained some form of damage from the flooding.

1889: The same storm that caused the historic dam failure in Johnstown, PA, also affected Washington, D.C. The streets and reservations in the center of the city and all the wharves and streets along the riverfront were under water. Pennsylvania Avenue was flooded from 2nd to 10th Streets. The Potomac River crested at the Aqueduct Bridge at 19.5 feet on June 2. Additionally, damage occurred on Rock Creek, with the Woodley Lane Bridge washed away. Considerable damage occurred to machinery plants and material at the Navy Yard.

1917: The temperature at Tribune, Kansas dipped to 30 degrees to establish a state record for June.

1998: Frostburg, Maryland on June 2, 1998, at 9:45 PM - This was part of a killer outbreak of tornadoes that moved southeast from Pennsylvania. The storm entered Garrett County, Maryland striking the town of Finzel. It then moved up and over Big Savage Mountain in Allegany County and ripped through the northern portion of Frostburg. It reached its peak strength as it crossed the ridge. Winds were estimated between 210 and 250 mph (F4 on the Fujita Tornado Damage Scale). This was the first tornado to "officially" be rated an "F4" in the State of Maryland. The National Weather Service adopted the Fujita Damage Scale in 1973. The total damage path of the Frostburg tornado was over 25 miles long (8 miles in Allegany County) and up to a half-mile wide. Along most of its path, it was producing winds over 125 mph (F2 or stronger). The damage path was continuous as it moved up and down over 2000-foot mountain ridges. The fact that no one was killed in Maryland was attributed to 5 to 10 minutes warning that was well communicated to people in Frostburg over television, radio, scanners, telephones, and sirens. People took quick action to move to their basements. A mother and child rode out the storm as it destroyed their house hiding under a table in the basement. They were shaken but unharmed. A jacket from a Frostburg home was found 25 miles away. A diploma was found near Winchester, Virginia, 60 miles away and a bill was found near Sterling Virginia (about 100 miles away).

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

LOVE AND RESPECT

One evening a husband returned from work and found his home cluttered and un-kept. Calling his wife he asked, "What on earth happened today?"

"So," she responded thoughtfully, "every evening when you arrive home you ask, 'What did you do all day?' Well, now you know."

When a man and woman become husband and wife, a unique relationship is formed: the two become one. And when the two are merged into one, a unique union is formed. From then on, whatever affects one certainly affects the other. It is as if there is no seam or separation.

Paul said that "each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." We know that a man "loves himself" if he takes care of himself as one who was created in God's image and for God's glory. If a man takes his obligation to God seriously, he will be concerned about his spiritual, mental and physical well-being. How? By developing his relationship with God, putting "good things" into his mind, and caring for his body. These are the "right" things to do. And, as he cares for himself, he must - willingly and consistently - also care for his wife the same way. A wife knows that her husband cares for her if he cares for himself as God intended him to. He will also want the same - what is best in God's sight and teachings - for her. Respect for the husband comes easily and naturally and freely and consistently when the wife knows she is being cared for the way God intended.

Prayer: Lord, we pray that in our homes and in our lives we will live the true love that comes only from You. Help us to live love and show love as Your Son did. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Ephesians 5:33



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.30.23

13 16 40 64 68 21

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$203,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 11 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.31.23

4 15 27 28 49 5

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$3,420,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 11 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.01.23

2 15 17 22 28 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 41 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.31.23

5 14 23 28 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$80,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 11 Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.31.23

15 36 61 66 68 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 10 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
05.31.23

2 4 54 61 62 14

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$262,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 10 Mins 5 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

South Dakota man admits fatally shooting 3 people, wounding 2 others

TYNDALL, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota man has admitted to fatally shooting three people and wounding two others.

Francis Lange, 43, on Wednesday entered a plea of guilty but mentally ill to three counts of murder and two counts of aggravated assault, KELO-TV reported. Sentencing is scheduled for July 24. Prosecutors are not seeking the death penalty.

Lange admitted in court to going into a home in the small town of Scotland, South Dakota, on Nov. 9, 2021, and shooting everyone inside. Those killed included Lange's former girlfriend, Angela Monclova, along with her father, Librado Monclova, and Diane Akins. A 5-year-old girl and another adult were shot but survived.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said that under the plea, Lange faces mandatory life in prison without parole, but will receive mental health evaluation and treatment.

Psychiatrist Josette Lindahl testified Wednesday that she had met three times with Lange and diagnosed him with schizoaffective disorder. She added that alcohol and other substances made his symptoms worse.

Blinken says no Ukraine cease-fire without a peace deal that includes Russia's withdrawal

By SUSIE BLANN and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday that there can be no cease-fire in the war in Ukraine unless it is part of a "just and lasting" peace deal that includes Russia's military withdrawal.

Blinken said that "a cease-fire that simply freezes current lines in place" and allows Russian President Vladimir Putin "to consolidate control over the territory he has seized, and rest, rearm, and reattack — that is not a just and lasting peace."

Russia must also pay a share of Ukraine's reconstruction and be held accountable for launching its full-scale invasion of its neighbor in February 2022, Blinken said in a speech during a visit to Finland, which recently joined NATO and shares a long border with Russia.

Allowing Moscow to keep the one-fifth of Ukraine territory it has occupied would send the wrong message to Russia and to "other would-be aggressors around the world," according to Blinken.

Washington is ready to support peace efforts by other countries, including recent overtures from China and Brazil, he said. But any peace agreement must uphold the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.

The United States is a leading Western ally and supplier of arms to Kyiv to help it push back against the Kremlin's forces.

China, which says it is neutral and wants to serve as a mediator but has supported Moscow politically, on Friday urged countries to stop sending weapons to Ukraine.

In Ukraine, air defenses shot down more than 30 Russian cruise missiles and drones Friday in Moscow's sixth air attack in six days on Kyiv, local officials said.

The Ukrainian capital was simultaneously attacked from different directions by Iranian-made Shahed drones and cruise missiles from the Caspian region, senior Kyiv official Serhii Popko wrote on Telegram.

A 68-year-old man and an 11-year-old child were wounded in the attack, with private houses, outbuildings and cars sustaining damage from falling debris, according to Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office.

A recent spate of attacks on the capital has put strain on residents and tested the strength of Ukraine's air defenses while Kyiv officials plot what they say is an upcoming counteroffensive to push back the

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Kremlin's forces 15 months after their full-scale invasion. Kyiv was the target of drone and missile attacks on 17 days last month, including daylight attacks.

Moscow's strategy could backfire, however, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

The air campaign aims to "degrade Ukrainian counteroffensive capabilities, but ... the Russian prioritization of Kyiv is likely further limiting the campaign's ability to meaningfully constrain potential Ukrainian counteroffensive actions," it said in an assessment late Thursday.

Ukrainian air defenses intercepted all 15 cruise missiles and 21 attack drones, Ukraine's chief of staff, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said.

Ukraine's presidential office said Friday that at least four civilians were killed and 42 wounded over the previous 24 hours.

Meanwhile, border regions of Russia once again came under fire from Ukraine. Recent cross-border raids have also rattled those regions of Russia and put the Kremlin on guard.

That could be a Ukrainian strategy to disperse Russian forces before a counteroffensive begins.

"Russian commanders now face an acute dilemma of whether to (strengthen) defenses in Russia's border regions or reinforce their lines in occupied Ukraine," the U.K. ministry of defense said Friday.

Air defense systems shot down "several Ukrainian drones" overnight Thursday in Russia's southern Kursk region, which borders Ukraine, regional Gov. Roman Starovoit wrote on Telegram.

In the neighboring Bryansk region, which also borders Ukraine, regional Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said that Ukrainian forces shelled two villages on Friday morning. No casualties were reported.

Two drones also attacked energy facilities in Russia's western Smolensk region, which borders Belarus, in the early hours of Friday, officials said.

Matthew Lee reported from Oslo, Norway. Karl Ritter contributed to this report from Stockholm.

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

US jobs report for May could point to slower hiring as Fed rate hikes cool demand for workers

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — America's surprisingly resilient job market may have delivered yet another month of solid hiring and pay gains in May, if economists' forecasts prove to be correct. Still, some signs of cooling could emerge in the government report being released Friday.

Analysts have estimated that hiring slowed to a still-healthy pace of 190,000 added jobs last month, according to a survey by the data provider FactSet. That would mark a decline from the robust 253,000 jobs that were gained in April and would fall below the average for the previous three months of about 220,000. The unemployment rate is projected to rise slightly to 3.5% from a five-decade low of 3.4%.

Companies have steadily slowed hiring since January, when the three-month average pace of gains was an unusually strong 330,000.

Federal Reserve officials would welcome a more modest rate of job growth. The central bank has raised its benchmark interest rate 10 times in 14 months in an aggressive drive to conquer high inflation. Fed officials have said they think strong hiring can often fuel inflation if companies feel compelled to raise pay to attract and keep workers. These companies typically pass on their higher labor costs to their customers by raising prices.

A slowdown in job growth and pay raises could help the Fed reach its 2% inflation target. Though inflation has dropped steadily from its peak of 9.1% a year ago, it remained elevated in April at 4.9%, measured year over year.

Top Fed officials have signaled that they expect to forgo a rate increase at their June 13-14 meeting. Doing so would afford them time to assess how their previous rate hikes have affected the inflation pres-

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sure underlying the economy. Higher rates typically take time to affect growth and hiring. The Fed wants to avoid raising its key rate to the point where it would slow borrowing and spending so much as to cause a deep recession.

In remarks this week, several Fed officials pointed to Friday's jobs report — along with the next government report on inflation, to be released June 13 — as important factors in their decision-making. It's possible that a much stronger-than-expected May jobs report could cause the Fed's policymakers to consider imposing yet another rate hike this month instead of pausing.

Slower hiring could suggest that the job market is moving toward a more sustainable balance after two years of gangbusters gains that followed the economy's explosive rebound from the 2020 pandemic recession.

The U.S. economy as a whole has been gradually weakening. It grew at a lackluster 1.3% annual rate from January through March, after 2.6% annual growth from October through December and 3.2% from July through September.

Some signs have emerged that demand for workers, too, is easing just as more Americans are coming off the sidelines and looking for jobs. The low unemployment rate and rising pay have helped persuade more than 2 million people to take jobs or begin looking for work in just the past six months.

"We are seeing some calming down in terms of the jobs market, even if it remains pretty strong overall," said Sarah House, an economist at Wells Fargo.

The number of people who are quitting their jobs — a sign of confidence in the employment market — has dropped back to near pre-pandemic levels. Companies have also shed temporary employees for the past three months, evidence that labor demand has begun to ebb.

The Federal Reserve's so-called Beige Book, a collection of anecdotal reports mostly from businesses across the country, reported Wednesday that the pace of hiring gains in April and May had "cooled some" compared with previous reports. Many companies reported that they were fully staffed.

At the same time, despite some high-profile job cuts by financial and high-technology companies, the pace of layoffs remains unusually low. The number of people seeking first-time unemployment benefits, a proxy for layoffs, barely rose from a low level last week.

Many employers are still engaged in so-called "catch-up hiring," particularly in such sectors as restaurants, hotels and entertainment venues. Though customer demand in these industries has spiked, the number of employed workers remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Consumers, who drive roughly two-thirds of economic activity, are still mostly spending at a solid pace, despite higher prices and borrowing rates. Their spending jumped 0.8% in April, the fastest monthly pace since January, as Americans flocked to airports, restaurants and concert halls, among other places.

National Spelling Bee champ Dev Shah goes from 'despondent' to soaking up the moment

By BEN NUCKOLS Associated Press

OXON HILL, Md. (AP) — Fifteen months ago, Dev Shah spent a miserable five hours spelling outdoors in chilly, windy, damp conditions at a supersize regional competition in Orlando, Florida, only to fall short of his dream of returning to the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

"Despondent is the right word," Dev said. "I just didn't know if I wanted to keep continuing."

Look at him now.

Soft-spoken but brimming with confidence, Dev asked precise questions about obscure Greek roots, rushed through his second-to-last word and rolled to the National Spelling Bee title Thursday night.

Dev, a 14-year-old from Largo, Florida, in the Tampa Bay area, first competed at the national bee in 2019, then had his spelling career interrupted. The 2020 bee was canceled because of COVID-19, and in the mostly virtual 2021 bee, he didn't make it to the in-person finals, held in his home state on ESPN's campus at Walt Disney World.

Then came the disaster of last year, when he was forced to compete in the Orlando region because his

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previous regional sponsor didn't come back after the pandemic.

"It took me four months to get him back on track because he was quite a bit disturbed and he didn't want to do it," said Dev's mother, Nilam Shah.

When he decided to try again, he added an exercise routine to help sharpen his focus and lost about 15 pounds, she said.

Dev got through his region. He flexed his knowledge in Wednesday's early rounds by asking questions that proved he knew every relevant detail the bee's pronouncers and judges had on their computer screens. And when it was all over, he held the trophy over his head as confetti fell.

"He appreciated that this is a journey, which sounds very trite but is really quite true," said Dev's coach, Scott Remer, a former speller and study guide author. "I think the thing that distinguishes the very best spellers from the ones that end up not really leaving their mark is actually just grit."

Dev's winning word was "psammophile," a layup for a speller of his caliber.

"Psammo meaning sand, Greek?" he asked. "Phile, meaning love, Greek?"

Dev soaked up the moment by asking for the word to be used in a sentence, something he described a day earlier as a stalling tactic. Then he put his hands over his face as he was declared the winner.

"I would say I was confident on the outside but inside I was nervous, especially for my winning word — well, like, before. Not during," he said.

Runner-up Charlotte Walsh gave Dev a congratulatory hug.

"I'm so happy for him," said Charlotte, a 14-year-old from Arlington, Virginia. "I've known Dev for many years and I know how much work he's put into this and I'm so, so glad he won."

The winner's haul is more than \$50,000 in cash and prizes. When Charlotte returned to the stage later to congratulate Dev again, he reminded her that the runner-up gets \$25,000.

"Twenty-five thousand! What? I didn't know that," Charlotte said.

Earlier, when the bee was down to Dev and Charlotte, Scripps brought out the buzzer used for its "spell-off" tiebreaker, and Dev was momentarily confused when he stepped to the microphone.

"This is not the spell-off, right?" Dev asked. Told it was not, he spelled "bathypitometer" so quickly that it might as well have been.

"I practiced for the spell-off every day, I guess. I knew it might happen and I prepared for everything, so I kind of went into spell-off mode," he said. "But I also was scared for the spell-off."

Dev is the 22nd champion in the past 24 years with South Asian heritage. His father, Deval, a software engineer, immigrated to the United States from India 29 years ago to get his master's degree in electrical engineering. Dev's older brother, Neil, is a rising junior at Yale.

Deval said his son showed an incredible recall with words starting at age 3, and Dev spent many years in participating in academic competitions staged by the North South Foundation, a nonprofit that provides scholarships to children in India.

The bee began in 1925 and is open to students through the eighth grade. There were 229 kids onstage as it began — and each was a champion many times over, considering that 11 million participated at the school level.

The finalists demonstrated an impressive depth of knowledge as they worked their way through a sometimes diabolical word list chosen by Scripps' 21-person word panel, which includes five past champions.

This year's bee proved that the competition can remain entertaining while delving more deeply into the dictionary — especially early in the finals, when Scripps peppered contestants with short but tough words like "traik" (to fall ill, used in Scotland), "carey" (a small to medium-size sea turtle) and "katuka" (a venomous snake of southeastern Asia).

"There are a lot of hard words in the dictionary," Dev said. "There are realms of the dictionary that the word panelists need to dive into and I think they did a great job of that today."

With the field down to four, Shradha Rachamreddy was eliminated on "orle," a heraldry term that means a number of small charges arranged to form a border within the edge of a field (she went with "orel"). And "kelep" — a Central American stinging ant — ousted Surya Kapu (he said "quelep").

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While sometimes Scripps' use of trademarks and geographical names can anger spelling traditionalists who want to see kids demonstrate their mastery of roots and language patterns — and even the exceptions to those patterns — Scripps has made clear that with the exception of words designated as archaic or obsolete, any entry in Merriam-Webster's Unabridged dictionary is fair game.

Dev is happy to be closing that book for now.

"My main priority is sleep. I need to sleep. There have been a lot of sleepless nights these last six months," he said. "I need to sleep well tonight, too. There's a lot more sleep debt."

Ben Nuckols has covered the Scripps National Spelling Bee since 2012. Follow him at <https://twitter.com/APBenNuckols>

Erykah Badu basks in her new era of reinvention and expansion

By GARY GERARD HAMILTON Associated Press

New York (AP) — Erykah Badu has unintentionally occupied the role of culture shifter and influencer for 20 plus years, well before it became a trendy, social media descriptor. Her impact has vibrated throughout music and fashion, and the "Green Eyes" songstress sees it clearly.

"I can hear my influence in music. I can see my influence style," explained the four-time Grammy winner. "I hear my words resonated all over the world...So yeah, I can see it."

That cultural cache may be why her collaboration with Italian fashion house Marni has been so anticipated. The Marni x Erykah Badu capsule was released in select U.S. Marni boutiques last month. The 42-piece collection features women's ready-to-wear garments, including dresses, accessories and footwear, accented with handmade leather patchwork, heavy wools, bold sequins and lush velvets. Badu, 52, who is known for her creative and eccentric style, was hands on in all aspects.

"I've worked the same way in every area of my life; on stage I'm doing sound, I'm doing lighting, set design, costume, hair, makeup," said Badu, whose 18-year-old daughter Puma modeled for the campaign. "I'm involved in everything. I am a creator. I am a visionary...we put those things together and came up with something really creative."

Claire Sulmers, CEO of the influential style blog Fashion Bomb Daily, says Badu's versatility has made her a muse for designers.

"She is a trendsetter, but she's always marched to the beat of her own drum...she can work anything, from a designer you might find at a flea market, to a runway," said Sulmers, who called Badu an icon. "I think that is what can be attributed to her collaborating with brands because a lot of these brands that might have been under the radar or off the radar, now they're like, 'Whoa, there's this beautiful woman who is an amazing artist, who also has an amazing style, and we want to work with her.'"

As Badu enters the fashion industry and launches other business ventures, the singer-songwriter is keeping her feet firmly planted in music with a tour on the horizon. In a wide-ranging video interview with The Associated Press, Badu discussed her businesses and creativity.

The line between entertainer and philosopher is often blurred when conversing with the "Next Lifetime" artist. When asked what makes her happy, she mentions her diet; when questioned about the creation of her classic records, she brings up the latest theories on the formation of the pyramids.

Her aura has a warm, but intense gravitational pull, and there's a long-running joke that one can't look into her eyes without falling into a trance — a myth Badu embraces. She has embarked through life with a creative fearlessness.

"If I'm a little nervous or afraid, I feel brave because of the confidence," said Badu, who has served as both a birthing and end-of-life doula for the past two decades. "That has always driven my creativity and art. So, it's easy to be a non-conformist, especially when you feel confident that there's no such thing as losing because even those moments are lessons. I take all the information and use them to reinvent myself each day."

Badu has helped bring babies into the world for friends, family and even celebrity mothers like singers

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Summer Walker and Teyana Taylor, stating the relationships happen organically, and she only agrees if she can dedicate the time. There's no website or phone number to request the "Love of My Life" singer's doula services, at least not yet.

"(If) the money gets tight, then we'll see," she joked.

A champion for Black women and free thinking, she's not only in an era of reinvention, but expansion. She's entered the cannabis industry partnering with Cookies, arguably the world's most recognizable legal marijuana brand. Her idea for a line first formed in the early 2000s, but it became a reality about four years ago after researching the budding mainstream industry.

Badu oversaw everything from the marketing to the packaging for her "That Badu" line, which includes pre-rolls packaged to resemble tampons.

"Everything you see from her line is her. She came up with the design. She came up with the concepts," said Berner, founder of Cookies and mentor to Badu on the industry. He said she inspires other women "to get in the (cannabis) game...women love Erykah Badu. They look up to her. They respect her."

Draped in Afrocentric garb including statuesque headwraps and ankh jewelry, Badu teleported into the music scene in 1997 with her debut album, "Baduizm." It earned her a best new artist Grammy nomination and a best R&B album win. A pioneer of the '90s neo-soul movement with contemporaries like Maxwell, D'Angelo and Jill Scott, Badu crafted soulful classics like "On & On," "Tyrone," "Bag Lady," "Didn't Cha Know" and "Window Seat." Her last official project was 2015's "But You Caint Use My Phone" mixtape.

"I'm always working on new music. I don't know when I'll put it out, but I'm waiting for the right time," said the 2018 Soul Train Legend honoree. "I like to feel necessary for my real audience. My real audience is trees and wind and rain, air — ancestors and things like that."

Badu says music is the star that her other businesses orbit around.

"Everything is vibration and sound, from the sound of the birds that I've heard since I was a child... (to) the clothes I wear — the clothes in my Marni line all have bells on them," explained the Dallas native, who still resides in the city. "So, if I associate everything with music, it's very easy for me to create...there's a variety of things I listen to throughout the day, from wind chimes in the morning to Brent Faiyaz in the afternoon to Bach — I mean, there's just so many different things. I just love music and frequency. It is my therapy."

One of her most impactful musical contributions didn't come from a hit, but from the lesser-known "Master Teacher Medley" on 2008's "New Amerykah Part One (4th World War)" album. Produced by Shafiq Husayn, that song is largely credited with reintroducing the term "stay woke" — with collaborator Georgia Anne Muldrow chanting those words — to a new generation.

"From the time they started using it for Black Lives Matter (social protests), it was out of my hands because it kind of doesn't really belong to us anymore," said Badu, who describes the phrase as a person's heightened awareness of everything going on around them.

However, when conservatives made the term a political lightning rod, Badu decided to speak out.

"It got a little out of hand. That's why I had to say something about it, because people were starting to use it as a weapon," she continued. "If it gets into the wrong hands...I've gotta interfere and bring it back in."

Badu, who has an upcoming Funko Pop! figure that sold out during pre-order, is prepping for a highly anticipated 25-date tour kicking off this month. Yasiin Bey, the hip-hop star formerly known as Mos Def, will join her for the "Unfollow Me" tour.

"I just want people to follow their own heart," said the active social media user, giggling at the cheekiness of the title. "It's about your journey."

As Badu, who will appear in the upcoming film "The Piano Lesson" starring Samuel L. Jackson and John David Washington, continues her own odyssey, her outlook is one of gratefulness and optimism.

"When I open my eyes in the morning, I say, 'Still here! Got another chance today do some good (expletive), create some great (expletive) — be challenged by people and make the right choices. Another chance to discriminate between things that are useful in my brain...(and) thoughts that are not,'" she revealed. "That's woke. That's awareness — knowing that there is adversity, but also using the tools that you have

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to navigate through your world.”

Gary Gerard Hamilton is an entertainment journalist for the AP who told Badu he loves “Next Lifetime” so much he wishes he wrote it. You can follow him on all social platforms at @garyghamilton.

Just days to spare, Senate gives final approval to debt ceiling deal, sending it to Biden

By LISA MASCARO, KEVIN FREKING, STEPHEN GROVES, FARNOUSH AMIRI and MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fending off a U.S. default, the Senate gave final approval late Thursday to a debt ceiling and budget cuts package, grinding into the night to wrap up work on the bipartisan deal and send it to President Joe Biden’s desk to become law before the fast-approaching deadline.

The compromise package negotiated between Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy leaves neither Republicans nor Democrats fully pleased with the outcome. But the result, after weeks of hard-fought budget negotiations, shelves the volatile debt ceiling issue that risked upending the U.S. and global economy until 2025 after the next presidential election.

Approval in the Senate on a bipartisan vote, 63-36, somewhat reflected the overwhelming House tally the day before, relying on centrists in both parties to pull the Biden-McCarthy package to passage — though Democrats led the tally in both chambers.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said ahead of voting that the bill’s passage means “America can breathe a sigh of relief.”

Afterward he said, “We’ve saved the country from the scourge of default.”

Biden said in a statement following passage that senators from both parties “demonstrated once more that America is a nation that pays its bills and meets its obligations — and always will be.”

He said he would sign the bill into law as soon as possible. “No one gets everything they want in a negotiation, but make no mistake: this bipartisan agreement is a big win for our economy and the American people,” the president said. The White House said he would address the nation about the matter at 7 p.m. EDT Friday.

Fast action was vital if Washington hoped to meet next Monday’s deadline, when Treasury has said the U.S. will start running short of cash to pay its bills, risking a devastating default. Raising the nation’s debt limit, now \$31.4 trillion, would ensure Treasury could borrow to pay already incurred U.S. debts.

In the end, the debt ceiling showdown was a familiar high-stakes battle in Congress, a fight taken on by McCarthy and powered by a hard-right House Republican majority confronting the Democratic president with a new era of divided government in Washington.

Refusing a once routine vote to allow a the nation’s debt limit to be lifted without concessions, McCarthy brought Biden’s White House to the negotiating table to strike an agreement that forces spending cutbacks aimed at curbing the nation’s deficits.

Overall, the 99-page bill restricts spending for the next two years, suspends the debt ceiling into January 2025 and changes some policies, including imposing new work requirements for older Americans receiving food aid and greenlighting an Appalachian natural gas line that many Democrats oppose.

It bolsters funds for defense and veterans, cuts back new money for Internal Revenue Service agents and rejects Biden’s call to roll back Trump-era tax breaks on corporations and the wealthy to help cover the nation’s deficits. It imposes automatic 1% cuts if Congress fails approve its annual spending bills.

After the House overwhelmingly approved the package late Wednesday, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell signaled he too wanted to waste no time ensuring it became law.

Touting its budget cuts, McConnell said Thursday, “The Senate has a chance to make that important progress a reality.”

Having remained largely on the sidelines during much of the Biden-McCarthy negotiations, several senators insisted on debate over their ideas to reshape the package. But making any changes at this stage

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would almost certainly derail the compromise and none were approved.

Instead, senators dragged through rounds of voting late into the night rejecting the various amendments, but making their preferences clear. Conservative Republican senators wanted to include further cut spending, while Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine of Virginia sought to remove the Mountain Valley Pipeline approval.

The energy pipeline is important to Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and he defended the development running through his state, saying the country cannot run without the power of gas, coal, wind and all available energy sources.

But, offering an amendment to strip the pipeline from the package, Kaine argued it would not be fair for Congress to step into a controversial project that he said would also course through his state and scoop up lands in Appalachia that have been in families for generations.

Defense hawks led by Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina complained strongly that military spending, though boosted in the deal, was not enough to keep pace with inflation — particularly as they eye supplemental spending that will be needed this summer to support Ukraine against the war waged by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Putin's invasion is a defining moment of the 21st century," Graham argued from the Senate floor. "What the House did is wrong."

They secured an agreement from Schumer, which he read on the floor, stating that the debt ceiling deal "does nothing" to limit the Senate's ability to approve other emergency supplemental funds for national security, including for Ukraine, or for disaster relief and other issues of national importance.

All told, most of the Democratic senators voted for the package, while most of the Republicans opposed it. The tally was 46 Democrats and 17 Republicans in favor; 31 Republicans along with four Democrats and one independent who caucuses with the Democrats opposed.

For weeks negotiators labored late into the night to strike the deal with the White House, and for days McCarthy had worked to build support among skeptics.

Tensions had run high in the House the night before as hard-right Republicans refused the deal. Ominously, the conservatives warned of possibly trying to oust McCarthy over the issue.

But Biden and McCarthy assembled a bipartisan coalition, with Democrats ensuring passage on a robust 314-117 vote. All told, 71 House Republicans broke with McCarthy to reject the deal.

"We did pretty dang good," McCarthy, R-Calif., said afterward.

As for discontent from Republicans who said the spending restrictions did not go far enough, McCarthy said it was only a "first step."

The White House immediately turned its attention to the Senate, its top staff phoning individual senators.

Democrats also had complaints, decrying the new work requirements for older Americans, those 50-54, in the food aid program, the changes to the landmark National Environmental Policy Act and approval of the controversial Mountain Valley Pipeline natural gas project they argue is unhelpful in fighting climate change.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said the spending restrictions in the package would reduce deficits by \$1.5 trillion over the decade, a top goal for the Republicans trying to curb the debt load.

In a surprise that complicated Republicans' support, however, the CBO said their drive to impose work requirements on older Americans receiving food stamps would end up boosting spending by \$2.1 billion over the time period. That's because the final deal exempts veterans and homeless people, expanding the food stamp rolls by 78,000 people monthly, the CBO said.

AP White House Correspondent Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Top American, Chinese defense officials vie for influence in Asia-Pacific

By DAVID RISING Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — As the United States and China vie to establish new partnerships and expand influence with Asia-Pacific nations, the top defense officials from both countries are preparing to try to win support this weekend from their regional counterparts, diplomats and leaders at a security forum in Singapore.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, whose country is a stalwart American ally in the Pacific, is to give the keynote address Friday evening to open the dialogue at the Shangri-La Hotel hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank.

Albanese, whose country has angered Beijing with its agreement with Britain and the U.S., known as AUKUS, to obtain nuclear-powered submarines to address the perceived rising threat from China, said he would focus on Australia's deepening engagement, as well as "shared opportunities and challenges" in the region.

"We want a region that is stable, peaceful, resilient and prosperous," he said when his speech was announced.

Ahead of his speech, Albanese met with Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and told reporters that the strong ties between the two countries was important because "security isn't just about defense."

"It's also about our capacity to be less vulnerable to shocks, whether that's a future pandemic, a trade or cyber security shock, or international conflict," he said.

Wong stressed that none of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations wanted to have to choose between Washington or Beijing.

"No one wants to be in a position where we have to either contain China's rise or limit America's presence," he said. "Any move in either direction will have few takers in the region because no one in ASEAN wants to see a new Cold War."

This year's dialogue comes amid a wide range of issues, including the war in Ukraine and its regional implications, including China's support for Russia, the ongoing conflict in Myanmar, and growing tensions between China and the U.S. and its allies over Beijing's claim to the self-governing island of Taiwan.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin will open the day Saturday with an address on American "leadership in the Indo-Pacific," according to the Pentagon, while China's new defense minister, Li Shangfu, leads off the day Sunday with a speech on his country's new security initiatives.

Austin began his trip to the region in Japan, whose prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has been one of the most outspoken leaders in Asia against the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Kishida has ramped up Japan's defense spending, and cautioned others at the Shangri-La forum last year that "Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow."

China has refused to criticize Russia's invasion of Ukraine and has blamed the U.S. and NATO for provoking Moscow. During a trip in April to Moscow, Li pledged to expand military cooperation, military-technical ties and the arms trade with Russia.

"We will certainly take them to a new level," he said at the time.

On the sidelines of the conference in Singapore, Austin plans to meet with "key leaders to advance U.S. defense partnerships across the region in support of our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific anchored in ASEAN centrality," the Defense Department said.

Following the conference, Austin travels to New Delhi to meet with his Indian counterpart for talks on issues including expanding "operational cooperation between the U.S. and Indian militaries."

Like the U.S., many of its allies have been increasing their focus on the Indo-Pacific, and the conference brings together many other top officials, including defense ministers from Britain, Germany, Sweden, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. Ukraine's defense minister is also expected to attend.

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Austin asked Li to meet with him in Singapore, but China turned down the request, Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters in Washington.

"The department believes strongly in the importance of maintaining open lines of military-to-military communication between Washington and Beijing to ensure that competition does not veer into conflict," he said.

Li, a general who was named defense minister in March, is under American sanctions that are part of a broad package of measures against Russia — but predate its invasion of Ukraine — which were imposed in 2018 over Li's involvement in China's purchase of combat aircraft and anti-aircraft missiles from Moscow.

The sanctions, which broadly prevent Li from doing business in the United States, do not prevent him from holding official talks, Ryder said.

Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei said Austin's offer of talks in Singapore was rejected because the U.S. "disregards China's concerns and creates artificial obstacles."

"The U.S. side should take practical actions to show sincerity and correct mistakes, so as to create the necessary conditions and proper atmosphere for communication and exchange between the two sides," he said, while not mentioning the sanctions or other issues directly.

Even before Li's appointment, multiple Defense Department requests for talks involving key leaders were rejected, with more than a dozen requests having gone unanswered or declined since 2021, according to a senior American defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide information on private discussions.

In Japan on Thursday, Austin stressed the need for regular communications and open channels, noting a recent incident in which a Chinese fighter jet flew aggressively close to an American reconnaissance plane over the South China Sea.

"I'm concerned about at some point having an incident that could very, very quickly spiral out of control," Austin said. "I would welcome any opportunity to engage with leadership."

Despite Li's refusal of the invitation, China might not want to be seen as the non-communicative party in regional eyes so some sort of bilateral talks could still take place over the course of the weekend, said Euan Graham, senior fellow for Indo-Pacific Defense and Strategy with IISS.

"I wouldn't rule out a U.S.-China meeting yet," he said.

Associated Press writer Lolita C. Baldor in Washington, D.C., contributed to this story.

Money stored in Venmo and other payment apps could be vulnerable, financial watchdog warns

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Customers of Venmo, PayPal and CashApp should not store their money with those apps for the long term because the funds might not be safe during a crisis, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau warned Thursday.

The alert comes several weeks after the failure of Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank and First Republic Bank, which all experienced bank runs after fearful customers with uninsured deposits pulled their money en masse.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insures bank accounts up to \$250,000. But money stored in Venmo or CashApp or Apple Cash is not being held in a traditional bank account. So, if there is an event similar to a bank run with those payment apps, those funds may not be protected.

Some of the funds may be eligible for pass-through insurance coverage if customers do certain activities with the apps, the CFPB said, but generally by default the apps are not covered by deposit insurance. For example, if a customer opened a PayPal Savings account, it would have deposit insurance through PayPal's partner bank, Synchrony Bank. But the general PayPal account is not covered by insurance. For Apple Cash, which can be insured through Green Dot Bank, it requires a user to verify their identity to get deposit insurance.

"We find that stored funds can be at risk of loss in the event of financial distress or failure of the entity operating the nonbank payment platform, and often are not placed in an account at a bank or credit union and lack individual deposit insurance coverage," the CFPB said in its report.

"Consumers may not fully appreciate when, or under what conditions, they would be protected by deposit insurance," the agency added in its report.

Peer-to-Peer payment apps and non-banks offering bank-like services have exploded in popularity in the last decade. Venmo now has more than 90 million customers and recently announced it was going to allow parents to create accounts for their teenage children, potentially bringing in tens of millions of new customers for the app.

Apple recently announced a savings account tied to its Apple Card that is operated by Goldman Sachs. The savings account took in billions of dollars in deposits within days of its launch.

The Financial Technology Association, an industry group that represents PayPal as well as Cash App's owner Block, emphasized in a statement that those products are safe.

"Tens of millions of American consumers and small businesses rely on payment apps to better spend, manage, and send their money. These accounts are safe and transparent, with users receiving FDIC Insurance on their accounts depending on the products they use," the association said.

US retaliates for Russia's suspension of New START treaty by revoking visas of nuclear inspectors

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

OSLO, Norway (AP) — The Biden administration is retaliating for Russia's suspension of the New START nuclear treaty, announcing Thursday it is revoking the visas of Russian nuclear inspectors, denying pending applications for new monitors and canceling standard clearances for Russian aircraft to enter U.S. airspace.

The State Department said it was taking those steps and others in response to Russia's "ongoing violations" of New START, the last arms control treaty remaining between the two countries, which are currently at severe odds over the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"The United States is committed to full and mutual implementation of the New START treaty," it said. "Consistent with that commitment, the United States has adopted lawful countermeasures in response to the Russian Federation's ongoing violations of the New START treaty."

The department said the visa revocations and application denials, as well as a U.S. decision to stop sharing information on the status or locations of missiles and telemetry data on test launches with Russia, were consistent with international law because of Russia's actions.

The U.S. will, however, continue to notify Russia when it conducts test launches, it said, adding that the steps it was taking were reversible provided Moscow returns to compliance with the treaty.

Russia suspended its participation in New START in February in a move that the U.S. said was "legally invalid." Immediately afterward Moscow curtailed its adherence to the accord.

Allowing inspections of weapons sites and providing information on the placement of intercontinental and submarine-based ballistic missiles and their test launches are critical components of New START, which then-Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev signed in 2010.

In March, the U.S. announced that it and Russia had stopped sharing biannual nuclear weapons data. The U.S. had said it wanted to continue such sharing but stopped after Moscow informed Washington that it would not share its data.

Despite being extended shortly after President Joe Biden took office in January 2021, New START has been severely tested by Russia's war in Ukraine and has been on life support for since Russian President Vladimir Putin announced Russia would no longer comply with its requirements.

The treaty limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers. The agreement envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.

The inspections went dormant in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions on resuming

republic, as the start of the "Century of Turkey."

A RETURN TO ISLAMIC ROOTS

Erdogan has cultivated deep loyalty from conservative and religious supporters by elevating Islamic values in a country that was defined by secularism for nearly a century.

He has curbed the powers of the military, which frequently meddled in civilian politics whenever the country began deviating from secularism. He lifted rules that barred conservative women from wearing headscarves in schools and government offices.

He also reconverted Istanbul's landmark Hagia Sophia into a mosque, meeting a long-time demand of Turkish Islamists. The Byzantine-era cathedral first became a mosque after the conquest of Constantinople but had served as a museum for decades.

More recently, he has slammed LGBTQ+ rights, suggesting they pose a threat to the traditional, conservative notion of what constitutes a family.

TIGHT CONTROL OVER MEDIA

During his decades in power, Erdogan consolidated control over the media.

A majority of Turkish news outlets are now owned by conglomerates loyal to him. He has used his position to silence criticism and to disparage the opposition.

International election monitors observed that both the first round of the presidential election on May 14th and the May 28th runoff were free but not fair.

While voters in the second round had a choice between genuine political alternatives, "biased media coverage and a lack of a level playing field gave an unjustified advantage to the incumbent," said Farah Karimi, a coordinator for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Erdogan's opponent in the runoff election, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, had promised to undo the president's economic policies and to put Turkey back on a democratic path by ending crackdowns on free speech.

Cinar Kiper reported from Bodrum.

Despite flags, Border Patrol staff didn't review fragile 8-year-old girl's file before she died

By VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

HARLINGEN, Texas (AP) — Border Patrol medical staff declined to review the file of an 8-year-old girl with a chronic heart condition and rare blood disorder before she appeared to have a seizure and died on her ninth day in custody, an internal investigation found.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has said the child's parents shared the medical history with authorities on May 10, a day after the family was taken into custody.

But a nurse practitioner declined to review documents about the girl the day she died, CBP's Office of Professional Responsibility said in its initial statement Thursday on the May 17 death. The nurse practitioner reported denying three or four requests from the girl's mother for an ambulance.

Anadith Tanay Reyes Alvarez, whose parents are Honduran, was born in Panama with congenital heart disease. She received surgery three years ago that her mother, Mabel Alvarez Benedicks, characterized as successful during a May 19 interview with The Associated Press.

A day before she died, Anadith showed a fever of 104.9 degrees Fahrenheit (40.5 degrees Celsius), the CBP report said.

A surveillance video system at the Harlingen, Texas, station was out of service since April 13, a violation of federal law that prevented evidence collection, according to the Office of Professional Responsibility, akin to a police department's office of internal affairs. The system was flagged for repair but wasn't fixed until May 23, six days after the girl died.

Still, the report relied on interviews with Border Patrol agents and contracted medical personnel to raise

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a host of new and troubling questions about what went wrong during the girl's nine days in custody, which far exceeded the agency's own limit of 72 hours.

Investigators gave no explanation for decisions that medical staff made and appeared to be at a loss for words.

"Despite the girl's condition, her mother's concerns, and the series of treatments required to manage her condition, contracted medical personnel did not transfer her to a hospital for higher-level care," the Office of Professional Responsibility said.

Troy Miller, CBP's acting commissioner, said the initial investigation "provides important new information on this tragic death" and he reaffirmed recent measures including a review of all "medically fragile" cases in custody to ensure they are out of custody as soon as possible. Average time in custody has dropped by more than half for families in two weeks, he said.

"(This death) was a deeply upsetting and unacceptable tragedy. We can — and we will — do better to ensure this never happens again," Miller said.

Anadith entered Brownsville, Texas, with her parents and two older siblings May 9 when daily illegal crossings topped 10,000 as migrants rushed to beat the end of pandemic-related restrictions on seeking asylum.

She was diagnosed with the flu May 14 at a temporary holding facility in Donna, Texas, and was moved with her family to Harlingen. Staff had about nine encounters with Anadith and her mother over the next four days at the Harlingen station until her death over concerns including high fever, flu symptoms, nausea and breathing difficulties. She was given medications, a cold pack and a cold shower, according to the Office of Professional Responsibility.

A court-appointed monitor expressed concern in January about chronic conditions of medically fragile children not getting through to Border Patrol staff.

Dr. Paul H. Wise, a Stanford University pediatrics professor who was in South Texas last week to look into the circumstances around what he said was a "preventable" death, said there should be little hesitation about sending ill children to the hospital, especially those with chronic conditions.

Anadith's mother told the AP that she informed staff of her child's conditions, which included sickle-cell anemia, and repeatedly asked for medical assistance and an ambulance to take her daughter to a hospital but the request were denied until her child fell unconscious.

Karla Marisol Vargas, an attorney for the Texas Civil Rights Project who is representing the family, said Border Patrol agents rejected her pleas for medicine until the day she died.

"They refused to review documents showing the illnesses that her daughter had," Vargas said.

The family is living with relatives in New York City while funeral arrangements are made.

Associated Press writer Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed to this story.

Clashes in Senegal leave at least 9 dead; government bans use of social media platforms

By BABACAR DIONE and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Clashes between police and supporters of Senegalese opposition leader Ousmane Sonko left nine people dead, the government said Friday, with authorities issuing a blanket ban on the use of several social media platforms in the aftermath of the violence.

The deaths occurred mainly in the capital, Dakar, and Ziguinchor in the south, where Sonko is mayor, Interior Minister Antoine Felix Abdoulaye Diome said in a statement.

Some social media sites used by demonstrators to incite violence, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have been suspended, he said.

"The state of Senegal has taken every measure to guarantee the safety of people and property. We are going to reinforce security everywhere in the country," Diome said.

Sonko was convicted Thursday of corrupting youth but acquitted on charges of raping a woman who

worked at a massage parlor and making death threats against her. The court sentenced Sonko to two years in prison. He didn't attend his trial in Dakar, and was judged in absentia. His lawyer said a warrant hadn't been issued yet for the politician's arrest.

Sonko came in third in Senegal's 2019 presidential election and is popular with the country's youth. His supporters maintain his legal troubles are part of a government effort to derail his candidacy in the 2024 presidential election.

Sonko is considered President Macky Sall's main competition and has urged Sall to state publicly that he won't seek a third term in office.

Corrupting young people, which includes using one's position of power to have sex with people under the age of 21, is a criminal offense in Senegal that is punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of up to more than \$6,000.

Under Senegalese law, his conviction would bar Sonko from running in next year's election, said Bamba Cisse, another defense lawyer.

"The conviction for corruption of youth hinders his eligibility, because he was sentenced in absentia, so we can't appeal," Cisse said.

However, the government said that Sonko can ask for a retrial once he is imprisoned. It was unclear when he would be taken into custody.

Shortly after the verdict was announced Thursday, clashes erupted throughout the country with Sonko's PASTEF party calling for people to take to the streets.

In Dakar, protesters threw rocks, burned vehicles and in some places erected barricades while police fired tear gas. Plumes of black smoke and the sound of tear gas being fired were seen and heard throughout the city. Those who weren't protesting stayed indoors, leaving much of Dakar a ghost town with boarded-up shops and empty streets as people feared the violence would escalate.

"The verdict cements the criticism that Sall's government is weaponizing the judiciary to eliminate prominent rivals that could shake his rule," said Mucahid Durmaz, senior analyst at global risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft.

"Despite being presented as a beacon (of) democracy, the Sonko cases demonstrate the structural issues Senegal grapples with. The court decision and the prospect of Sall's bid for a third term in the election next year will fuel fierce criticism around erosion of judicial independence and democratic backsliding," Dumaz said.

Government spokesman Abdou Karim Fofana said that the damage caused by months of demonstrations has cost the country millions of dollars.

"These calls (to protest), it's a bit like the anti-republican nature of all these movements that hide behind social networks and don't believe in the foundations of democracy, which are elections, freedom of expression, but also the resources that our (legal) system offers," Fofana said.

Restoration lags for Syria's famed Roman ruins at Palmyra and other war-battered historic sites

By ABBY SEWELL and ALBERT AJI Associated Press

PALMYRA, Syria (AP) — At the height of the Islamic State group's rampage across Syria, the world watched in horror as the militants blew up an iconic arch and temple in the country's famed Roman ruins in Palmyra.

Eight years later, IS has lost its hold but restoration work on the site has been held up by security issues, leftover IS land mines and lack of funding.

Other archaeological sites throughout Syria face similar problems, both in areas held by the government and by the opposition. They were damaged by the war or, more recently, by the deadly 7.8-magnitude earthquake that struck a wide area of neighboring Turkey and also Syria in February.

Youssef Kanjou, a former director of Syria's Aleppo National Museum, said the situation of heritage sites

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in his country is a "disaster."

Without a coordinated preservation and restoration effort, said Kanjou, now a researcher at Tübingen University in Germany, "We will lose what was not destroyed by the war or the earthquake."

Before the war, Palmyra — one of Syria's six UNESCO world heritage sites — was the country's archaeological crown jewel, a tourist attraction that drew tens of thousands of visitors each year. The ancient city was the capital of an Arab client state of the Roman Empire that briefly rebelled and carved out its own kingdom in the third century, led by Queen Zenobia.

In more recent times, the area had darker associations. It was home to the Tadmur prison, where thousands of opponents of the Assad family's rule in Syria were reportedly tortured. IS demolished the prison after capturing the town.

The militants later destroyed Palmyra's historic temples of Bel and Baalshamin and the Arch of Triumph, viewing them as monuments to idolatry, and beheaded an elderly antiquities scholar who had dedicated his life to overseeing the ruins.

Today, the road through the desert from Homs to Palmyra is dotted with Syrian army checkpoints. In the town adjacent to the ancient site, some shops have reopened, but signs of war remain in the form of charred vehicles and burned-out or boarded-up stores and houses.

The Palmyra Museum is closed, and the much-loved lion statue that used to stand in front of it has been moved to Damascus for restoration and safekeeping.

Nevertheless, Syrian and foreign tourists have begun to trickle back.

"We thought it was impossible that foreigners would return to Palmyra," said Qais Fathallah, who used to run a hotel there but fled to Homs when IS took over. Now he is back in Palmyra, operating a restaurant, where he said he serves tourists regularly.

On a recent day, a group of tourists from countries including the United Kingdom, Canada and China, and another, with Syrian university students, were wandering through the ruins.

Some of the Syrian tourists had visited in better days. For communication engineering student Fares Mardini, it was the first time.

"Now I've finally come, and I see so much destruction. It's something really upsetting," he said. "I hope it can be restored and return to what it was."

In 2019, international experts convened by UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural agency, said detailed studies would need to be done before starting major restorations.

Youmna Tabet, program specialist at the Arab states unit of UNESCO's World Heritage Center, said restoration work often involves difficult choices, particularly if there isn't enough original material for rebuilding.

"Is it worth it to rebuild it with very little authenticity or should we rather focus on having 3D documentation of how it was?" she said.

Missions to the site were held up at first by security issues, including land mines that had to be cleared. IS cells still occasionally carry out attacks in the area.

Money is also a problem.

"There is a big lack of funding so far, for all the sites in Syria," Tabet said, noting that international donors have been wary of breaching sanctions on Syria, which have been imposed by the United States, the European Union and others.

U.S. sanctions exempt activities related to preservation and protection of cultural heritage sites, but sanctions-related obstacles remain, such as a ban on exporting U.S.-made items to Syria.

Russia, an ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government, has begun restoring Palmyra's triumphal arch, the largest-scale project underway to date at the site.

"We have some funding from some friends in some places, but it is not sufficient in relation to the disaster that occurred," said Mohammad Nazir Awad, director general of Syria's department of Antiquities and Museums.

It doesn't have to be this way, said Maamoun Abdulkarim, who headed the antiquities department at the time of the IS incursion. Abdulkarim pointed to the international push to recover damaged heritage sites

in the city of Mosul in neighboring Iraq, also controlled by the militants for some time, as an example of a successful restoration.

"We need to make some separation between political affairs and cultural heritage affairs," said Abdulkarim, now a professor at the University of Sharjah. He warned that damaged structures are in danger of deteriorating further or collapsing as the rehabilitation work is delayed.

The deadly Feb. 6 earthquake caused further destruction at some sites already damaged by the war. This includes the old city of Aleppo, which is under the control of the government, and the Byzantine-era church of Saint Simeon in the Aleppo countryside, in an area controlled by Turkish-backed opposition forces.

About one-fifth of the church was damaged in the earthquake, including the basilica arch, said Hassan al-Ismail, a researcher with Syrians for Heritage a non-governmental organization. He said the earthquake compounded earlier damage caused by bombings and vandalism.

The group tried to stabilize the structure with wooden and metal supports and to preserve the stones that fell from it for later use in restoration.

Ayman al-Nabo, head of antiquities in the opposition-held city of Idlib, appealed for international assistance in stabilizing and restoring sites damaged by the earthquake.

Antiquities should be seen as "neutral to the political reality," he said. "This is global human heritage, which belongs to the whole world, not just the Syrians."

Sewell reported from Beirut. Associated Press reporters Omar Sanadiki in Palmyra, Syria, and Omar Albam in Deir Semaan, Syria, contributed to this report.

US expands slots for asylum app at land crossings as demand overwhelms supply

By VALERIE GONZALEZ and ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

HARLINGEN, Texas (AP) — U.S. authorities on Thursday expanded slots to seek asylum at land crossings with Mexico through a mobile app for the second time in less than a month, seeking to dispel doubts it isn't a viable option.

There are now 1,250 appointments at eight land crossings, up from 1,000 previously and 740 in early May.

The increase "reflects our commitment to continue to expand lawful options for migrants," said Blas Nuñez-Neto, the Homeland Security Department's assistant secretary for border and immigration policy. "We'll continue to expand appointments at the border as our operations allow in terms of capacity."

Nuñez-Neto called CBP One a "safe and orderly option" during a visit to Harlingen, Texas. He announced the expansion a week after Texas sued to end what the state government considers an illegal method of boosting immigration.

Demand has far outstripped supply from the Jan. 12 start, prompting many to consider crossing the border illegally or giving up. Enrique Lucero, migrant affairs director for the city of Tijuana, said the latest increase would have little impact considering how many are waiting.

"It's not a big deal," he said. "It's still very low and not enough for the pent-up demand."

After pandemic-related asylum restrictions ended May 11, the Biden administration continued its embrace of a carrot-and-stick approach to the border, introducing a general ban on asylum for people who travel through other countries, like Mexico, and enter the U.S. illegally.

U.S. authorities are trying to funnel people to "legal pathways" like CBP One and parole for up to 30,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans who apply online with a financial sponsor and arrive by air.

CBP One is for people of any nationality who apply in central and northern and northern Mexico and enter by land.

The expansion on Thursday was met with cautious optimism and mild indifference among some of the 150 people, mostly families with young children, camped on a sidewalk at a border crossing where Tijuana leads to San Diego, hoping U.S. officials admit them without a CBP One appointment.

They said it appeared authorities were allowing about one family every several hours, enough to create

them were supposed to have taken place in November 2022, but Russia abruptly called them off, citing U.S. support for Ukraine.

The State Department said Russia had been told of the countermeasures ahead of time and also advised that Washington is still interested in keeping the treaty alive.

"The United States remains ready to work constructively with Russia on resuming implementation of the New START Treaty," it said.

How Turkey's president Erdogan has maintained a tight grip on power in the country

By SUZAN FRASER and CINAR KIPER Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a populist with increasingly authoritarian tendencies, is scheduled to take the oath of office and start his third presidential term Saturday following his latest election win.

Erdogan, who has led Turkey as prime minister or president for 20 years, prevailed in a runoff race last weekend despite the country's ongoing economic crisis and his government's criticized response to a February earthquake that killed more than 50,000 people.

Known as "reis," or "the chief," among his fans, the 69-year-old Erdogan already is the longest-serving leader in the Turkish republic's history. His reelection to a five-year term that runs until 2028 extends his rule into a third decade, and he could possibly serve longer with the help of a friendly parliament.

Here is a look at Erdogan's career and some of the reasons for his political longevity.

IT'S NOT THE ECONOMY

Many experts agree that Turkey's severe economic woes result from Erdogan's unorthodox fiscal policies — most notably, depressing interest rates against rampant inflation despite the warnings of economists. However, the majority of voters — he received 52% of the runoff vote — did not seem to hold it against him.

Erdogan's endurance amid a cost-of-living crisis — inflation in Turkey hit a staggering 85% in October before easing to 44% in April — might have resulted from many people preferring stability over change as they struggle to pay skyrocketing prices for rent and basic goods.

The president has demonstrated an ability to turn the economy around in the past. And he has never shied away from spending and deploying government resources to his political advantage.

Over the past two decades, his government has spent lavishly on infrastructure to please constituents. In the period leading up to last month's parliamentary and presidential elections, he increased wages and pensions to cushion the blow from inflation and disbursed electricity and gas subsidies.

One point of pride for many voters is Turkey's ballooning military-industrial sector. Throughout the campaign, Erdogan frequently cited domestically made drones, aircraft and a warship touted as the world's first "drone carrier."

ON THE WORLD STAGE

Erdogan has swayed many Turks to his side with the way he navigates the world stage. Supporters see in him a leader who has shown that Turkey can be a major player in geopolitics while displaying an independent streak as it engages with the East and West.

Turkey is a key NATO member because of its strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and it controls the alliance's second-largest army. During Erdogan's tenure, the country has proven to be an indispensable and, at times, troublesome NATO ally.

The Turkish government has held up Sweden's entry into NATO and purchased Russian missile-defense systems, prompting the United States to oust Turkey from a U.S.-led fighter jet project. Yet, together with the United Nations, Turkey brokered a vital wartime deal that allowed Ukraine to resume shipping grain through the Black Sea to parts of the world struggling with hunger.

Erdogan has hailed his reelection, which came as the country prepares to mark the centenary of the

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a growing bottleneck over the last week as word spread it was an alternative.

Carlos Vasquez, 25, reached southern Mexico from Honduras in January with his pregnant wife and their 4-year-old daughter and started trying daily on the app once he was in central Mexico. He became frustrated and, on Monday, began sleeping at the border camp, hoping U.S. officials would take mercy on his family.

Vasquez said the increase to 1,250 a day was good news but not enough for a major impact.

"We are many and there are few chosen," he said.

Sergio Hernandez, 35, scored an appointment on May 24 after more than five months of daily effort. The appointments are scheduled up to two weeks out.

Hernandez, a Guatemalan who plans to seek asylum while living with a childhood friend in Kansas City, Missouri, said he had received countless "system error" messages before confirming a slot. He was once given a date on his phone screen but email confirmation never arrived.

"They keep improving it little by little," he said.

Hernandez, who was traveling alone, said perceptions persist that larger families are at a disadvantage, which U.S. officials deny.

Beatriz Melchor, 47, said she would wait to see if the latest increase has an impact. She has been trying the app for about six weeks with her husband and son and said changes announced in early May have produced no noticeable benefit.

The changes included giving higher priority to asylum-seekers who have been trying the app longest and making appointments available throughout the day instead of all at once, which created mad rushes.

"We have more than a month trying and there are people here nine days, four days, and they get their appointments," she said.

Melchor said returning to her hometown in the Mexican state of Guerrero wasn't an option. Criminals blocked exits and entrances and she had to escape. If the mobile app doesn't work, she is prepared to wait, though she said Tijuana is unsafe.

Spagat reported from Tijuana, Mexico.

3 dead, 2 missing after family fishing trip in Alaska becomes a nightmare

By STEFANIE DAZIO and BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — An Alaska fishing adventure became a nightmare for a family of eight when disaster struck one of the two boats they chartered over the Memorial Day weekend, leaving three people dead and two more missing despite a desperate search over hundreds of square miles of ocean.

The tragedy tore the Tyau family apart: Two sisters and one of their husbands are dead, while the other's partner and the boat captain remain missing off southeast Alaska four days after the boat was found partially submerged off an island.

Authorities suspended a more than 20-hour search covering 825 square miles (2,100 square kilometers) on Monday and have no plans to resume it.

The women's parents, older brother and sister-in-law were on the other charter boat as part of a three-day trip to a destination fishery known for king salmon and groundfish.

The sisters and their sister-in-law didn't like fishing but joined the vacation to spend more time with a family that was usually split between Hawaii and Los Angeles.

"It was just supposed to be a simple family get-together for eight of us, since we haven't been together in the same spot for so long," Michael Tyau, the older brother, told The Associated Press on Thursday. "For it to turn out like this is really devastating."

The Tyau siblings — Michael, Brandi and Danielle — grew up fishing in Hawaii with their parents. Michael Tyau said his sisters hated being cold and wet but would endure it for their water-loving parents and later their partners.

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Brandi Tyau's longtime partner, Robert Solis — a Navy diver-turned-private investigator who was stationed in Hawaii when they met decades ago — was someone for whom "the ocean really was his life," one of Solis' brothers said.

So when the Tyau siblings' mother suggested a family trip last year, a fishing vacation in the Sitka Sound won out.

"My sisters, I think, reluctantly agreed," Michael Tyau said.

He and his wife flew from Los Angeles to Alaska on Thursday with Brandi Tyau, 56, and Solis, 61. They met up with their parents, sister Danielle Agcaoili, 53, and her husband, 57-year-old Maury Agcaoili, all Hawaii residents.

The whole family stayed in a lodge owned by charter boat company Kingfisher Charters in Sitka. The small port city with a backdrop of a stunning volcanic mountain is located on the shore of Baranof Island, which is part of a cluster of islands dripping off Alaska's southeast coastline.

The area is a "premier fishing destination" for tourists because the many bays and passageways created by the islands provide protection from the wind and waves on days when the open sea is too rough, Kingfisher Charters says on its website.

Forrest Braden, executive director of the Southeast Alaska Guides Organization, said anglers often stay for multiple days on trips to the region.

"It's more of a fishing-themed trip for a lot of people, rather than being one of a variety of activities that they do," he said.

The boats the Tyau clan chartered, named the Pockets and the Awakin, set out Friday amid rough conditions. Michael Tyau said his sisters and wife spent the day's voyage seasick in the two boats' cabins and skipped Saturday's trip to recover on land.

When Sunday dawned, their last vacation day before Monday flights home, the women rejoined the boats.

Danielle Agcaoili said "she didn't want to let anybody down," Michael Tyau recalled through tears.

The boat captains opted for different fishing spots. Aboard the Pockets, Michael Tyau said he "in no way felt in jeopardy, like this wasn't safe for us to fish in."

The Pockets returned to the lodge Sunday evening, but the family began worrying when Brandi Tyau, Danielle Agcaoili, Maury Agcaoili and Solis didn't respond to text messages and never arrived for dinner.

The Awakin hadn't come back, the charter company told Michael Tyau, and they lost radio contact with the captain, 32-year-old Morgan Robidou.

What happened aboard the Awakin on Sunday remains unclear. Efforts to recover the 30-foot (9-meter) aluminum vessel have been hampered by rough seas and strong winds.

The bodies of Brandi Tyau and Danielle Agcaoili were found inside the cabin. Maury Agcaoili's body was discovered near the boat. Solis and Robidou were still considered missing Thursday.

The boat was last seen Sunday afternoon near Sitka, authorities said, but around 7 p.m. Sunday was found partially submerged off Low Island, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) west of Sitka.

Coast Guard investigators are working to determine the timeline and cause of the incident. The area was experiencing 6-foot to 11-foot (1.8- to 3.35-meter) waves, a Coast Guard spokesperson said.

Kingfisher Charters declined to respond to questions outside a statement released Wednesday saying the company is "devastated by the loss of the guests and captain of the Awakin" and is fully cooperating with an investigation it hopes "furnishes answers to the questions as to how it occurred."

For the Tyau family, it's too late. The deaths of Brandi Tyau, the reserved middle child who was a calming influence on Solis, and Danielle Agcaoili, the happy-go-lucky baby of the family who was often called "Dani," has been devastating.

Brandi Tyau and Solis leave behind one son together, as well as Solis' three sons from a previous relationship. The Agcaoilis have two children, one of whom just graduated from high school.

The family's vacation was meant for them to enjoy a holiday weekend away and bridge the gap between their homes in Hawaii and Los Angeles.

"I don't think all eight of us have been together in over 10 years," Michael Tyau said.

Now, only four are left.

Dazio reported from Los Angeles. Associated Press News Researcher Randy Herschaft in New York contributed.

Some trans people turn to crowdfunding to leave Florida after anti-LGBTQ+ laws

By THALIA BEATY Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Dozens of transgender people in Florida have turned to crowdfunding appeals to help them leave the state after the passage of new legislation that targets the LGBTQ+ community, including a law that curtails access to gender-affirming care for adults and bans it for minors.

For Sage Chelf, the decision to leave hardly felt like a choice, but she didn't have the funds to cover a move. The 30-year-old trans woman, who lives in the Orlando area, was nearly out of one medication when she found out the clinic that had been prescribing her hormone therapy was ending all treatment for trans patients.

"I don't want to go back to the person that I was forced to be at the time," Chelf said, of the years before she transitioned in 2021. "It was a very dark time in my life. I would rather just not be alive, I guess, then have to go back to living not trans."

Chelf was among dozens who made an appeal for donations online, saying they needed help to leave Florida in anticipation of or in reaction to a law that took effect May 17. In addition to banning gender-affirming care for transgender minors, the law places new restrictions on adults seeking treatment.

The number of people seeking help online is a fraction of the 94,900 transgender adults estimated to live in Florida by the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law, which looked at state-level, population-based surveys. Many, if not most, will stay.

Not all trans people seek medical interventions. But for those who do, losing access to hormone therapy, or interrupting other care, can be devastating for their mental health. Over time, they can lose some of the sex characteristics generated by the hormones.

Chelf, who works as a leasing agent in Orlando, figured she would need \$2,500 to cover the cost of moving and finding a new job. She was stunned to raise more than \$3,000 online in less than two weeks.

"I was under the impression that no one's going to actually donate, people are going to think I'm just trying to like, get free money," she said.

People have given \$200,000 since January to fundraisers on GoFundMe started by trans people seeking to leave Florida, according to data from the platform. Jalen Drummond, GoFundMe's director of public affairs, said the online fundraising platform saw a 39% increase from April to May in the number of fundraisers created to help trans people leave the state because of the changing laws.

That's still a pittance in terms of overall charitable giving, but it has a big impact for people like Chelf. Such mutual aid helps make up for the overall underfunding of nonprofits that serve the LGBTQ+ community.

A recent study found that those organizations received 0.13% of the \$426 billion in overall charitable giving in 2019, the most recent year that IRS data on donations to tax-exempt organizations was available.

One reason for that low figure is that many nonprofits that primarily serve the LGBTQ+ community are small, grassroots organizations that don't have a lot of fundraising capacity, said Una Osili, associate director for research and international programs at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. She's hopeful that the school's research can be a resource for both donors and nonprofits seeking additional funding.

The report does not look at funds exchanged directly between individuals. However, Elise Colomer-Cheadle, development director for Outright International, said it's likely that the most vulnerable in the LGBTQ+ community — older people, rural residents, immigrants and trans people — do not have their needs met.

"While their movement is the largest it's ever been historically in the last 55 years, it's still not big enough to serve all of the needs of this population against the backdrop of a very well-funded and very hateful opposition," said Colomer-Cheadle, whose organization advocates for the human rights of LGBTQ+ people and populations around the world.

"There's a sense of: The opposition is out for blood and our lives are at stake," she said. "And if we don't step up for ourselves, it's possible that nobody else will. It's a very, very scary time."

The Campaign for Southern Equality, which advocates for the LGBTQ+ community, is providing direct grants of \$500 to the families of transgender minors across the South and to transgender adults in Florida. It is close to reaching its goal of raising \$250,000 in additional funds to distribute this year, said Jasmine Beach-Ferrara, the organization's executive director.

"We are having folks reach out out-of-the-blue, multiple times a week saying, 'Hey, never connected with your organization before. I'm hosting a fundraiser for you tomorrow night thousands of miles from here. I'll send you the money.' That's pretty incredible." Beach-Ferrara said.

Chelf hopes to move to Illinois and move in with her girlfriend. The donations to her GoFundMe have restored her faith in humanity.

"I think everyone's aware of how dire the situation actually is," she said.

Associated Press coverage of philanthropy and nonprofits receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content. For all of AP's philanthropy coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/philanthropy>.

In gun law push, Tennessee governor's office memo says NRA prefers to 'round up mentally ill people'

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI and JONATHAN MATTISE Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee's administration accused the National Rifle Association of wanting to use involuntary commitment laws "to round up mentally ill people and deprive them of other liberties," according to documents drafted by the Republican's staffers as part of their initial attempt to pass a gun control proposal earlier this year.

The memos, provided by Lee's office as part of a public records request, reveal a rare criticism of the powerful gun lobby made by the Republican governor. Lee has previously praised the NRA's efforts to protect the Second Amendment but has since faced opposition from the group as he works to pass gun control legislation in response to a deadly Nashville school shooting that took place in late March.

So far, Lee has proposed keeping firearms away from people who could harm themselves or others. He's currently facing pushback from both the GOP-dominant General Assembly and firearms rights advocacy groups, including the NRA, that are wary of loosening gun laws in ruby red Tennessee. The NRA's opposition is particularly notable because the group was a crucial player in Lee's successful push in 2021 to pass a law that allows people 21 and older to carry handguns without a permit in Tennessee.

That means Lee has been forced to go on the defensive, arguing that what he has proposed is not, in fact, a so-called red flag law like those adopted by other states in the wake of tragedies. Instead, the talking points show he is attempting to sell his proposal as "the most conservative in the nation" and the best plan for "Second Amendment advocates." He also is taking aim at advocates who want to focus on Tennessee laws that allow committing people without their permission if they pose "a substantial likelihood of serious harm" due to a "mental illness or serious emotional disturbance."

"Not only is the NRA's proposal impractical — it would drastically expand the scope of government," one of the memos reads.

In announcing his plan publicly in April, Lee acknowledged the proponents of involuntary commitment, but did not name the NRA.

"Some advocates of the Second Amendment say something called 'involuntary commitment' is the answer, but that would restrict all kinds of constitutional rights, including the Second Amendment," Lee said

at the time. "It's not the best way."

Speaking with reporters on Wednesday, House Speaker Cameron Sexton further lowered expectations that Lee's proposal has a chance to pass, saying he doesn't think he and fellow Republican lawmakers support red-flag-esque laws. He said some other areas of policy could be considered: involuntary commitment, more mental health in-patient beds, better database updating for background checks, a new state-level offense beyond the federal law prohibiting felons from having a certain amount of ammunition, and broadening state law so more types of violent threats could be considered a crime.

"When you look at what the NRA is saying, is you currently have laws on the books — emergency, involuntary commitment," Sexton told The Associated Press on Wednesday. "And so, use what you have."

The governor initially unveiled his legislation just weeks after six people — including three young children — were killed in a Nashville school shooting. Lee's wife, Maria, was friends with the head of the school and a substitute teacher who were among those killed.

Despite Lee's urging for lawmakers to pass his proposal, GOP leaders have resisted. The Legislature adjourned without taking up the issue in April, but Lee has since called them to come back to address the matter in late August.

The documents reviewed by AP show that Lee's administration drafted the talking points in April. They tout the governor's proposal as "more targeted and more limited" than what the NRA currently supports. It's unclear where the memos were circulated or how many people outside Lee's office received them.

In the memo, Lee's office wrote that the NRA's plan "does not get at the heart of the problem, as it fails to address unstable individuals who suffer from mental health issues but do not qualify for involuntary commitment to a facility."

"Gov. Lee believes the best path forward is practical, thoughtful solutions to keep communities safe and protect constitutional rights," his spokesperson, Jade Byers, said in an emailed statement. "He looks forward to speaking with key stakeholders, including the NRA, and working with legislators on proposals in the months ahead."

In an April memo, the NRA's lobbying arm urged its supporters to oppose Lee's plan. The group noted that "Tennessee already has broad civil commitment laws" and added that the state could improve access to emergency mental health services.

Asked about the governor's office talking points about their group, NRA spokesperson Amy Hunter didn't address the claims, saying in a statement that the group is focused on "preserving and advancing the rights of law-abiding gun owners in Tennessee."

IMF says Sri Lanka's economic recovery shows signs of improvement but challenges remain

By BHARATHA MALLAWARACHI Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Debt-stricken Sri Lanka, which declared bankruptcy last year, is showing signs of economic improvement but its recovery still faces challenges, the International Monetary Fund said Friday.

The Indian Ocean island nation declared bankruptcy in April 2022 and said it was suspending repayment of its foreign debt. It reached an agreement with the IMF in March on a nearly \$3 billion bailout program over four years.

"Sri Lanka's economy is showing tentative signs of improvement, in part due to the implementation of critical policy actions. But the economic recovery remains challenging," said IMF deputy managing director Kenji Okamura after concluding a visit to Sri Lanka, where he met with the country's top leaders and officials.

Okamura said he welcomed Sri Lankan authorities' "strong commitment to implement their ambitious economic program, which is supported by the IMF."

IMF previously said Sri Lanka's economy is expected to resume growing in 2024 after contracting 3% this year. The expected economic growth of 1.5% next year hinges critically on the economic reforms Sri

Lanka has agreed to undertake.

"Now, more than ever, it is essential to continue the reform momentum under strong ownership by both the authorities and the Sri Lankan people," Okamura said in a statement early Friday.

Sri Lanka's foreign debt exceeds \$51 billion, of which \$28 billion must be repaid by 2027. Sri Lanka has now started negotiations with its creditors on debt restructuring.

"The current economic crisis has its genesis in policy missteps aggravated by external shocks. We discussed the importance of fiscal measures, in particular revenue measures, for a return to macroeconomic stability. I was encouraged by the authorities' commitment to negotiate a debt strategy in a timely and transparent manner. Continued open dialogue with the creditors will help to reach restructuring agreements to restore debt sustainability in line with the program targets," Okamura said.

Sri Lanka's economic crisis and resultant shortages of essentials sparked riots last year, forcing then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country and later resign.

Unsustainable debt, a severe balance of payment crisis on top of lingering scars of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the government's insistence on spending scarce foreign reserves to prop up the Sri Lankan rupee, led to a severe shortage of foreign currency and essentials such as fuel, medicine, cooking gas and food.

Although there are some signs of progress — with shortages reduced and day-to-day functions restored — under current President Ranil Wickremesinghe, the government is still struggling to find money to pay its employees and conduct other administrative functions.

There's been growing public dissatisfaction over the government's recent move to increase taxes and electricity bills that came as part of the commitment to obtain the bailout package from the IMF.

The government announced 6% cuts in the budgets of each ministry this year and plans to nearly halve the size of the military, which had swelled to more than 200,000 personnel due to a long civil war that ended in 2009.

New details of Jeffrey Epstein's death and the frantic aftermath revealed in records obtained by AP

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two weeks before ending his life, Jeffrey Epstein sat in the corner of his Manhattan jail cell with his hands over his ears, desperate to muffle the sound of a toilet that wouldn't stop running.

Epstein was agitated and unable to sleep, jail officials observed in records newly obtained by The Associated Press. He called himself a "coward" and complained he was struggling to adapt to life behind bars following his July 2019 arrest on federal sex trafficking and conspiracy charges — his life of luxury reduced to a concrete and steel cage.

The disgraced financier was under psychological observation at the time for a suicide attempt just days earlier that left his neck bruised and scraped. Yet, even after a 31-hour stint on suicide watch, Epstein insisted he wasn't suicidal, telling a jail psychologist he had a "wonderful life" and "would be crazy" to end it.

On Aug. 10, 2019, Epstein was dead.

Nearly four years later, the AP has obtained more than 4,000 pages of documents related to Epstein's death from the federal Bureau of Prisons under the Freedom of Information Act. They include a detailed psychological reconstruction of the events leading to Epstein's suicide, as well as his health history, internal agency reports, emails, memos and other records.

Taken together, the documents the AP obtained Thursday provide the most complete accounting to date of Epstein's detention and death, and its chaotic aftermath. The records help to dispel the many conspiracy theories surrounding Epstein's suicide, underscoring how fundamental failings at the Bureau of Prisons — including severe staffing shortages and employees cutting corners — contributed to Epstein's death.

They shed new light on the federal prison agency's muddled response after Epstein was found unresponsive in his cell at the now-shuttered Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York City.

In one email, a prosecutor involved in Epstein's criminal case complained about a lack of information

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from the Bureau of Prisons in the critical hours after his death, writing that it was "frankly unbelievable" that the agency was issuing public press releases "before telling us basic information so that we can relay it to his attorneys who can relay it to his family."

In another email, a high-ranking Bureau of Prisons official made a spurious suggestion to the agency's director that news reporters must have been paying jail employees for information about Epstein's death because they were reporting details of the agency's failings — impugning the ethics of journalists and the agency's own workers.

The documents also provide a fresh window into Epstein's behavior during his 36 days in jail, including his previously unreported attempt to connect by mail with another high-profile pedophile: Larry Nassar, the U.S. gymnastics team doctor convicted of sexually abusing scores of athletes.

Epstein's letter to Nassar was found returned to sender in the jail's mail room weeks after Epstein's death. "It appeared he mailed it out and it was returned back to him," the investigator who found the letter told a prison official by email. "I am not sure if I should open it or should we hand it over to anyone?"

The letter itself was not included among the documents turned over to the AP.

The night before Epstein's death, he excused himself from a meeting with his lawyers to make a telephone call to his family. According to a memo from a unit manager, Epstein told a jail employee that he was calling his mother, who'd been dead for 15 years at that point.

Epstein's death put increased scrutiny on the Bureau of Prisons and led the agency to close the Metropolitan Correctional Center in 2021. It spurred an AP investigation that has uncovered deep, previously unreported problems within the agency, the Justice Department's largest with more than 30,000 employees, 158,000 inmates and an \$8 billion annual budget.

An internal memo, undated but sent after Epstein's death, attributed problems at the jail to "seriously reduced staffing levels, improper or lack of training, and follow up and oversight." The memo also detailed steps the Bureau of Prisons has taken to remedy lapses Epstein's suicide exposed, including requiring supervisors to review surveillance video to ensure officers made required cell checks.

Epstein's lawyer, Martin Weinberg, said people detained at the facility endured "medieval conditions of confinement that no American defendant should have been subjected to."

"It's sad, it's tragic, that it took this kind of event to finally cause the Bureau of Prisons to close this regrettable institution," Weinberg said Thursday in a phone interview.

The workers tasked with guarding Epstein the night he killed himself, Tova Noel and Michael Thomas, were charged with lying on prison records to make it seem as though they had made their required checks before Epstein was found lifeless. Epstein's cellmate did not return after a court hearing the day before, and prison officials failed to pair another prisoner with him, leaving him alone.

Prosecutors alleged they were sitting at their desks just 15 feet (4.6 meters) from Epstein's cell, shopped online for furniture and motorcycles, and walked around the unit's common area instead of making required rounds every 30 minutes.

During one two-hour period, both appeared to have been asleep, according to their indictment. Noel and Thomas admitted to falsifying the log entries but avoided prison time under a deal with federal prosecutors. Copies of some of those logs were included among the documents released Thursday, with the guards' signatures redacted.

Another investigation, by the Justice Department's inspector general, is still ongoing.

Epstein arrived at the Metropolitan Correctional Center on July 6, 2019. He spent 22 hours in the jail's general population before officials moved him to the special housing unit "due to the significant increase in media coverage and awareness of his notoriety among the inmate population," according to the psychological reconstruction of his death.

Epstein later said he was upset about having to wear an orange jumpsuit provided to inmates in the special housing unit and complained about being treated like he was a "bad guy" despite being well behaved behind bars. He requested a brown uniform for his near-daily visits with his lawyers.

During an initial health screening, the 66-year-old said that he had 10-plus female sexual partners within the previous five years. Medical records showed he was suffering from sleep apnea, constipation, hyper-

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tension, lower back pain and prediabetes and had been previously treated for chlamydia.

Epstein did make some attempts to adapt to his jailhouse surroundings, the records show. He signed up for a Kosher meal and told prison officials, through his lawyer, that he wanted permission to exercise outside. Two days before he was found dead, Epstein bought \$73.85 worth of items from the prison commissary, including an AM/FM radio and headphones. He had \$566 left in his account when he died.

Epstein's outlook worsened when a judge denied him bail on July 18, 2019 — raising the prospect that he'd remain locked up until trial and, possibly longer. If convicted, he faced up to 45 years prison. Four days later, Epstein was found on the floor of his cell with a strip of bedsheet around his neck.

Epstein survived. His injuries didn't require going to the hospital. He was placed on suicide watch and, later, psychiatric observation. Jail officers noted in logs that they observed him, "sitting at the edge of the bed, lost in thought," and sitting "with his head against the wall."

Epstein expressed frustration with the noise of the jail and his lack of sleep. His first few weeks at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, Epstein didn't have his sleep apnea breathing apparatus he used. Then, the toilet in his cell started acting up.

"He was still left in the same cell with a broken toilet," the jail's chief psychologist wrote in a email the next day. "Please move him to the cell next door when he returns from legal as the toilet still does not work."

The day before Epstein ended his life, a federal judge unsealed about 2,000 pages of documents in a sexual abuse lawsuit against him. That development, prison officials observed, further eroded Epstein's previous elevated status.

That, combined with a lack of significant interpersonal connections and "the idea of potentially spending his life in prison were likely factors contributing to Mr. Epstein's suicide," officials wrote.

Associated Press writers Sarah Brumfield in Silver Spring, Maryland, Ben Finley in Norfolk, Virginia, Sam Metz in Salt Lake City, Jake Offenhartz and David B. Caruso in New York, Russ Bynum in Savannah, Georgia, Gene Johnson in Seattle and Brooke Schultz in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.

Jokic gets triple-double, Nuggets roll past Heat 104-93 in Game 1 of NBA Finals

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

DENVER (AP) — Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets were facing some questions going into their first NBA Finals, and their answers came in resounding fashion.

No, a week and a half off didn't hurt them.

And no, the NBA's biggest stage isn't too big, either.

Jokic got a triple-double in his finals debut, Jamal Murray scored 26 points and the Nuggets had little trouble with the cold-shooting Miami Heat on the way to a 104-93 win in Game 1 on Thursday night.

"I think that's what the beauty of this team is," Murray said. "We have so many different weapons and so many different looks. You've got to guard everybody. ... Free-flowing, and it's a lot of fun."

The Heat had been 3-0 in openers so far in these playoffs, all on the road, but Denver is still unbeaten at home. Game 1 winners in the finals go on to win the title nearly 70% of the time.

Advantage, Nuggets.

"That was one of my last messages to the group before our game," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "I reminded our group, if they didn't know, that Miami went into Milwaukee and won Game 1. They went into the Garden in New York City and won Game 1. They won Game 1 up in Boston. So, we did not want them coming in here taking control of the series on our court."

Jokic was the one in control. The two-time NBA MVP finished with 27 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds for the Nuggets, who waited 47 years to make the finals and didn't disappoint.

"The most important thing is to win a game," Jokic said after his ninth triple-double of this year's playoffs — his sixth in his last seven games. "I'm trying to win a game in any possible way."

Aaron Gordon added 16 points and Michael Porter Jr. scored 14 for Denver, which trailed for all of 34

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seconds and eventually led by as many as 24.

Bam Adebayo finished with 26 points and 13 rebounds for Miami, which shot 41% for the game — 33% from 3-point range. Gabe Vincent scored 19, Haywood Highsmith had 18 and Jimmy Butler added 13 for the Heat.

Miami was 2 for 2 from the foul line — a night like none other in NBA playoff history.

It tied the fewest free throws ever made in a playoff game, broke the record for fewest attempts from the line in a playoff game — the previous record was three — and set NBA Finals records for fewest free throws made and attempted. The Los Angeles Lakers had the previous marks there, going 3 for 5 from the line against Philadelphia on May 26, 1983.

"We've got to attack the rim a lot more, myself included," Butler said.

Added Adebayo, tongue firmly in cheek: "We made history"

Game 2 is in Denver on Sunday night.

Miami opened the fourth quarter on an 11-0 run, cutting an 84-63 deficit to start the final period down to 84-74. The Heat actually got within nine on a 3-pointer by Highsmith with 2:34 left, but no closer and there wasn't any doubt, either.

"It's a long series," Vincent said. "First to four wins. Adjustments will be made. And we will learn from this loss."

Malone gave his team a pop quiz in shootaround Thursday morning, peppering them with questions about the game plan and what had to be done in the most important game to date in franchise history.

They had all the answers then. Had them all at game time, too. They were the team with minimal NBA Finals experience, only two players having been to the title round before, and yet they looked right at home before the home crowd in Game 1.

"We were ready," Denver guard Bruce Brown said.

Jokic became the second player in the last 25 years — LeBron James was the other, in 2017 — to have 10 assists by halftime of a finals game. He had 10 points and 10 assists by the break, and Denver was up 59-42 after the first two quarters — with Jokic taking only three shots.

"I don't need to shoot and I know I don't need to score to affect the game," Jokic said.

Meanwhile, the Heat just couldn't shoot. At all. Or at least, not until Denver was too far ahead to catch.

Caleb Martin, who narrowly missed out on winning the MVP award of the Eastern Conference finals, was 1 for 7. And Max Strus was 0 for 10, 0 for 9 on 3-pointers, and became just the second player in the last 45 years to take that many shots without a make in a finals game.

The other, somewhat surprisingly: Ray Allen, a past Heat finals hero who was 0 for 13 for Boston against the Los Angeles Lakers in 2010.

"I didn't even look at the box score yet, but like I said, I think the disposition, the efforts were more appropriate in the second half," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "But that's not enough. It has to be for a full game, and you also have to make some plays when you're beat."

TIP-INS

Heat: Miami fell to 1-6 all-time in Game 1s of the NBA Finals. The Heat lost the series opener in each of their title years — 2006, 2012 and 2013 — and the only win came in 2011, a series they eventually lost to Dallas. ... Adebayo's 25 shots were a career high. He became the third player to score at least 24 points for Miami in a Game 1 of a finals. James did it three times for the Heat and Dwyane Wade did it in 2006.

Nuggets: Jokic became the eighth player to have a triple-double in Game 1 of a finals. None of the others were accompanied by 27 points; Dave Cowens had a 25-point triple-double to open the 1976 finals. ... Brown, who played his college ball at Miami, scored 10. ... Denver got to the foul line 20 times.

CELEB WATCH

Among those in the sellout crowd: Grammy winner H.E.R., former Denver quarterback Peyton Manning, current Denver quarterback Russell Wilson, Broncos coach Sean Payton and actor-comedian Ken Jeong.

Iowa officials expected to detail demolition plans for partially collapsed building

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE, HANNAH FINGERHUT and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Plans to demolish a partially collapsed six-story apartment building in Iowa could become clearer Friday, five days after much of the structure crumbled and left three tenants missing and feared dead.

Davenport Mayor Mike Matson said Thursday he expected to announce a company “to do a very systematic approach to this building, on how to remove things at certain times.”

It is a difficult task because officials have said the remains of the building have continued to shift since part of the structure sheared off on Sunday, leaving an unstable building that eventually will collapse on its own. Adding to the challenge is a giant pile of brick and steel at the base of the building that is helping to hold up the structure but also may contain the remains of people killed in the collapse.

Matson has said the debris pile “could be a place of rest for some of the unaccounted” and insisted the city would be sensitive about those remains, comparing work at the site to an archeological dig.

Work to bring down the building comes amid questions about why neither the owner nor city officials warned residents even after a structural engineer’s report issued last week indicated a wall of the century-old apartment building was at imminent risk of crumbling.

The revelation was the latest flashpoint following the partial collapse that has left some residents upset with city leaders over what they see as an inept response.

“Do I have regrets about this tragedy and about people potentially losing their lives? Hell yeah. Do I think about this every moment? Hell yeah.” Matson said Thursday. “I have regrets about a lot of things. Believe me, we’re going to look at that.”

City officials said Thursday that they did not order an evacuation because they relied on the engineer’s assurances that the building remained safe.

The state’s search and rescue team, search dogs and cameras were used Thursday to continue combing the building for missing people.

The building collapsed shortly before 5 p.m. Sunday. Rescue crews pulled seven people from the building in their initial response and escorted out 12 others who could walk on their own. Later, two more people were rescued, including a woman who was removed from the fourth floor hours after authorities said they were going to begin setting up for demolition.

Earlier this week, authorities said five people were missing. But Davenport Police Chief Jeff Bladel said during a media briefing Thursday morning that two of them have since been accounted for and are safe.

City officials named those unaccounted for as Brandon Colvin, Ryan Hitchcock and Daniel Prien. The city said all three “have high probability of being home at the time of the collapse, and their apartments were located in the collapse zone.”

Bladel said transient people also often enter the building but there was no indication anyone else was inside and missing.

The city announced that each displaced household would be eligible for \$6,000 in addition to a \$5,000 state grant for households up to 200% of the federal poverty level. Money also will be available for businesses in the building and those nearby.

City Administrator Corri Spiegel said the building likely is “filled with asbestos” given its age, and the city will develop a plan to ensure workers and people in the area are protected when the remaining structure is demolished.

Matson said he and others spoke Thursday with government officials from Miami-Dade County, Florida, about how they responded to the collapse of an apartment tower in 2021 that killed 98 people.

The city on Wednesday night released documents, including structural engineering reports, that show city officials and the building’s owner were warned that the parts of the building were unstable.

A report dated May 24, just four days before the collapse, suggested patches in the west side of the

building's brick façade "appear ready to fall imminently" and could be a safety hazard to cars or passersby.

The report also detailed that window openings, some filled and some unfilled, were insecure. In one case, the openings were "bulging outward" and looked "poised to fall." Inside the first floor, unsupported window openings help "explain why the façade is currently about to topple outward."

Despite the warnings, city officials did not order that the estimated 50 tenants leave.

Rich Oswald, the city's director of development and neighborhood services, said officials relied on assurances from the structural engineer hired by the building owner. The engineer said the building wasn't in imminent danger of collapsing.

Andrew Wold, the building's owner, released a statement dated Tuesday saying "our thoughts and prayers are with our tenants" and that his company, Davenport Hotel L.L.C., is working with agencies to help them.

County records show Davenport Hotel L.L.C. acquired the building in 2021 in a deal worth \$4.2 million.

Tenants had complained to the city in recent years about a host of other problems they say were ignored by property managers, including no heat or hot water for weeks or even months at a time, as well as mold and water that leaked through ceilings and toilets. City officials gave orders to vacate some individual apartments and tried to address other complaints, but a broader evacuation was never ordered, records show.

City officials ordered repairs after they found seven fire code violations on Feb. 6. They were told three weeks later by building maintenance officials that "none of the work was completed," records show.

Assistant City Attorney Brian Heyer said he is unaware whether the city had considered earlier civil enforcement action to protect residents. Only after the collapse did the city file a civil infraction seeking a \$300 fine against Wold for failing to maintain the structure in a safe manner. He will be required to pay for the cost of demolition, Heyer said.

Emails and calls to an attorney believed to be representing Wold have not been returned.

Foley reported from Iowa City. Associated Press reporter Summer Ballentine contributed from Jefferson City, Missouri.

Drought, water overuse prompt Arizona to limit construction in some fast-growing parts of Phoenix

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona will not approve new housing construction on the fast-growing edges of metro Phoenix that rely on groundwater thanks to years of overuse and a multi-decade drought that is sapping its water supply.

In a news conference Thursday, Gov. Katie Hobbs announced the restrictions that could affect some of the fastest-growing suburbs of the nation's fifth-largest city.

Officials said developers could still build in the affected areas but would need to find alternative water sources to do so — such as surface or recycled water.

Driving the state's decision was a projection that showed that over the next 100 years, demand in metro Phoenix for almost 4.9 million acre-feet of groundwater would be unmet without further action, Hobbs said. An acre-foot of water is roughly enough for two to three U.S. households per year.

Despite the move, the governor said the state isn't running out of water. "Nobody who has water is going to lose their water," Hobbs said.

Officials said the move would not affect existing homeowners who already have assured water supplies.

Hobbs added that there are 80,000 unbuilt homes that will be able to move forward because they already have assured water supply certificates within the Phoenix Active Management Area, a designation used for regulating groundwater.

Years of drought in the West worsened by climate change have ratcheted up pressure among Western states to use less water. Much of the focus has stayed on the dwindling Colorado River, a main water source for Arizona and six other Western states. Over the past two years, Arizona's supply from the 1,450-mile powerhouse of the West has been cut twice.

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Phoenix relies on imported Colorado River water and also uses water from the in-state Salt and Verde rivers. A small amount of the city's water supply comes from groundwater and recycled wastewater.

The drought has made groundwater — held in underground aquifers that can take many years to be replenished — even more vital.

Under a 1980 state law aimed at protecting the state's aquifers, Phoenix, Tucson and other Arizona cities have restrictions on how much groundwater they can pump. But in rural areas, there are few limitations on its use.

Long pumped by farmers and rural residents in Arizona with little oversight, Hobbs and other state officials recently vowed to take more steps to protect the state's groundwater supplies.

In rapidly growing Phoenix suburbs such as Queen Creek and Buckeye, developers have relied on unallocated groundwater to show that they had adequate water supplies for the next 100 years, which Arizona requires for building permits in some areas.

"Developers rely on groundwater because it has been frankly, cheaper and easier for them, and they have been able to move through the process much more quickly," said Nicole Klobas, chief counsel for the Arizona Department of Water Resources.

Under the new restrictions, that won't be possible.

"It closes off that path," said Kathryn Sorenson, director of research at the Kyl Center for Water Policy at Arizona State University.

Because the rule largely affects cities and towns outside Phoenix and larger cities in the metro area, Sorenson said developers would likely "weigh whether they want to continue to buy relatively cheap land ... and incur the cost of developing a whole new water supply versus purchase land that is probably more expensive without the boundaries of a designated city."

Naishadham reported from Washington, D.C.

'Shrink the room': How Biden and McCarthy struck a debt-limit deal and staved off a catastrophe

By SEUNG MIN KIM, STEPHEN GROVES and FARNOUSH AMIRI The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It was advice that Mitch McConnell had offered to Joe Biden once already: To resolve the debt-limit standoff, he needed to strike a deal with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy — and McCarthy alone. But after a first meeting of the top four congressional leaders with the president in early May, the Senate minority leader felt the need to reemphasize his counsel.

After returning from the White House that day, McConnell called the president to privately urge him to "shrink the room" — meaning no direct involvement in the talks for himself, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

That, McConnell stressed to Biden, was the only way to avert a potentially economy-rattling default.

A week later, Biden and McCarthy essentially adopted that path, tapping a handful of trusted emissaries to negotiate a deal that would lift the debt limit. It was a turning point in an impasse that until then, seemed intractable.

Having lived through the debacle of a 2011 debt-limit fight, Biden would not entertain any concessions for a task that he viewed as Congress' fundamental responsibility. But McCarthy, prodded by conservatives insisting on sweeping changes to federal spending, was intent on using the nation's borrowing authority as leverage even if it edged the U.S. closer to default.

The scramble that ensued showed how two of the most powerful figures in Washington — who share a belief in the power of personal relationships, despite not having much of one between themselves — jointly staved off an unprecedented default that could have ravaged the economy and held unknown political consequences. It's a tale of an underestimated House speaker determined to defy expectations that he couldn't address a complex debt-limit fight, and a president who tuned out the noise from his own party to ensure a default would not happen on his watch.

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But it was also a standoff largely instigated by Republicans who argued they needed to use the debt limit threat as a cudgel to rein in federal spending. And even with a resounding 314-117 House vote — followed by a 63-36 Senate vote — the episode is testing the durability of McCarthy's speakership and his ability to tame a restive hard-right flank.

'HOW YOU FINISH'

McCarthy, now emboldened, is unfazed.

He reflected back on his election as speaker after the House passed the debt-limit package, referring to his long battle to claim the gavel in January. "Every question you gave me (was), what could we survive, what could we even do? I told you then, it's not how you start, it's how you finish."

This account of the weeks-long saga of how Washington defused the debt-limit crisis is based on interviews with lawmakers, senior White House officials and top congressional aides, some who requested anonymity to discuss details of private negotiations.

Perhaps most critical to clearing the blockades were Biden and McCarthy's five negotiators who came to the discussions armed with policy gravitas and empowered by their principals. Particularly comforting to Republicans was the presence of presidential counselor Steve Ricchetti, who speaks on behalf of Biden like no one else, and Shalanda Young, now the director of the Office and Management and Budget, who cut her teeth as a beloved senior congressional aide managing the complex annual appropriations process.

Young and Rep. Patrick McHenry of North Carolina, one of McCarthy's negotiators, grew so close that they checked in each morning by phone as they did their respective day care dropoffs. Meanwhile, she and the other GOP negotiator, Rep. Garret Graves, who represents the south central part of Louisiana where Young hails from, ribbed each other over who had the better gumbo recipe and squeezed in debt-limit talks during a White House celebration for the national champion Louisiana State University women's basketball team.

The five negotiators — Graves, McHenry, Ricchetti, Young and legislative affairs director Louisa Terrell — met daily in a stately office on the first floor of the Capitol, under frescoes painted by the 19th century muralist Constantino Brumidi. Inside, they would home in with seriousness on priorities and red lines to figure out how they could reach a deal.

THE PAUSE BUTTON AND A 'REGRESSIVE' OFFER

By May 19, the negotiations were getting shaky.

Republicans were losing patience as the White House didn't appear to be budging on curbing federal spending. For the GOP, anything short of that was a nonstarter.

During a morning meeting that Friday, White House officials pushed McHenry and Graves to put a formal offer on the table, but by that point, the frustrated Republicans decided to take it all public.

Republicans told reporters the talks had momentarily stopped. Graves, in a ball cap and blue button-up shirt that looked more apt for a fishing trip than high-stakes dealmaking, said as he walked briskly through the Capitol: "We decided to press pause because it's just not productive,"

"We were not going to play games here," Graves recounted later of his and McHenry's frustrations.

The friction wasn't about to ease. When the negotiations reconvened that night, McHenry and Graves put forward a fresh proposal to administration officials: It not only revived more of the rejected provisions in the GOP's debt-limit bill, but also included the House Republicans' border-security bill for good measure.

One White House official called the offer "regressive."

The White House went public with its own frustrations as the negotiations seemed to be going awry, first with a lengthy statement from communications director Ben LaBolt and then from Biden himself at a news conference in Hiroshima, Japan, where he was attending a summit of the world's leading democracies.

"Now it's time for the other side to move their extreme positions," the president said. "Because much of what they've already proposed is simply, quite frankly, unacceptable."

OPTIMISM, LATE NIGHTS AND GUMMY WORMS

Even as the public rhetoric sharpened, there were signs that the talks were starting to take a better turn. As Biden left Japan, he called McCarthy from Air Force One, and the speaker emerged appearing more

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optimistic than he had in days. Sustained by coffee, gummy worms and burritos, the negotiators worked grueling hours, mostly at the Capitol but once at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, where they noshed on Call Your Mother bagel sandwiches sent over by Jeff Zients, the White House chief of staff.

One session lasted until 2:30 a.m. Graves, at another time, showed reporters an app on his phone that tracked his sleep, which showed he was averaging three hours a night during the final stretch.

Still, McCarthy sent lawmakers home over the Memorial Day weekend, which McHenry said helped.

"The tone of the White House negotiators became much more serious and much more grounded in the realities they were going to have to accept," McHenry said.

SELLING THE DEAL

By May 27, Biden and McCarthy announced a deal in principle, and now had to sell the agreement in earnest.

The night before the vote, McCarthy gathered House Republicans in the basement of the Capitol, wheeled in pizza and walked lawmakers through the bill, while daring the Freedom Caucus members to use the same confrontational language they used at a news conference earlier in the day. By the time the meeting ended, it was clear McCarthy had subdued the revolt.

Meanwhile, the White House had work of its own to mollify rank-and-file Democrats.

Biden and McCarthy were a study in contrasting styles. The speaker chatted about the debt-limit talks at every turn throughout the negotiations to frame the debate on his terms; the president stayed silent by design, leery of fouling anything up before the deal was finalized.

Even as the deal was coming together, Biden had been privately trying to assuage his party's concerns. After the Congressional Progressive Caucus publicly eviscerated the few details that they knew of, particularly about toughening requirements for federal safety-net programs, Rep. Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., got a call that night.

It was Biden. He assured her that his negotiators were working hard to minimize Republican-drafted changes to programs that offer food stamps and cash assistance.

"I do believe that had we not done that, this would have been much worse than what I heard," Jayapal said.

After the deal was finalized, through phone calls and virtual briefings, White House officials answered questions, explained the agreement's intricacies and fielded complaints from lawmakers about their communications strategy. As of Thursday, senior White House officials had called more than 130 lawmakers personally.

Biden himself got on the phone. On one call, he spoke with Rep. Annie Kuster, D-N.H., the leader of the center-left New Democrats Coalition, and thanked her for the group's efforts to ensure the deal would pass.

"I appreciate that he knows this institution so well, and that he understands what it takes to deliver these votes to get us across the line and to uphold the full faith and credit of the United States of America," Kuster said. "We all took an oath."

Late Wednesday night, as the House voted its approval with significant bipartisan support, Biden watched from the Cheyenne Mountain Resort in Colorado Springs, where he had traveled to for a commencement address at the Air Force Academy. On the phone with Biden throughout were Ricchetti and Terrell, who were listening in from the West Wing with other legislative aides, munching on more pizza.

In a statement after the vote, Biden sounded thankful — and relieved.

"Tonight, the House took a critical step forward to prevent a first-ever default and protect our country's hard-earned and historic economic recovery," he said. "This budget agreement is a bipartisan compromise. Neither side got everything it wanted. That's the responsibility of governing."

Then the Senate labored toward its own vote. It passed the bill Thursday night.

AP Congressional Correspondent Lisa Mascaro and AP White House Correspondent Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Jordan's crown prince weds scion of Saudi family in ceremony packed with stars and symbolism

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) — Jordan's crown prince married the scion of a prominent Saudi family on Thursday in a palace ceremony attended by royals and other VIPs from around the world, as massive crowds gathered across the kingdom to celebrate the region's newest power couple.

The marriage of Crown Prince Hussein, 28, and Saudi architect Rajwa Alseif, 29, drew a star-studded guest list including Britain's Prince William and his wife Kate, as well as U.S. First Lady Jill Biden.

The celebrations hold deep significance for the region, emphasizing continuity in an Arab state prized for its longstanding stability and refreshing the monarchy's image after a palace feud. It even could help resource-poor Jordan forge a strategic bond with its oil-rich neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

The bride, wearing an elegant white dress by Lebanese designer Elie Saab, arrived at Zahran Palace in a 1968 Rolls-Royce Phantom V custom-made for the crown prince's late great grandmother. The crown prince arrived earlier in full ceremonial military uniform with a gold-hilted saber.

The families and their guests gathered in an open-air gazebo decked with flowers and surrounded by landscaped gardens for a traditional Muslim wedding ceremony known as "katb al-ketab." The crowd erupted in applause after the signing of the marriage contract. Alseif will henceforth be known as Her Royal Highness Princess Rajwa Al Hussein, according to a royal decree.

Several miles away, a jolt went through a packed ancient Roman amphitheater as viewers watched the couple seal their vows and exchange rings on a wide screen. After several minutes of stillness, the crowd of some 18,000 people were on their feet, waving flags and shrieking with excitement at one of several viewing parties held across the nation.

Samara Aqrabawi, a 55-year-old mother watching the livestream with her young daughter, said the ceremony was more impressive than she imagined. "I wish for all mothers and fathers in Jordan and in the world to feel like they're surely feeling," she said of the king and queen.

The newlyweds later emerged from the palace in a white custom Range Rover escorted by several bright red Land Rovers, motorcycles and a military marching band — a nod to the traditional horse-mounted processions during the reign of the country's founder, King Abdullah I.

The kingdom declared Thursday a public holiday so crowds of people could gather to wave at the couple's motorcade amid a heavy security presence across the city. Tens of thousands of well-wishers attended free concerts and cultural events.

On Thursday morning, Saudi wedding guests and tourists — the men wearing white dishdasha robes and the women in brightly colored abayas — filtered through the marbled lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel in Amman. Noura Al Sudairi, an aunt of the bride, was wearing sweatpants and sneakers on her way to breakfast.

"We are all so excited, so happy about this union," she said. "Of course it's a beautiful thing for our families, and for the relationship between Jordan and Saudi Arabia."

Excitement over the nuptials — Jordan's biggest royal event in decades — has been building in the capital of Amman, where congratulatory banners of Hussein and his beaming bride adorn buses and hang over winding hillside streets. Shops had competing displays of royal regalia.

"She looks like such a princess that I think she deserves him," Suhair Afaneh, a 37-year-old businesswoman, said of the bride, lingering in front of a portrait of Hussein in a dark suit. "But so what, I'll still be in love with him."

She contemplated buying Hussein's portrait to hang in her bedroom but her nieces persuaded her that her husband might not approve.

Jordan's 11 million residents have watched the young crown prince rise in prominence in recent years, as he increasingly joined his father, Abdullah, in public appearances. Hussein has graduated from Georgetown University, joined the military and gained some global recognition speaking at the U.N. General Assembly. His wedding, experts say, marks his next crucial rite of passage.

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"It's not just a marriage, it's the presentation of the future king of Jordan," said political analyst Amer Sabaileh. "The issue of the crown prince has been closed."

The wedding may create a brief feel-good moment for Jordanians during tough economic times, including persistent youth unemployment and an ailing economy.

Palace officials have turned the event — a week after Jordan's 77th birthday — into something of a PR campaign. Combining tradition and modernity, the royal family introduced a wedding hashtag (#Celebrating Al Hussein) and omnipresent logo that fuses the couple's initials into the Arabic words "We rejoice."

Zahran Palace in Amman, where the marriage ceremony was held, hasn't seen such pomp and circumstance since 1993, when, on a similarly sunny June day, Abdullah married Rania, who was born in Kuwait to Palestinian parents. Decades earlier, Abdullah's father, the late King Hussein, sealed his vows in the same garden with his second wife, the British citizen Antoinette Gardiner.

In addition to the Prince and Princess of Wales, the guest list includes an array of foreign aristocrats and dignitaries, including senior royals from Europe and Asia, as well as U.S. climate envoy John Kerry. Other likely attendees include Saudi aristocrats, as Rajwa's mother comes from the same influential family as the late mother of King Salman. Her billionaire father owns a major construction firm in the kingdom.

Both Rajwa and Kate wore gowns by the Lebanese designer Elie Saab, said a spokeswoman for the company, Maryline Mossino.

The motorcade drove through Amman to the Al Husseiniya Palace, a 30-minute drive away, for the reception. There, the newlyweds walked beneath an arch of swords and were welcomed with a traditional zaffeh, a lively musical procession featuring drums, dancing, singing and clapping.

The royals greeted more than 1,700 guests at the reception, which featured live music and a banquet. The celebrations were capped with a fireworks display that could be seen across the capital.

Experts consider the marriage an advantageous alliance for the Hashemites, historic rivals of the Al Saud family to the east. Jordan has recently sought closer ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab petro-states, which once doled out billions of dollars to the aid-dependent country but since have reined in their spending.

Even as restaurants blared call-and-response Arabic wedding songs and cars honked in celebration downtown, some signaled the royal fairy tale was fraught as Jordanians struggle to make ends meet.

Osama, a 25-year-old bookseller, was thrilled about the occasion and festooned his car and shop windows with portraits of the royal family. But he also knew reality would return quickly.

"Of course, it's joyful," he said, declining to give his last name for fear of reprisals. "But in a couple days, we'll just go back to our problems."

Biden says he got 'sandbagged' after he tripped and fell onstage at Air Force graduation

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (AP) — President Joe Biden quipped that he got "sandbagged" Thursday after he tripped and fell — but was uninjured — while onstage at the U.S. Air Force Academy graduation.

Biden had been greeting the graduates in Colorado Springs, Colorado, at the front of the stage with salutes and handshakes, and turned to jog back toward his seat when he fell. He was helped up by an Air Force officer as well as two members of his U.S. Secret Service detail.

Onlookers, including some members of the official delegation onstage, watched in concern before Biden, who at age 80 is the oldest president in U.S. history, returned to his seat to view the end of the ceremony.

"I got sandbagged," the president told reporters with a smile when he arrived back at the White House on Thursday evening before pretending to jog into the residence. Two small black sandbags had been onstage supporting the teleprompter used by Biden and other speakers at the graduation.

"He's fine," White House communications director Ben LaBolt tweeted after the incident. "There was a sandbag on stage while he was shaking hands."

Biden has been dogged by questions about his age and his fitness to serve, and his missteps have be-

come fodder for political rivals as he campaigns for a second term in 2024. He has stumbled before going up the stairs and onto Air Force One and he once got caught up in his bike pedals while stopping to talk to reporters near his home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

Biden's personal doctor said after the president's most recent physical exam in February that Biden "remains a healthy, vigorous 80-year-old male, who is fit to successfully execute the duties of the Presidency." Dr. Kevin O'Connor also documented the president's stiffened gait, which O'Connor said was the result of spinal arthritis, a previously broken foot and neuropathy in the Biden's feet.

Biden is far from the first national political figure to stumble in public.

President Gerald Ford fell down while walking off Air Force One in 1975. GOP Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, the GOP presidential nominee at the time, fell off the stage at a campaign rally in 1996. President Barack Obama tripped walking up the stairs to a stage at a 2012 event. "I was so fired up, I missed a stair" he told the crowd.

President Donald Trump's gingerly walk down a ramp at the 2020 West Point commencement also sparked concerns about his health.

Trump, 76, was campaigning in Iowa when he heard about Biden's stumble and alluded to his own episode. "He actually fell down? Well I hope he wasn't hurt," Trump said after an audience member told him about what had happened to Biden. "The whole thing is crazy. You gotta be careful about that ... 'cause you don't want that, even if you have to tiptoe down a ramp."

The audience laughed as Trump recounted slowly inching his way down what he said had been a slippery ramp at the U.S. Military Academy graduation.

"If he fell, it's too bad," the former president said. "We gotta just get this thing back on track. That's a bad place to fall when you're making, I think it was the Air Force Academy, right? That's not inspiring."

Meanwhile, GOP presidential candidate and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis used the opportunity to take a political shot at Biden while at a campaign event in New Hampshire.

"We hope and wish Joe Biden a swift recovery from any injuries he may have sustained," he said, "but we also wish the United States of America a swift recovery from the injuries it has sustained because of Joe Biden and his policies."

Woman walking on California beach finds ancient mastodon tooth

APTOS, Calif. (AP) — A woman taking a Memorial Day weekend stroll on a California beach found something unusual sticking out of the sand: a tooth from an ancient mastodon.

But then the fossil vanished, and it took a media blitz and a kind-hearted jogger to find it again.

Jennifer Schuh found the foot-long (.30-meter) tooth sticking out of the sand on Friday at the mouth of Aptos Creek on Rio Del Mar State Beach, located off Monterey Bay in Santa Cruz County on California's central coast.

"I was on one side of the creek and this lady was talking to me on the other side and she said what's that at your feet," Schuh recounted. "It looked kind of weird, like burnt almost."

Schuh wasn't sure what she had found. So she snapped some photos and posted them on Facebook, asking for help.

The answer came from Wayne Thompson, paleontology collections advisor for the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History.

Thompson determined that the object was a worn molar from an adult Pacific mastodon, an extinct elephant-like species.

"This is an extremely important find," Thompson wrote, and he urged Schuh to call him.

But when they went back to the beach, the tooth was gone.

A weekend search failed to find it. Thompson then sent out a social media request for help in finding the artifact. The plea made international headlines.

On Tuesday, Jim Smith of nearby Aptos called the museum.

"I was so excited to get that call," said Liz Broughton, the museum's visitor experience manager. "Jim

told us that he had stumbled upon it during one of his regular jogs along the beach, but wasn't sure of what he had found until he saw a picture of the tooth on the news."

Smith donated the tooth to the museum, where it will be on display Friday through Sunday.

The age of the tooth isn't clear. A museum blog says mastodons generally roamed California from about 5 million to 10,000 years ago.

"We can safely say this specimen would be less than 1 million years old, which is relatively 'new' by fossil standards," Broughton said in an email.

Broughton said it is common for winter storms to uncover fossils in the region and it may have washed down to the ocean from higher up.

Schuh said she is thrilled that her find could help unlock ancient secrets about the peaceful beach area. She didn't keep the tooth, but she did hop on Amazon and order herself a replica mastodon tooth necklace.

"You don't often get to touch something from history," she said.

It's only the third find of a locally recorded mastodon fossil. The museum also has another tooth along with a skull that was found by a teenager in 1980. It was found in the same Aptos Creek that empties into the ocean.

"We are thrilled about this exciting discovery and the implications it holds for our understanding of ancient life in our region," museum Executive Director Felicia B. Van Stolk said in a statement.

Referee Eric Lewis not selected to work NBA Finals while league looks into tweets

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

DENVER (AP) — Eric Lewis was not selected as one of the 12 referees who will work the NBA Finals between the Denver Nuggets and Miami Heat, while the league continues to look into whether he used a Twitter account to defend himself and other officials from online critiques.

Lewis had been chosen to work the finals in each of the last four seasons. This year's finals referees were announced by the league Thursday morning, about 12 hours before the start of the title series.

After some now-deleted tweets were revealed by a pair of Twitter users last week, the league opened an investigation into whether Lewis violated NBA rules by speaking about officiating in an unauthorized manner. It has not been determined if Lewis was using the account, which utilizes the name "blair cuttliff." The account was deactivated briefly last week but was active again Wednesday evening.

"Regarding Eric Lewis and the social media posts, we are continuing to review the matter and he will not be working the finals," NBA spokesman Mike Bass said Thursday.

The league has not revealed a timetable for the completion of its probe into whether Lewis used the Twitter account. It also remains unknown what discipline from the league that Lewis could face if he broke policy by discussing officiating matters openly without approval.

"We decided that given that investigation was ongoing and it remains ongoing, that it wouldn't be appropriate for him to work in these finals," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Thursday night. "I don't know what the ultimate conclusion will be. We'll see where the facts take us."

Of the 12 referees picked for the Nuggets-Heat matchup, nine worked the title series last season. Scott Foster will be a finals referee for the 16th year, while Tony Brothers and Marc Davis were picked for a 12th time. Zach Zarba is now a 10-time selection, John Goble was picked for the seventh time, David Guthrie for the sixth time, Josh Tiven for the fourth and Courtney Kirkland and James Williams are now three-time selections.

Returning to the referee lineup for the finals are Ed Malloy, now an eight-time pick, and Bill Kennedy — picked for the fifth time. The only first-time selection this year is Kevin Scott, who began working NBA games in the 2010-11 season.

Tyler Ford and Ben Taylor have been assigned as finals alternates. Foster has officiated 23 NBA Finals games, followed by Davis (18) and Brothers (15).

"The pinnacle for an NBA official is to work the NBA Finals," said Byron Spruell, the league's president

of basketball operations.

Davis, Guthrie and Malloy worked Game 1 of the series Thursday night. Typically, the 12 referees each get to work one of the first four games of the series.

Besides Lewis, the other referees who worked the 2022 finals but aren't working them this year are Kane Fitzgerald — who left on-court work after last season and took over in September as the league's Vice President of Referee Operations and Replay Center Principal — and James Capers, who is injured.

Lewis has worked more than 1,200 games, counting both regular season and playoffs, in 19 seasons as an NBA referee. He last worked on May 16, when Denver played host to the Los Angeles Lakers in Game 1 of the Western Conference finals. The reports of the tweets came out about a week later.

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

Oregon youths' climate lawsuit against US government can proceed to trial, judge rules

EUGENE, Ore. (AP) — A federal judge ruled on Thursday that a lawsuit brought by young Oregon-based climate activists can proceed to trial years after they first filed the lawsuit in an attempt to hold the nation's leadership accountable for its role in climate change.

U.S. District Court Judge Ann Aiken ruled that the plaintiffs can amend their case, known as Juliana v. United States, and go to trial. A previous trial was halted by U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts days before it was to begin in 2018.

Aiken wrote in her decision, "It is a foundational doctrine that when government conduct catastrophically harms American citizens, the judiciary is constitutionally required to perform its independent role and determine whether the challenged conduct, not exclusively committed to any branch by the Constitution, is unconstitutional."

The 21 plaintiffs, who were between the ages of 8 and 18 when the lawsuit was filed in 2015, will move forward on the question of whether the federal government's fossil fuel-based energy system, and resulting climate destabilization, is unconstitutional.

"Today's ruling from Judge Aiken is our legal system working the way it should: a fair and well-reasoned application of the law in a vitally important constitutional case where children's lives are at stake," the plaintiffs' attorney, Julia Olson, said in a statement.

The plaintiffs alleged in the original lawsuit that they have a constitutional right to a climate that sustains life and that the U.S. government's actions have encouraged a fossil fuel economy despite scientific warnings about global warming.

Aiken ruled in 2016 that the case could proceed to trial, but the lawsuit was challenged repeatedly in federal court by the Obama and Trump administrations.

A three-member panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed the case in 2020 after finding that Aiken lacked the power to order or design a climate recovery plan sought in the lawsuit.

The plaintiffs then filed an amended complaint asking to change their lawsuit to seek a ruling that the nation's fossil fuel-based energy system is unconstitutional.

A message to the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., seeking comment was not immediately returned.

The first youth climate change lawsuit to reach trial in the U.S. is set to begin June 12 in Montana. That case was brought in 2020 by attorneys for the environmental group Our Children's Trust, which brought the Oregon case and has filed climate lawsuits in every state on behalf of young plaintiffs since 2010.

In the meantime, a study published this week said Earth has pushed past seven out of eight scientifically established safety limits and into "the danger zone," for an overheating planet and for the well-being of people living on it.

Opponents hold 'day without immigrants' in Florida to protest new restrictions

By DANIEL KOZIN Associated Press

IMMOKALEE, Fla. (AP) — Across Florida on Thursday, workers didn't show up at construction sites and tomato fields and scores of restaurants, shops and other small businesses never opened their doors to protest a new state law that imposes restrictions on undocumented immigrants.

Organizers dubbed the protest "a day without immigrants."

In the Orlando area, dozens of protesters, including some driving trucks with small construction cranes, demonstrated at a busy intersection outside the office of a state lawmaker who had championed the law.

In Immokalee, an area in southwest Florida known for its tomato fields, hundreds of protesters, many with families, marched two miles around the town, chanting and carrying signs.

In Fort Lauderdale, opponents of the law chanted and waved flags outside Isis Cordova's Latin cuisine restaurant, which was closed in protest.

"I managed to get legal status in this country, and I said one day when I have documents I'm going to raise my voice. I'm also going to speak up for those people who don't have a voice," Cordova said. "Because I know what it's like to be in these shoes on the other side, with that fear and living in the shadows."

The legislation Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law last month bolsters his migrant relocation program and limits social services for immigrants lacking permanent legal status. It also expands requirements for businesses with more than 25 staffers to use E-Verify, a federal system that determines if employees can legally work in the U.S. Another provision requires hospitals that accept Medicaid to include a citizenship question on intake forms, which critics have said is intended to dissuade immigrants living in the U.S. illegally from seeking medical care.

Last month, the Latino civil rights group LULAC issued a travel advisory for Hispanics, warning that the new law marginalizes immigrant communities and was immoral. Other civil rights groups, including the NAACP and the Human Rights Campaign, also have issued travel advisories for Florida, saying new laws and policies by DeSantis and Republican lawmakers are "openly hostile toward African Americans, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals."

DeSantis launched a campaign for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination last week.

A spokesman for the governor's office on Thursday said the new law targets illegal immigration, not those who are in the U.S. legally.

"The media has been deliberately inaccurate about this distinction between legal and illegal immigration to create this very sort of outrage based on a false premise," said Jeremy Redfern, press secretary for DeSantis' office. "Any business that exploits this crisis by employing illegal aliens instead of Floridians will be held accountable. Every country defends its borders with a sovereign right to do so."

Isaac Dubon, who owns a construction business in South Florida, said immigrants are important to Florida because they do jobs that others won't.

"We work a lot in this country, 15 or 16 straight hours nonstop," Dubon said. "We go through a lot. We pay taxes too, like everyone else, and we sustain the country's economy."

Associated Press reporter Mike Schneider in Orlando, Florida, contributed to this report.

What to stream this weekend: Foo Fighters, 'The Idol,' LeBron James and 'American Gladiators' doc

By The Associated Press undefined

There's new music from Foo Fighters, the buzzy HBO series "The Idol" starring Lily-Rose Depp and The Weeknd and a documentary about the breakthrough TV show "American Gladiators" among the 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 are a LeBron James's origin story and a TV show where contestants compete to transform nostalgia cars

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into life-sized Hot Wheels.

NEW MOVIES TO STREAM

— LeBron James's origin story is dramatized in the new film "Shooting Stars," debuting exclusively on Peacock on Friday. Based on the 2009 book, written by James and "Friday Night Lights" author Buzz Bissinger, the film looks at how he and his childhood friends (the self-anointed "fab four") rose to basketball prominence on their high school team in Akron, Ohio. He and his friends would help lead their St. Vincent-St. Mary's team to three state championships in four years. James is played by newcomer Marquis "Mookie" Cook, who co-stars with "Stranger Things"' Caleb McLaughlin as Lil Dru, Avery S. Wills Jr. as Willie McGee and Khalil Everage as Sian Cotton in the Chris Robinson-directed film.

— Sydney Sweeney, of "Euphoria" and "The White Lotus," takes a starring role in "Reality," available now on HBO and Max. (Read AP's review here.) She plays former U.S. Air Force member and NSA contractor Reality Winner who was accused of leaking classified documents about Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. The film is based on actual dialogue between Winner and the FBI agents (Josh Hamilton and Marchant Davis) who showed up at her doorstep to interrogate her in 2017. It's the directorial debut of Tina Satter, who adapted her 2019 play "Is This a Room?" and has gotten rave reviews since its debut at the Berlin Film Festival.

— Method acting is in the spotlight in a new series that debuted on The Criterion Channel on Thursday, along with a conversation between Ethan Hawke, Vincent D'Onofrio and Isaac Butler, who wrote a book on the matter ("The Method: How the Twentieth Century Learned How to Act.") The films feature performances by noted disciples like Sidney Poitier, Montgomery Clift, Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando. Included among the 25 titles are George Stevens' "A Place in the Sun," Sidney Lumet's "12 Angry Men," Elia Kazan's "Splendor in the Grass," Mike Nichols' "The Graduate" and "Carnal Knowledge," Bob Rafelson's "Five Easy Pieces" and Warren Beatty's "Reds."

— AP Film Writer Lindsey Bahr

NEW MUSIC TO STREAM

— Foo Fighters have a new album, the first since the death of the band's drummer, Taylor Hawkins. The rockers say the 10-track "But Here We Are" is "a brutally honest and emotionally raw response to everything Foo Fighters endured over the last year." The lead, driving single is "Rescued," with the lyrics "I'm just waiting to be rescued/Bring me back to life. Kings and queens and in-betweens/We all deserve the right." The new album, out Friday is produced by Greg Kurstin and Foo Fighters. Hawkins died last year during a South American tour. (Read AP's review here.)

— Bob Dylan's re-recordings of old songs, which first premiered on Alma Har'el's 2021 film "Shadow Kingdom: The Early Songs of Bob Dylan," will be released on audio formats for the first time on Friday. The collection includes "Forever Young," "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" and "When I Paint My Masterpiece." The 14 tracks include "Watching the River Flow," a bluesy jewel. The full-length "Shadow Kingdom feature" film will also be available for download and rental on June 6. (Columbia Records and Legacy Recordings)

— The Revivalists return with their fifth full-length album, promising more of their spicy gumbo of horn-accented alt-rock, blues, folk and gospel. "Pour It Out Into the Night" is out Friday and the New Orleans-based band offers three very different takes on their sound, with the driving anthem "Kid," the folky "Down in the Dirt" and the political protest tune "The Long Con," with the lyrics "Every day they take away/A little piece of you/a little piece of me." The band this summer are performing at Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza. (Concord Records)

— This week will offer a chance to honor Kenny Rogers with some rare songs he left behind. The 10-track "Life Is Like a Song" features eight never-before-heard recordings, spanning 2008-2011, including covers of Eric Clapton's "Wonderful Tonight" and Lionel Richie's "Goodbye," as well as his duet with Dolly Parton, "Tell Me That You Love Me." The collection is curated and executive produced by the late Country Music Hall of Famer's widow, Wanda Rogers. Two bonus tracks include a cover of the Mack Gordon/Henry Warren standard, "At Last" and the Buddy Hyatt-penned "Say Hello to Heaven." (UMe)

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— AP Entertainment Writer Mark Kennedy

NEW SERIES TO STREAM

— “Euphoria” creator Sam Levinson has a new gritty HBO series called “The Idol” starring Lily-Rose Depp and Abel Tesfaye, also known as the recording artist The Weeknd, who is a co-writer and co-executive producer. Depp plays a recording artist in LA who, after a nervous breakdown, enters a disturbing relationship with a self-help guru/cult leader played by Tesfaye. “The Idol” has already garnered a lot of buzz for an alleged toxic work environment off camera and reportedly gratuitous sex scenes that are also violent, which the cast and Levinson have denied. The show premiered at the Cannes Film Festival where Levinson acknowledged at a press conference that while it is a “provocative” story, the media coverage has convinced him “we’re about to have the biggest show of the summer.” “The Idol” premieres Sunday on HBO.

— A new miniseries offers a history lesson on the 32nd president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was elected to four terms in office. Co-executive produced by Bradley Cooper and biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin, “FDR” delves into some of the most pivotal times in Roosevelt’s life including when he contracted Polio disease and was permanently paralyzed from the waist down, when U.S. forces stormed the beaches of Normandy, France on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and his marriage to Eleanor Roosevelt who became a champion for human rights. The three-night miniseries premiered its first episode Monday on History.

— ESPN’s award-winning “30 for 30” series returns with “The American Gladiators Documentary,” a two-part film examining the history of the former syndicated reality-competition show. It also reveals “American Gladiators” had a dark underbelly, involving greed, addiction and blackmail. Former contenders and crew members are interviewed. It premiered Tuesday.

— Gearheads will rev up for “Hot Wheels: Ultimate Challenge,” where contestants compete to transform nostalgia cars into life-sized Hot Wheels. Hosted by auto expert Rutledge Wood and featuring celebrity guests including Anthony Anderson, Joel McHale and Terry Crews, the winner of each episode gets a \$25,000 prize. Jay Leno, known for his own love of automobiles and rare car collection, appears in the finale episode where the winner is awarded \$50,000 and have their creation turned into an actual Hot Wheels diecast model that the public can purchase. “Hot Wheels: Ultimate Challenge” debuted Tuesday on NBC.

— Alicia Rancilio

NEW VIDEO GAMES TO PLAY

— As Mick Jagger once sang, summer’s here and the time is right for fighting in the street. For aficionados of Capcom’s venerable Street Fighter series, that time can’t come soon enough. Street Fighter 6 — the franchise’s first release since 2016 — brings back 18 fan-favorite brawlers for more one-on-one punching and kicking. The new edition also lets you create your own avatar from scratch and go cruisin’ for a bruisin’ in cities all over the world. And there’s a battle hub where you and your friends can start fight clubs, compete in tournaments and play old-school Capcom arcade games. The fists and feet start flying Friday on PlayStation 5/4, Xbox X/S and PC.

— Lou Kesten

Catch up on AP’s entertainment coverage here: <https://apnews.com/apf-entertainment>.

Soaring rhetoric: NASA mission will carry Poet Laureate Ada Limón’s words to Jupiter

NEW YORK (AP) — A new work by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón, written for an upcoming NASA mission to Jupiter’s moon Europa, is a glance at outer space that returns back to Earth.

Limón’s “In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa,” which she read Thursday night during a ceremony at the Library of Congress, is part of NASA’s “Message In a Bottle Campaign” as the aeronautics and space administration prepares for a years-long journey. The Europa Clipper is expected to launch in October 2024, with “In Praise of Mystery” engraved on the spacecraft.

“Writing this poem was one of the greatest honors of my life, but also one of the most difficult tasks I’ve

ever been assigned," Limón said in a statement released through the Library of Congress. "Eventually, what made the poem come together was realizing that in pointing toward other planets, stars and moons, we are also recognizing the enormous gift that is our planet Earth. To point outward is also to point inward."

During a recent interview with The Associated Press, Limón said she struggled at first with the poem, explaining that because of its official nature she couldn't rely on her usual instincts. After working on more than a dozen drafts, she received invaluable advice from her husband, Lucas Marquardt, who urged her to write the poem as if it were personal, a "poem that you would write anyway."

"I think of all the times as a child that I would look down and find a whole universe in the grass, or in a small, watery wedge from the creek across the street from my house," she said. "But then I also think that that was in tandem with looking up at the moon."

The 7-stanza poem begins as a tribute to "the night sky inky/with black expansiveness," a sky we read as an "unerring book of the universe." But, Limón adds, treasures can be found below the sky.

"O second moon, we, too, are made
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.
We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark."

Limón, 47, has been poet laureate since 2022 and was recently appointed by Librarian of Congress Carla Hayden to a second term, lasting two years. Her books include "Bright Dead Things" and "The Carrying."

Family, attorneys criticize prosecutor's handling of case in Ralph Yarl's shooting

By MARGARET STAFFORD Associated Press

LIBERTY, Mo. (AP) — The family of a Black Kansas City teenager who was shot by a white man after he mistakenly knocked on the man's door are frustrated with the prosecutor's handling of the case, attorneys for the family said Thursday.

The complaints came after a preliminary hearing for 84-year-old Andrew Lester was set for Aug. 31-Sept. 1 and just days after a Clay County judge approved a request by Lester's attorney to seal documents in the case.

Lester has pleaded not guilty to first-degree assault and armed criminal action in the shooting of Ralph Yarl, who knocked on Lester's door on April 13 while trying to pick up his young brothers, who were at a home a block away.

Civil rights attorneys Benjamin Crump and Lee Merritt said in a Zoom news conference that they had previously asked Clay County Prosecutor Zachary Thompson to step aside and let Jackson County Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker be named as a special prosecutor in the case but that Thompson "adamantly" refused.

The family is upset that Thompson did not more aggressively challenge the motion to seal court records and that the preliminary hearing was delayed for 90 days, which Thompson did not object to in court.

"We continue to encourage the prosecutor to zealously prosecute this case as he would had the dynamics been different," Crump said. "We don't want any different form of justice or policy because we have a young teenage Black kid shot by an older white man."

Thompson's office said in a statement that the focus of his office "remains squarely on following the law and achieving justice."

The shooting drew international attention amid claims that Lester received preferential treatment from investigators after he shot Yarl. President Joe Biden and several celebrities issued statements calling for justice for Yarl.

Lester admitted that he shot Yarl through the door without warning because he was "scared to death" he was about to be robbed by the Black person standing at his door. He remains free after posting \$20,000 — 10% of his \$200,000 bond.

The teen's father, Paul Yarl, said after Thursday's hearing that he hopes Lester eventually serves jail time.

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"The shooter was going to kill Ralph," Paul Yarl said. "It's obvious, right? He shot him twice. His intent was to finish him off. So yeah, we need justice for that."

Ralph Yarl, who has celebrated his 17th birthday since the shooting, suffered gunshot wounds to his head and wrist and continues to recover at home. His mother, Cleo Nagbe, said he is trying to get back some normalcy in his life.

"The longer we stretch this out, the longer it takes him to get that little bit of normalcy he needs to spend his teenage years just doing teenager stuff ... Ralph needs to be the teenager that he needs to be that Lester is stealing away from him," Nagbe said.

Merritt said the appropriate circumstances to seal court documents have not been met and sealing them benefits Lester at the expense of Yarl and his family.

"The state's failure, Mr. Thompson's failure to make the appropriate objections to the seal is costing this family peace of mind," Merritt said. "It's costing them access to equal justice under the law."

On Tuesday, Clay County Judge Louis Angles granted a request from Lester's attorney to seal the court documents, saying the publicity led to threats against Lester, who his attorney says has been forced to move three times. He also said the publicity has made it more difficult for the case to be heard before a fair and impartial jury.

"The overwhelming majority of the reporting continues to assert that the alleged actions of (Lester) were racially motivated, which if believed, virtually eliminates the defense available to (Lester) related to the reasonableness of his actions," Angles wrote in the ruling.

The judge noted in his order that Lester's personal cell phone number was posted on a public platform after the shooting, leading to several text messages calling him a "murderer" who "should burn in hell." Others threatened to shoot up Lester's home, which has been vandalized since the shooting.

In his reply to the motion, Thompson argued that legal precedents largely favored keeping court documents open to the public, but he did not directly oppose sealing the records.

Nagbe and Yarl's aunt, Faith Spoonmore, said the family was upset that some of the arguments for sealing court records focused on Lester's suffering health problems and being harassed since the shooting with little discussion about the continuing problems Ralph is facing.

They said Ralph, who will be a senior in high school in the fall, has restrictions on playing with friends and playing his band instruments, while also suffering from the emotional trauma of the shooting.

"That is what we need to talk about, that is what the judge needs to understand," Spoonmore said. "That Lester is suffering the consequences of his actions, but Ralph is suffering the consequences of being Black in America. That is what the judge needs to hear."

32 Mississippi school districts still under federal desegregation orders

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

LEXINGTON, Miss. (AP) — There are 32 school districts in Mississippi still under federal desegregation orders, the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division's assistant attorney general said Thursday.

Enforcing the open desegregation orders fit into a broader body of civil rights work launched in Mississippi that is examining jails, police departments and hate crimes in the state, according to Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. Referring to the U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed segregation of public schools across the country, she said the Justice Department is ensuring school districts provide Black students in Mississippi with equal access to education programs.

"In our ongoing efforts to fulfill the promise of Brown vs. Board of Education, we currently have 32 open cases with school districts here in Mississippi," Clarke said. "And in each of those cases, we are working to ensure that these districts comply with desegregation orders from courts."

Clarke spoke to a small group of residents, local leaders and reporters Thursday at the Holmes County

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Circuit Court Complex in Lexington, about 62 miles (100 kilometers) from Jackson, the state capital. Mississippi is the latest stop in Clarke's "listening tour" throughout the Deep South. The Justice Department is learning where to direct resources and where it might need to mount civil rights lawsuits, she said.

Mississippi has the highest percentage of Black residents of any state. It has been home, as have other states, to legal fights over desegregation. In 2017, a Mississippi Delta school district agreed to merge two high schools after nearly 50 years of litigation in which the district sought to maintain historically Black and white schools.

In addition to school districts, Clarke said at least five Mississippi jails and prisons have come under federal scrutiny. The department is looking into whether the facilities protect prisoners from violence and meet housing standards. The facilities include the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, the South Mississippi Correctional Institution, the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, the Wilkinson County Correctional Facility and a Hinds County Jail.

Clarke also said her division is investigating whether Rankin County Sheriff's Deputies used excessive force when they shot Michael Corey Jenkins in the mouth during an alleged drug raid. An Associated Press investigation found that several deputies from the department have been involved in at least four violent encounters with Black men since 2019 that left two dead and another with lasting injuries.

Clarke declined to offer more details about the case, citing an ongoing federal civil rights investigation. After delivering prepared remarks in Lexington, she met with community members about allegations of police brutality in the small town. Police have "terrorized" Black residents by subjecting them to false arrests, excessive force and intimidation, an ongoing federal lawsuit claims.

"What I hope she'll do is seriously address the issues. Not gloss over them, say that she has heard about these violations, talk about them in detail and say that it is wrong if it is happening," said Jill Collen Jefferson, president of JULIAN, a civil rights organization that filed the federal lawsuit on behalf of a group of Lexington residents.

The community meeting was closed to reporters. The Justice Department has not announced an investigation into the Lexington Police Department.

Jefferson said her organization plans to file a class action lawsuit against the Lexington Police Department in the new few months.

Against the backdrop of ongoing investigations into potential civil rights violations ensnaring school districts, jails and police departments is FBI data released in March showing the number of hate crimes in the U.S. rose in 2021.

"Hate and bigotry are sadly on the rise," she said.

Michael Goldberg is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mikergoldberg>.

'Do I have regrets? ... Hell yeah,' says Davenport mayor after partial collapse of Iowa building

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE, HANNAH FINGERHUT and RYAN J. FOLEY Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A structural engineer's report issued last week indicated a wall of a century-old apartment building in Iowa was at imminent risk of crumbling, yet neither the owner nor city officials warned residents of the danger days before the building partially collapsed, leaving three people missing and feared dead.

The revelation is the latest flashpoint after Sunday's partial collapse of the building in Davenport, where residents have lashed out at city leaders over what they see as an inept response.

"Do I have regrets about this tragedy and about people potentially losing their lives? Hell yeah. Do I think about this every moment? Hell yeah." Mayor Mike Matson said Thursday. "I have regrets about a lot of things. Believe me, we're going to look at that."

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City officials said Thursday that they did not order an evacuation because they relied on the engineer's assurances that the building remained safe.

The state's search and rescue team, search dogs and cameras were used Thursday to continue combing the building for missing people. Matson said crews were also consulting with experts about how to safely bring down the structure, which remains extremely unstable, while being respectful of bodies that could be buried in the debris.

The six-story building collapsed shortly before 5 p.m. Sunday. Rescue crews pulled seven people from the building in their initial response and escorted out 12 others who could walk on their own. Later, two more people were rescued, including a woman who was removed from the fourth floor hours after authorities said they were going to begin setting up for demolition.

Earlier this week, authorities said five people were missing, but Davenport Police Chief Jeff Bladel said during a media briefing Thursday that two of them have since been accounted for and are safe.

City officials named those unaccounted for as Brandon Colvin, Ryan Hitchcock and Daniel Prien. The city said all three "have high probability of being home at the time of the collapse and their apartments were located in the collapse zone."

Bladel said transient people also often enter the building but there is no indication anyone else was inside and missing.

People living in the building will be eligible for \$6,000 payments from the city and those meeting certain income requirements could get state payments of \$5,000. Businesses near the collapsed building will also be eligible to receive payments.

City Administrator Corri Spiegel said the building likely is "filled with asbestos" given its age and the city will develop a plan to protect workers and others when the structure is demolished.

The city on Wednesday night released documents, including structural engineering reports, that show city officials and the building's owner were warned that parts of the building were unstable.

A report dated May 24, just four days before the collapse, suggested patches in the west side of the building's brick façade "appear ready to fall imminently" and could be a safety hazard.

The report also detailed that window openings, some filled and some unfilled, were insecure. In one case, the openings were "bulging outward" and looked "poised to fall." Inside the first floor, unsupported window openings help "explain why the façade is currently about to topple outward."

Despite the warnings, city officials did not order some 50 tenants to leave the building.

Rich Oswald, the city's director of development and neighborhood services, confirmed Thursday that the city's chief building official, Trishna Pradhan, resigned earlier this week in the aftermath of the collapse.

Pradhan had visited the building on May 25, and erroneously reported it had "passed" an inspection in notes in the city's online permitting system, Oswald said.

Pradhan attempted to change the inspection result to "incomplete" on Tuesday — after the collapse — but a technical glitch instead listed the outcome as "failed," he said. Oswald said the "incomplete" status is the correct status since the repair work was unfinished.

Though the error was administrative, Oswald said the "magnitude of the situation and the error that was made" led to Pradhan's resignation.

Calls and text messages to Pradhan were not immediately returned.

The city clarified later in the day that Pradhan had resigned voluntarily and not in lieu of termination. Under Iowa law, it is a confidential personnel matter and the city is not required to explain the departure.

Matson promised to improve inspections and to investigate what happened.

Andrew Wold, the building's owner, released a statement dated Tuesday saying "our thoughts and prayers are with our tenants." County records show his company, Davenport Hotel, L.L.C., acquired the building in a 2021 deal worth \$4.2 million.

As the building deteriorated, tenants repeatedly complained about a host of other problems they say were ignored by property managers, including no heat or hot water for weeks or months at a time, mold and water leakage from ceilings and toilets. City officials gave orders to vacate some individual apartments and tried to address other complaints, but a broader building evacuation was never ordered, records show.

City officials ordered repairs after they found seven fire code violations on Feb. 6. They were told three weeks later by building maintenance officials that "none of the work was completed," records show.

Assistant City Attorney Brian Heyer said he's unaware whether earlier civil enforcement actions to protect residents were considered. Only after the collapse did the city file a civil infraction seeking a \$300 fine against Wold for failing to maintain the structure in a safe manner. He will be required to pay for the cost of demolition, Heyer said.

Heyer said an enforcement action the city filed that resulted in a \$4,500 fine in March for repeated trash overflows came in response to complaints from downtown residents and businesses about the debris.

Emails sent to an attorney believed to be representing Wold have not been returned.

The documents released Wednesday outline numerous other concerns raised by engineers, a utility company and city officials. Among them, MidAmerican Energy, an electric and gas utility, complained to the city in early February about an unsafe brick wall at the west corner of the building. A city notice dated Feb. 2 said the wall was gradually failing and cited "visible crumbling of this exterior load bearing wall under the support beam." The notice also said the exterior brick veneer had separated and allowed rain and ice to cause damage.

The notice ordered Davenport Hotel to provide an engineer's letter "stating this is not an imminent danger" and to take immediate steps to repair the problems.

A Feb. 8 letter to the city from engineering company Select Structural said an engineer conducted an emergency site visit Feb. 2 and determined the crumbling wall "is not an imminent threat to the building or its residents, but structural repairs will be necessary."

City inspectors monitored progress at the site and learned Feb. 28 that "the west wall has collapsed into the scaffolding."

Foley reported from Iowa City, Iowa. Associated Press reporter Summer Ballentine contributed from Jefferson City, Missouri.

Man pleads guilty to assaulting Rep. Angie Craig of Minnesota in DC apartment building

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man pleaded guilty Thursday to assaulting Democratic Rep. Angie Craig of Minnesota in the elevator of her Washington apartment building in February, according to court records.

Kendrid Khalil Hamlin, 26, pleaded guilty to charges of assaulting a member of Congress and assaulting law enforcement officers, according to the court docket. Hamlin was also accused of assaulting two officers as they attempted to arrest him on the same day of Craig's attack.

Hamlin's attorneys said in an emailed statement that he "accepted responsibility for his actions today with the earnest hope of moving towards rehabilitation and the mental health treatment he very much wants and needs."

"Unfortunately, we know that treatment and rehabilitation will not occur in prison. We are hopeful that all parties can work together to finally provide Mr. Hamlin with the opportunity to get mental health support and treatment, as well as stable housing upon his release," said his federal public defenders, Katie D'Adamo Guevara and Eugene Jeen-Young Kim Ohm.

A Craig spokesperson said her office had no immediate comment.

Craig was getting coffee in the lobby of her building when she noticed a man pacing, a U.S. Capitol Police special agent wrote in court papers. The man came into the elevator with her and said he needed to go to the bathroom and was coming into her apartment, the agent wrote.

After she said he couldn't, he punched her in the side of her face and grabbed near her neck before she escaped by throwing her cup of hot coffee over her shoulder at him, according to the court papers.

Craig's chief of staff said after the assault that there was no evidence it was politically motivated.

Prosecutors said in court papers that Hamlin had numerous previous convictions, including for assaulting a police officer.

Craig won a third term in November in the suburban-to-rural 2nd District south of Minneapolis and St. Paul in one of the most expensive House races in the country, frustrating the GOP's best hope of flipping a Minnesota seat in an election that gave Republicans a narrow House majority.

Oath Keeper who guarded Roger Stone before Jan. 6 attack gets more than 4 years in prison

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A member of the far-right Oath Keepers extremist group who was part of a security detail for former President Donald Trump's longtime adviser Roger Stone before storming the U.S. Capitol was sentenced on Thursday to more than four years in prison.

Roberto Minuta, who was seen on video guarding Stone hours before the riot on Jan. 6, 2021, was among six Oath Keeper members convicted by jurors of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors said was a violent plot to stop the transfer of power from Trump to President Joe Biden after the 2020 election.

Also on Thursday, an Arizona man was sentenced to three years behind bars followed by one year of home confinement for his role in the same plot. Edward Vallejo, a U.S. Army veteran from Phoenix, oversaw a "Quick Reaction Force" at a Virginia hotel that was prepared to deploy an arsenal of weapons into Washington if needed, authorities say.

Vallejo and Minuta were both convicted in January of seditious conspiracy, the most serious charge the Justice Department has brought in the Jan. 6 attack.

Two other Oath Keepers, including founder Stewart Rhodes, were sentenced last week after being convicted of the rarely used charge. Rhodes was ordered to serve 18 years behind bars — the longest sentence that has been handed down so far in hundreds of Capitol riot cases. Kelly Meggs, who led the group's Florida chapter, was sentenced to 12 years.

U.S. District Judge Amit 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 has consistently issued sentences shorter than those prosecutors have sought for Oath Keeper members.

Mehta told Vallejo that he can't conspire to "undo" the results of an election just because he and his cohorts believed the process failed them.

"It can't be that dozens of judges got it wrong," he said, referring to the judges who rejected legal challenges after the 2020 election brought by Trump and his Republican allies. "If you believe in the system, if you believe in democracy, you take the good with the bad."

The Justice Department had sought 17 years in prison for both Minuta and Vallejo.

Minuta told the judge he is ashamed of his actions and was "repulsed" by the lack of remorse Rhodes showed at his own sentencing.

"My emotions got the best of me, and I'm deeply apologetic, your honor," he told Mehta. "I was misled and naïve."

Before handing down the sentence of four years and six months, the judge told Minuta that the law doesn't permit anybody to "gather up arms to battle your government."

"This is not about politics. This is not about your beliefs. It's about your conduct," Mehta said.

Minuta, who owned a New York tattoo shop, was in communication on Jan. 6 with Rhodes, who described Minuta in a message as one of his "most trusted men," according to federal prosecutors. Minuta purchased 5,500 rounds of ammunition as Jan. 6 approached, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said he hasn't shown true remorse, noting that Minuta took to social media after his arrest to slam the investigation as politically motivated and referred to Jan. 6 defendants as "POLITICAL PRISONERS." A fundraiser page that was linked to his Twitter page said the government "has been weaponized to destroy dissidents."

"That's his worldview," Justice Department prosecutor Troy Edwards said. "Mr. Minuta is a danger to himself and to his republic because of his worldview."

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Lawyers for the Oath Keepers say there was never any plot to storm the Capitol or stop the transfer of power.

Minuta's attorney, William Shipley, said his client came to Washington to serve in the Oath Keepers' personal security detail for Stone and "had no intention or plan to engage in any other activity."

Shipley said Minuta's fears of government "tyranny" were not sparked by the baseless claims that the 2020 election was stolen from Trump, but grew out of his tattoo shop being shut down by lockdown measures during the coronavirus pandemic. Shipley said Minuta's actions on Jan. 6 were "regrettable" and "idiotic."

"But worthy of a multiyear prison sentence? I don't think so," he added.

Minuta was among several people in Oath Keepers gear seen flanking Stone on Jan. 5 and Jan. 6.

Stone, an informal Trump adviser, has denied having any knowledge of or involvement in anything illegal on Jan. 6.

Vallejo told the judge his life has been destroyed and he regrets ever associating himself with Rhodes.

"I assure you that I'm not a traitor or a terrorist," he said, fighting back tears. "I've learned my lesson and keeping my big mouth shut."

Justice Department prosecutor Louis Manzo said Vallejo, as a "Quick Reaction Force" leader, managed one of the most important components of the Oath Keepers' conspiracy: the cache of firearms stashed at the Virginia hotel. The weapons were never deployed.

On a podcast recorded early Jan. 6, Vallejo warned of a "guerrilla war" if Congress went ahead with the certification of Biden's electoral victory. A day after the riot, Vallejo traveled into Washington to "conduct surveillance" and "probe the defense line" of police and National Guard troopers protecting the Capitol, according to prosecutors.

Defense attorney Matthew Peed said Vallejo was a relatively minor figure in the case. Vallejo brought a stockpile of food with him to Washington because he thought there would be an "ongoing protest," not a war, the defense lawyer said.

"He thought there was going to be a movement," Peed said.

Last Friday, the judge handed down punishments for two other Oath Keepers who were acquitted of seditious conspiracy but convicted of other serious charges. 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.

Two more Oath Keeper sentencing are scheduled for Friday.

The Oath Keepers sentencing come weeks after leaders of another far-right group — the Proud Boys — were also convicted in the Jan. 6 attack. Former Proud Boys national chairman Enrique Tarrío and three other group leaders were found guilty in May of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors said was a separate plot to keep Trump in the White House. They're scheduled to be sentenced in August.

Richer reported from Boston.

Senate passes GOP bill overturning student loan cancellation, teeing it up for Biden veto

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Republican measure overturning President Joe Biden's student loan cancellation plan passed the Senate on Thursday and now awaits an expected veto.

The vote was 52-46, with support from Democratic Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Jon Tester of Montana as well as Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, an independent. The resolution was approved last week by the GOP-controlled House by a 218-203 vote.

Biden has pledged to keep in place his commitment to cancel up to \$20,000 in federal student loans for 43 million people. The legislation adds to Republican criticism of the plan, which was halted in November in response to lawsuits from conservative opponents.

The Supreme Court heard arguments in February in a challenge to Biden's move, with the conservative

majority seemingly ready to sink the plan. A decision is expected in the coming weeks.

"The president's student loan schemes do not 'forgive' debt, they just shift the burden from those who chose to take out loans onto those who never went to college or already fulfilled their commitment to pay off their loans," said Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, lead sponsor of the Senate push.

The legislation aims to revoke Biden's cancellation plan and curtail the Education Department's ability to cancel student loans in the future. It would rescind Biden's latest extension of a payment pause that began early in the pandemic. It would retroactively add several months of student loan interest that was waived by Biden's extension.

It would also roll back months of progress borrowers made toward loan cancellation through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Those who recently had their debt canceled through the program would have their loans reinstated.

The GOP challenge invoked the Congressional Review Act, which allows Congress to undo recently enacted executive branch regulations. Passing a resolution requires a simple majority in both chambers, but overriding a presidential veto requires two-thirds majorities in the House and Senate, and Republicans aren't expected to have enough support to do that.

"If Republicans were to get their way and pass this bill into law, people across the country would have relief they are counting on snatched away from them," said Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

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Former Playboy model accuses Bill Cosby of drugging and sexually assaulting her in 1969

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A former Playboy model who alleges Bill Cosby drugged and sexually assaulted her and another woman at his home in 1969 sued him Thursday under a new California law that suspends the statute of limitations on sex abuse claims.

In her lawsuit, Victoria Valentino, 80, says she was an actress and singer 54 years ago, when she met Cosby, now 85. The comedian and actor later approached her at a Los Angeles café, where he spotted her crying over the recent drowning death of her 6-year-old son.

The Associated Press does not identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly.

Cosby offered to pay for a spa treatment for Valentino and a friend, and then sent a chauffeured car to pick the women up for dinner. That evening at a steakhouse, Cosby gave them each a pill, she said in the court filing.

"Here! Take this!" the lawsuit alleges Cosby said to them. "It will make you feel better. It will make us ALL feel better."

Cosby then drove the women to his house, where Valentino passed out on a couch, and later woke up and witnessed him sexually assaulting her unnamed friend, according to the lawsuit. The court documents allege Cosby then "engaged in forced sexual intercourse" with Valentino while she was incapacitated from the drug.

Valentino's allegations come on the heels of lawsuits last year by six Cosby accusers in New York under a similar provision known as a "lookback" law that allows adults to file sexual abuse cases for allegations that had fallen outside the statute of limitations.

The former "Cosby Show" star, who has been accused of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment by at least 60 women, has denied all allegations involving sex crimes. He was the first celebrity tried and convicted in the #MeToo era — and spent nearly three years at a state prison near Philadelphia before a higher court threw out the conviction and released him in 2021.

His spokesperson, Andrew Wyatt, said Thursday that Valentino's lawsuit lacks "any proof or facts" and

that so-called lookback laws violate constitutional rights aimed at protecting crime victims and “those that are accused of a crime.”

“What graveyard can Mr. Cosby visit, in order to dig up potential witnesses to testify on his behalf?” Wyatt asked in a statement. “America is continuing to see that this is a formula to make sure that no more Black Men in America accumulate the American Dream that was secured by Mr. Cosby.”

The lawsuit in LA County Superior Court was filed nearly two years after Cosby left prison when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his 2018 sexual assault conviction. They found he gave incriminating testimony in a deposition about the encounter only after believing he had immunity from prosecution. The trial judge and an intermediate appeals court had found no evidence of such immunity.

Earlier this year, a Los Angeles jury awarded \$500,000 to a woman who said Cosby sexually abused her at the Playboy Mansion when she was a teenager in 1975.

Seven other accusers received a settlement from Cosby’s insurers in the wake of the Pennsylvania conviction over a defamation lawsuit they had filed in Massachusetts. Their lawsuit said that Cosby and his agents disparaged them in denying their allegations of abuse.

Valentino’s lawsuit requests a jury trial and seeks unspecified punitive damages.

A timeline of concerns raised about Iowa apartment building, months before it partially collapsed

The Associated Press undefined

DAVENPORT, Iowa (AP) — City documents released Wednesday show engineers and city officials visited a Davenport building nearly a dozen times in the months before it partially collapsed on Sunday. The most recent engineer’s report came out just days before the building crumbled, suggesting the west wall appeared “ready to fall imminently.”

Here’s a timeline that shows red flags were raised multiple times in recent months, according to city documents.

FEB. 2, 2023

MidAmerican Energy, an electric and gas utility, complains to the city about a deteriorating brick wall at the southwest corner of the building. The utility says its employees would not work in the area until improvements were made, including installation of scaffolding.

Chief Building Official Trishna Pradhan signs a notice of public hazard that says the southwest wall “has been gradually falling” and there is “visible crumbling of this exterior load bearing wall under the support beam.”

Pradhan says “emergency vacate orders will be posted on the building if the falling masonry area is not secured.” Notes show Pradhan was working with the building’s owner, Andrew Wold, on repairs.

David Valliere, an engineer employed by Bettendorf-firm Select Structural, does an on site inspection and writes: “this damaged area is not an imminent danger to the entire building and its residents. An evacuation or lockout of the building is not necessary at this time.”

FEB. 8

Valliere sends a follow-up letter, detailing recommendations on the “necessary” structural repairs. He emphasizes that the failing wall should not be demolished all at once, saying there are unknowns about the “stability of a 100 year old masonry structure.”

FEB. 23

Valliere performs a follow-up inspection, in which a Bi-State Masonry worker points out “a large and potentially dangerous void” beneath the façade of the area just north of the work being done.

The repairs recommended in early February appeared to be “going to plan.” Valliere says in a March 1 email that his Feb. 23 inspection showed Bi-State Masonry was “doing a good job from what I can see.”

But the city’s notes say a visit a few days later, Feb. 28, revealed the “west wall had collapsed into the scaffolding” and workers indicated it was going to require more work than expected.

EARLY MARCH

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The city's notes show Bi-State Masonry was no longer working on the building by March 3, indicating that the firm requested more compensation because of unforeseen work.

MARCH 9

A city notice says the material being used to reconstruct the wall was "not allowed" and that emergency repair work had been approved with the understanding that brick "to match existing" would be used.

All work stopped on the building as of early March, according to the city's notes.

MARCH 13

Fire Marshal Jim Morris signs a letter to Wold detailing a lack of compliance to resolve fire safety violations. Nine issues were cited based on a Feb. 6 inspection, a Feb. 28 reinspection and a compliance inspection on March 13.

Morris asks that the violations be corrected "within 20 days. Failure to comply, will result in a progressive fine and possible rental license revocation for life safety code violations."

APRIL 17

Building representatives fail to meet city officials for scheduled inspection of fire safety violations.

MAY 23

Valliere visits the building.

MAY 24

Valliere issues another report, which says patches in the west side of the building's brick façade "appear ready to fall imminently."

The engineer's report says window openings, some filled and some unfilled, were insecure. In one case, the openings were "bulging outward" and looked "poised to fall." Inside the first floor, unsupported window openings help "explain why the façade is currently about to topple outward."

"The brick façade is unlikely to be preserved in place, but it can be brought down in a safe, controlled manner," the report says.

Also on May 24, the city issues a permit for work on the wall. City also sends a nuisance abatement order because of garbage and waste on the property.

MAY 28

The west wall of the building collapses.

MAY 29

City officials sign a notification of public hazard, describing the building as "an imminent, clear, and present public hazard" and "demanding the immediate demolition of the structure."

'Diablo IV' is almost here. What to know about the video game's coming release

WASHINGTON (AP) — The release of "Diablo IV" is right around the corner. Early access for the highly anticipated action role-playing video game begins Thursday night — ahead of next week's official launch.

"Diablo IV" marks the latest installment of Blizzard Entertainment's "Diablo" series, which began in 1996, and arrives more than a decade after "Diablo III" was released in May 2012.

Rod Fergusson, general manager of Diablo, has described "Diablo IV" as "our most brutal vision of Sanctuary," the fictional world where Diablo is set. It brings "the darkness of the original game" and builds on key aspects of previous installments of the series, he added.

In April, Blizzard Entertainment parent company Activision Blizzard reported a net revenue of \$2.38 billion for the first quarter of 2023 — up from \$1.77 billion for the first three months of 2022. At the time, Activision noted that presales for "Diablo IV" were strong, pointing to successful public testing of the game.

"All the excitement and feedback from players has been so energizing for all of us," Mike Ybarra, president of Blizzard Entertainment, said in a statement.

Here's what you need to know about the coming release of "Diablo IV."

WHAT TIME DOES DIABLO IV RELEASE?

"Diablo IV" will be officially released on Tuesday or Wednesday of next week, depending on the time

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zone of where you live. In the U.S., the game will launch at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT) on Tuesday.

While the official release of "Diablo IV" is slated for next week, early access will begin a few days earlier — kicking off on Thursday or Friday, also depending on your time zone. For U.S. players, early access will launch at 7 p.m. ET (4 p.m. PT) Thursday.

HOW DO I GET EARLY ACCESS?

Early access will be available for players who pre-purchased the digital deluxe or ultimate edition of the game.

Players who have already purchased "Diablo IV" can also pre-load the game on some devices ahead of the launch. Pre-loading any edition is currently available for Windows PC, Xbox and PlayStation, according to Blizzard.

WHAT ARE THE DIABLO IV CHARACTER CLASSES?

According to Blizzard, "Diablo IV" is set decades after the events of "Diablo III: Reaper of Souls." The demon Lilith and the angel Inarius have become enemies and launched a war against one another.

Upon the launch of "Diablo IV," players will be able to enter one of five classes: the Druids, Rogues, Sorceresses, Barbarians or Necromancers.

"Diablo IV" will offer cross-platform play and progression on Windows PC, Xbox Series X/S, Xbox One, PlayStation 5 and PlayStation 4, as well as couch co-op, upon its launch, Blizzard said.

ACTIVISION FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR 2022, MICROSOFT DEAL

Activision — which is also the maker of "Call of Duty," "Candy Crush" and "World of Warcraft" — reported a net revenue of \$7.53 billion for 2022, down from \$8.8 billion for 2021.

In January 2022, Microsoft announced plans to acquire Activision — but, more than a year later, the blockbuster deal is still in jeopardy. While the European Union approved the \$69 billion purchase last month, British regulators blocked the deal over concerns it would hurt competition in the small but rapidly growing cloud-gaming market. U.S. authorities are also trying to thwart the merger.

The companies are appealing the U.K. decision to a tribunal. If the appeal fails, Microsoft would be forced to either scrap the deal or carve out the U.K. as a separate market, which appeared to be an unfeasible option, Liam Deane, a game industry analyst for tech research and advisory firm Omdia, previously told The Associated Press.

Billy Joel to end his record-breaking concert series at Madison Square Garden in 2024

NEW YORK (AP) — Billy Joel is finally moving out of his monthly perch at Madison Square Garden. The singer-songwriter says he will conclude his residency in July 2024 with his 150th lifetime performance at the venue.

"It's hard to believe we've been able to do this for 10 years," Joel said at a news conference Thursday. "I'm now 74. I'll be 75 next year. It seems like a nice number."

The record-breaking residency began in January 2014 with Joel playing one show every month at the Garden for, as he said at the time, "as long as the demand continues."

In January 2015, Joel broke his own record of the "most consecutive performances by any artist" with the 13th show of the residency and a new banner was raised to the Garden's rafters.

In July 2015, with his 65th lifetime show, Joel broke another record for the "most lifetime performances by any artist," for which another banner was raised. Both of Joel's banners continue to hang at the Garden.

"There's only one thing that's more New York than Billy Joel — and that's a Billy Joel concert at MSG," said New York City Mayor Eric Adams. "For more than 50 years, Billy's music has defined our city and brought us together. On behalf of 8.5 million New Yorkers, congratulations, Billy, on a historic run of sold-out shows at MSG, and thank you for a lifetime of bringing joy to us all."

Joel has had 33 Top 40 hits, including three No. 1s — "It's Still Rock and Roll To Me," "We Didn't Start the Fire" and "Tell Her About It" — and four No. 1 albums — "52nd Street," "Glass Houses," "Storm Front" and "River of Dreams."

He won six Grammys — as well as a Grammy Legend Award in 1990 — as well as being inducted in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1999 and the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1992.

Store owner charged with killing a teen shot at people he suspected of shoplifting before

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A store owner in South Carolina charged with murder this week after shooting a teen he wrongly thought stole water has shot at suspected shoplifters two other times in the past eight years and not faced charges, authorities said.

In 2018, Rick Chow confronted a shoplifter at his Xpress Mart Shell station in Columbia and the man attacked him, Richland County deputies said. Chow fired two shots and the man was wounded in the leg, investigators said. The man pleaded guilty to charges in the case.

In 2015, Chow fired several shots at a vehicle after he tried to stop someone he suspected of shoplifting, and the suspect got into the vehicle and threatened to shoot Chow, deputies said. No one was hurt.

In both cases, authorities said Chow's actions were not criminal. Self-defense law in South Carolina requires the shooter doesn't instigate the incident, believes he is in imminent danger and has no way to avoid that danger.

Deputies decided that was not the case Sunday, when they said Chow and his son chased a 14-year-old from his store and killed him with one shot to the back. Chow is charged with murder. Prosecutors said once the investigation is finished and police present their findings, they will consider additional charges against Chow or his son.

Chow thought the boy had shoplifted four bottles of water, but investigators said store video shows Cyrus Carmack-Belton, who was Black, put the bottles back in the cooler. After an argument, Carmack-Belton ran off the store property and was still running away when he was killed, Sheriff Leon Lott said.

A gun was found near the teen's body, and Chow's son told his father that Carmack-Belton was armed after the youth fell as he ran, Lott said. But the sheriff said there was no evidence the boy ever pointed the weapon at Chow or his son.

The sheriff's department didn't release additional information about the two other shooting incidents. They said deputies have been called to Chow's store in suburban northeast Richland County hundreds of times over the past five years for assaults, shoplifting, personal theft, motor vehicle theft, vandalism, robbery and burglary.

A number of media outlets have made open records requests for police reports from those incidents, and authorities say they are working to gather them.

Chow, 58, is awaiting a bond hearing at the Richland County jail. His lawyer has said he is not talking about the case at this time. Chow faces 30 years to life in prison if convicted of murder.

Chow owned the gun legally, but witnesses and surveillance video provided no evidence that he was in fear of his life, Lott said.

"You don't shoot somebody in the back that is not a threat to you," the sheriff said.

Anguish and grief spread after the shooting through the African American community in Richland County, where nearly half the population is Black.

The state's only Black congressman, Democratic Rep. Jim Clyburn, said Carmack-Belton's family should be celebrating his completion of the eighth grade and heading to high school instead of mourning him at his funeral Saturday.

"The criminalization of Black men and boys and the historic trend of painting them as aggressors have time and again led to deadly and heartbreaking circumstances," Clyburn said in a statement. "Carmack-Belton has since been declared innocent, but his supposed crime of shoplifting a bottle of water should not have cost him his life. I pray justice is swift."

Chow's race in court records is listed as Asian.

Balloons, flowers, water bottles and a sign that says "Justice for King Cyrus" have been placed where the teen fell.

Several dozen people gathered at the store Monday for a peaceful vigil that included pouring water on the ground, spelling out "Cyrus" with the empty bottles and a sign taped to the locked door reading "Water or Life? Which means more?"

But after dark, deputies said a different group spray-painted the store with "Cyrus" and "14," broke windows and started stealing beer, cigarettes and other merchandise. Lott said when they find the people he called looters, they will be charged.

The entire gas station is now behind yellow crime scene tape. Deputies put a portable surveillance unit with cameras in the parking lot. A sign reading "Justice 4 Cyrus" leans against the sign advertising the gas price.

This story corrects the first name throughout of the store owner to Rick.

Heather Mack, convicted in mother's murder in Bali, plans to plead guilty in US, attorney says

By KATHLEEN FOODY Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — A Chicago woman facing federal conspiracy charges in the 2014 killing of her mother during a luxury vacation in Bali plans to plead guilty, her attorney said Thursday.

The details of any plea agreement or potential penalties under discussion by Heather Mack and U.S. prosecutors remain unclear. Her attorney, Michael Leonard, said Mack's defense has been in negotiations with federal prosecutors "over the last several weeks" ahead of her trial set to begin Aug. 1.

"We anticipate that the parties will be in a position to enter a written plea agreement, and proceed with a change of plea hearing on June 15," Leonard said in an email.

The Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times reported that prosecutors also told a judge Thursday they expect Mack will plead guilty but the parties were still negotiating.

A representative for the office of the U.S. Attorney of the Northern District of Illinois did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Mack was convicted in Indonesia in 2015 of being an accessory to her mother's murder, served seven years of her original 10-year sentence and then was deported back to the U.S. along with her then-six-year-old daughter. The violent case drew international attention.

The body of Sheila von Wiese-Mack was found stuffed into a suitcase, which had been left in the trunk of a taxi. Mack, who was 19 and a few weeks pregnant, and her then-boyfriend Tommy Schaefer were arrested at a hotel about 6 miles (10 kilometers) from the hotel where her mother's body was discovered.

Schaefer was convicted of murder and is still imprisoned in Indonesia.

Federal agents arrested Mack when she arrived at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport in November 2021 on the U.S. charges, accusing her of conspiring with her former boyfriend to kill her mother while on vacation in Bali.

Legal experts have said the allegations involve two countries with their own laws and jurisdiction, which doesn't violate the U.S. Constitution's prohibition on prosecuting someone twice for the same acts.

U.S. prosecutors say text messages, surveillance video and other evidence from the Indonesian cases show Mack and Schaefer planned von Wiese-Mack's killing for months and cleaned up her body and the hotel's bloody linens together.

According to a court document filed by the U.S. prosecutors, a relative who visited Schaefer and Mack while they awaited trial in Indonesia later told authorities that the couple said Schaefer hit von Wiese-Mack with a fruit bowl and Mack covered her mother's mouth with her hand.

Coach confirms Lionel Messi's last match for PSG this weekend

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN AP Sports Writer

Lionel Messi arrived two years ago wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with "Ici C'est Paris" (This Is Paris) — a favorite cry among Paris Saint-Germain fans — and to chants of "Messi! Messi! Messi!"

The soccer superstar will leave the team on Saturday not quite so revered.

The cheers have been replaced by jeers and boos in recent weeks at the Parc des Princes, where the World Cup winner will play his final game for the French league champion.

Christophe Galtier confirmed on Thursday that the looming end of the season is also the end of Messi's time at PSG.

Messi will bow out in their league finale against Clermont on Saturday. His contract expires at the end of June.

"I had the privilege of coaching the best player in the history of soccer," Galtier said. "This will be his last match at the Parc des Princes, and I hope that he will receive the warmest of welcomes."

PSG recruited Messi in August 2021 with the ambition to finally win the Champions League. The team is still waiting.

Although PSG won its record-extending 11th French league title last weekend, it exited Europe's top tournament in the round of 16 for the second straight season.

Messi's adventure in France has been bittersweet. In spite of pretty good statistics, he has been embodying the team's shortcomings in the view of many PSG fans who have repeatedly whistled his name sarcastically in recent weeks.

After struggling to adapt to the French league — the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner scored only six league goals in his first 26 games — Messi improved this season as he developed an efficient understanding with forward Kylian Mbappe.

Following a good start to the current campaign, Messi however failed to replicate that form since returning from the World Cup that he won with Argentina.

Still, in 31 league matches, the 35-year-old Messi has scored 16 goals and delivered as many assists. In all competitions, Messi netted 21 times and had 20 assists for PSG.

"This year, he has been an important part of the team, always available, always committed during training sessions," Galtier said. "I don't think any of the comments or criticisms are justified."

Despite Galtier's support, PSG's appreciation of Messi has not always been so positive.

Last month, the club suspended him following an unauthorized trip to Saudi Arabia. Messi has a commercial contract with Saudi Arabia to promote tourism and has been linked with a lucrative move there at the end of the season.

There has also been talk of a return to Barcelona, where he spent the majority of his career, or to the United States to play in MLS.

Messi arrived at Barcelona at age 13 and left having won 35 titles. He helped the club win the four Champions Leagues, 10 Spanish leagues, and seven Copa del Reys.

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

LGBTQ+ Pride month kicks off with protests, parades, parties

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The start of June marks the beginning of Pride month around the U.S. and some parts of the world, a season intended to celebrate the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ communities and to protest against attacks on hard-won civil rights gains.

This year's Pride takes place in a contentious political climate in which some state legislators have sought to ban drag shows, prohibit gender-affirming care and limit how teachers can talk about sexuality and gender in the classroom.

Events have been disrupted. Performers have been harassed. And in Colorado in November, five people

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were killed and several injured when a gunman shot them inside a gay nightclub.

"What we're seeing right now is probably the worst that it's been since the early days, in terms of the demonization of our communities," said Jay W. Walker, one of the co-founders of the Reclaim Pride Coalition, a New York City-based group.

But that won't stop people from coming out to mark Pride this month, he said.

"You can't keep our communities down. No one can. It's basic human rights," Walker said.

HOW IT STARTED

June has been an important month for the LGBTQ+ rights movement since New York City's first Pride march — then dubbed the "Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day" march — on June 28, 1970.

That event marked an act of defiance from the year before, a 1969 uprising at New York City's Stonewall Inn. After a police raid at the gay bar, a crowd partly led by trans women of color channeled their anger to confront authorities. It was a catalyst to what became a global movement for LGBTQ+ rights.

For more than a half-century, the annual marches have been an opportunity to demand action on specific issues such as the AIDS epidemic and same-sex marriage while also serving as a public celebration.

HOW IT'S GOING

These days, Pride celebrations and events can be found all over the country.

Many of the nation's largest cities — including New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Denver and Minneapolis — hold their main marches on the last weekend of June, while some cities host their events throughout the month or even at other times of the year.

Along with the marches, Pride organizers fill the month of June with events ranging from readings and performances to parties and street festivals.

In Florida this weekend, Orlando-area theme parks and hotels will play host to annual Gay Days events, which are going ahead even after Gov. Ron DeSantis and state legislators passed a series of anti-LGBTQ+ laws, some of which barred classroom discussion of sexual orientation.

Pride events are happening globally as well, drawing major crowds in places including Sao Paulo, Tel Aviv, Madrid and Toronto.

At some past events, there have been concerns about commercialism and corporate presence that overshadow real issues that are still unresolved. In New York City for the past few years, there has been a second event on the same day of the larger Pride march. The Reclaim Pride Coalition says their event hearkens back to the spirit of protest that animated Stonewall.

The New York City Dyke March channels the idea that Pride is about protest, not just parades.

WHAT ARE THE FLASHPOINTS?

Pride parades had plenty to celebrate in recent years, such as in 2015, when the U.S. Supreme Court recognized same-sex marriage in the Obergefell v. Hodges decision.

But the last several years have been more difficult; Pride events were restricted during the pandemic, and when they returned to in-person last year, it was with a sense of urgency, given the rise of hateful rhetoric and anti-LGBTQ legislative action.

Around the country, at least 17 states have put restrictions or bans on gender-affirming medical care for minors, and transgender athletes are facing restrictions at schools in at least 20 states.

"This is a year where sentiment is going to be revolving around resistance and about finding strength and community and centering our joy and our right to exist and our right to be here," said Cathryn Oakley, state legislative director and senior counsel for the Human Rights Campaign organization.

LGBTQ+ communities, Oakley said, need to "commit ourselves to continued resistance against the forces that are trying to prevent us from being our full, joyful, happy, thriving selves. ... And band together and fight back against the very oppressive forces that are coming for us."

LGBTQ+ people flock to Florida for Gay Days festival

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ people are flocking to central Florida this weekend to go on theme park rides, mingle with costumed performers, dance at all-night parties and lounge poolside at hotels during Gay Days, a decades-long tradition.

Even though Gov. Ron DeSantis and Florida lawmakers have championed a slew of anti-LGBTQ+ laws — spurring the most prominent gay rights group in the U.S. and other civil rights organizations to issue warnings the Sunshine State may no longer be safe — Gay Days organizers are still encouraging visitors from around the world to come to one of Florida's largest gay and lesbian celebrations.

They say a large turnout will send a message that LGBTQ+ people are not going away in Florida, which is continually one of the most popular states for tourists to visit. If the hoped-for 150,000 or more visitors come to the half-week of pool parties, drag bingo and thrill rides at Orlando's theme parks and hotels, then "that's the point," said Joseph Clark, CEO of Gay Days Inc.

"Right now is not the time to run. It's not the time to go away," Clark said. "It's time to show we are here, we are queer and we aren't going anywhere."

Unlike most of the country, which celebrates Pride in June, Orlando holds its Pride in October. Gay Days is a bonus celebration.

It's not lost on the organizers that the highlight of the weekend will be a Saturday meetup of LGBTQ+ visitors at the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, where the first Gay Days started as a single-day celebration in 1991. Traditionally, participants wear red shirts to identify themselves, and they meet for the afternoon parade in front of Cinderella's Castle.

Currently, Disney is embroiled in a legal fight with DeSantis over the governor and Republican lawmakers' takeover of Disney World's governing district — after Disney officials publicly opposed legislation that critics have dubbed "Don't Say Gay."

At first, the law banned classroom instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity up to third grade, but this year it was expanded to apply to all grades. On top of that, Florida lawmakers recently passed bills making it a felony to provide gender-affirming health care to transgender minors, as well as banning people from entering bathrooms other than their sex assigned at birth, and prohibiting children from some performances, which takes aim at drag shows.

The administration of DeSantis, who launched a campaign for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination last week, also moved to revoke the liquor licenses of a Miami hotel and a performing arts center owned by the Orlando Philharmonic Plaza Foundation after they hosted drag shows where investigators claim minors were present.

In response, some Florida cities, including St. Cloud near Orlando, have canceled Pride events altogether. "These laws have created a climate of fear and hostility for LGBTQIA+ people in Florida," organizers for St. Cloud's Pride events wrote to announce the cancellation. "We believe that holding an LGBTQIA+ event in this environment would put our community at risk."

Responding to Florida's new laws and policies, the Human Rights Campaign — the largest LGBTQ+ rights organization in the U.S. — recently issued a travel and relocation warning for the state, joining the NAACP, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Florida Immigrant Coalition and Equality Florida.

While the LGBTQ+ advocacy group said it wasn't calling for a boycott of all travel to Florida, it said it wanted to highlight new laws passed by the Republican-controlled Florida Legislature that they said are hostile to the LGBTQ+ community and restrict abortion access, as well as make the state unsafe for many by allowing people to carry concealed weapons without a permit.

Some participants in the Pride Cup athletic competitions at Gay Days decided not to come, forcing the cancellation of dodgeball and flag football tournaments. But the multi-sport competition that is held annually at Gay Days will still have beach volleyball, golf, pickleball and kickball.

Even before these travel advisories were issued, some regular Florida visitors were reconsidering their plans. Sara Haynes, who lives in metro Atlanta with her husband, decided not to visit the state after law-

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makers started planning legislation to restrict treatment options for trans people.

"It's less a crusade and more like, 'I'm not going to spend my money where bad things are going on,'" Haynes said.

But the organizers of Gay Days and their supporters say that Orlando is as gay-friendly a city as they come, earning a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign index, which measures how inclusive cities are of LGBTQ+ residents and visitors. They say tourists can support the LGBTQ+ community by visiting cities like Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and St. Petersburg, which also received perfect scores.

"We live in a bubble here in Orlando, where even with the chaos in Florida, we feel safe here," said Jeremy Williams, editor-in-chief of Watermark Publishing Group Inc., a Florida-based media company that is one of the sponsors of Gay Days.

Gay Days has survived past challenges, including in the early years when Disney posted signs at the Magic Kingdom's entrance warning visitors there was a large gathering of gays and lesbians and offering passes to other parks for guests who might be offended. Over the last three decades, though, the theme parks and resorts have thrown down the welcome mats as Gay Days has become a profitable bounce between the spring break and out-of-school summer crowds. SeaWorld's water park, Aquatica, is a sponsor this year.

Other groups have adopted hostile attitudes in the past. During Gay Days in the 1990s, hundreds of anti-abortion activists with Operation Rescue protested outside Walt Disney World, and the Southern Baptist Convention cited the gathering in calling for a boycott of all things Disney. Some Christian groups tried to buy air time during Gay Days in the late 1990s to pressure people to renounce their sexual orientation, but mainstream TV stations in Orlando rejected the ads.

If Clark, the CEO of the Gay Days business, had his wish, DeSantis would accept an open invitation to see one of the drag shows during this year's festivities.

"Come on out and see that not everything you hear out there is reality," said Clark, as if he were directly addressing DeSantis. "There's a part of me that hopes that if he were to see a show, maybe his mind would change, or maybe he would see the people his actions are affecting."

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP

Amazon to pay \$31 million in privacy violation penalties for Alexa voice assistant and Ring camera

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amazon agreed Wednesday to pay a \$25 million civil penalty to settle Federal Trade Commission allegations it violated a child privacy law and deceived parents by keeping for years kids' voice and location data recorded by its popular Alexa voice assistant.

Separately, the company agreed to pay \$5.8 million in customer refunds for alleged privacy violations involving its doorbell camera Ring.

The Alexa-related action orders Amazon to overhaul its data deletion practices and impose stricter, more transparent privacy measures. It also obliges the tech giant to delete certain data collected by its internet-connected digital assistant, which people use for everything from checking the weather to playing games and queueing up music.

"Amazon's history of misleading parents, keeping children's recordings indefinitely, and flouting parents' deletion requests violated COPPA (the Child Online Privacy Protection Act) and sacrificed privacy for profits," Samuel Levine, the FTC consumer protection chief, said in a statement. The 1998 law is designed to shield children from online harms.

FTC Commissioner Alvaro Bedoya said in a statement that "when parents asked Amazon to delete their kids' Alexa voice data, the company did not delete all of it."

The agency ordered the company to delete inactive child accounts as well as certain voice and geolocation data.

Amazon kept the kids' data to refine its voice recognition algorithm, the artificial intelligence behind Al-

exa, which powers Echo and other smart speakers, Bedoya said. The FTC complaint sends a message to all tech companies who are "sprinting to do the same" amid fierce competition in developing AI datasets, he added.

"Nothing is more visceral to a parent than the sound of their child's voice," tweeted Bedoya, the father of two small children.

Amazon said last month that it has sold more than a half-billion Alexa-enabled devices globally and that use of the service increased 35% last year.

In the Ring case, the FTC says Amazon's home security camera subsidiary let employees and contractors access consumers' private videos and providing lax security practices that enabled hackers to take control of some accounts.

Amazon bought California-based Ring in 2018, and many of the violations alleged by the FTC predate the acquisition. Under the FTC's order, Ring is required to pay \$5.8 million that would be used for consumer refunds.

Amazon said it disagreed with the FTC's claims on both Alexa and Ring and denied violating the law. But it said the settlements "put these matters behind us."

"Our devices and services are built to protect customers' privacy, and to provide customers with control over their experience," the Seattle-based company said.

In addition to the fine in the Alexa case, the proposed order prohibits Amazon from using deleted geolocation and voice information to create or improve any data product. The order also requires Amazon to create a privacy program for its use of geolocation information.

The proposed orders must be approved by federal judges.

FTC commissioners had unanimously voted to file the charges against Amazon in both cases.

Christopher Nolan breaks down the best ways to watch a movie, ahead of his 'Oppenheimer' release

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

It's no secret that Christopher Nolan made "Oppenheimer" to be seen on the big screen. But not all big screens are created equal.

That's part of the reason why Universal Pictures has made "Oppenheimer" tickets available early for over a thousand "premium large format" (or PLF) screens, with options including IMAX 70mm, 70mm, IMAX digital, 35mm, Dolby Cinema and more.

Knowing that even those words can get overwhelming and technical, Nolan went a step further: In an exclusive interview with The Associated Press, he offered a guide to his favorite formats, explaining why it matters and even where he likes to sit so that audiences don't feel like they need a film school degree (or one in theoretical physics) before settling on a theater.

"You rarely get the chance to really talk to moviegoers directly about why you love a particular format and why if they can find an IMAX screen to see the film on that's great," Nolan said. "We put a lot of effort into shooting the film in a way that we can get it out on these large format screens. It really is just a great way of giving people an experience that they can't possibly get in the home."

In a film about about J. Robert Oppenheimer, the theoretical physicist who oversaw the development of first atomic bomb during World War II, this will be especially pivotal in viewing the Trinity Test, the first detonation of a nuclear weapon. Nolan and his effects teams recreated the blast, with all its blinding brilliance.

"We knew that this had to be the showstopper," Nolan said. "We're able to do things with picture now that before we were really only able to do with sound in terms of an oversize impact for the audience—an almost physical sense of response to the film."

"Oppenheimer," starring Cillian Murphy, opens in theaters on July 21.

THE BIG PICTURE

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"Oppenheimer" was shot using some of the highest resolution film cameras that exist. Like "Dunkirk" and "Tenet," "Oppenheimer" was filmed entirely on large format film stock, meaning a combination of IMAX 65mm and Panavision 65mm (think David Lean/"Lawrence of Arabia"), that's then projected in 70mm.

"The sharpness and the clarity and the depth of the image is unparalleled," Nolan said. "The headline, for me, is by shooting on IMAX 70mm film, you're really letting the screen disappear. You're getting a feeling of 3D without the glasses. You've got a huge screen and you're filling the peripheral vision of the audience. You're immersing them in the world of the film."

Nolan has been shooting with IMAX cameras since "The Dark Knight." Audiences would regularly gasp at seeing its first shot projected in IMAX 70mm. Though it's "just a helicopter shot" of some buildings in Chicago, it helps explain the ineffable power of the format.

On a technical level, the IMAX film resolution is almost 10 times more than a 35mm projector and each frame has some 18,000 pixels of resolution versus a home HD screen that has 1,920 pixels.

WHY IS IT SHOT ON 65MM AND PROJECTED IN 70MM?

The 5mm difference goes back to when that extra space on the film had to be reserved for the soundtrack. With digital sound, that's unnecessary and it is "purely a visual enhancement," Nolan explained.

DO THE DIFFERENT FORMATS IMPACT HOW THE FILM IS SHOT?

"We have to plan very carefully because by shooting an IMAX film, you capture a lot of information," he said. "Your movie is going to translate very well to all the formats because you're getting the ultimate amount of visual information. But there are different shapes to the screen — what we call aspect ratios. What you have to plan is how you then frame your imagery so that it can be presented in different theaters with equal success."

Starting with "The Dark Knight," they developed a system that they call "center punching the action" so that nothing is lost.

Cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema is also always aware of the "frame lines for the different theaters" when looking through the camera.

On the biggest presentations, IMAX 1.43:1 (the massive square screen) the screen essentially disappears for the audience. For other formats like 35mm, the top and the bottom get cropped.

But, Nolan said, "from a creative point of view, what we've found over the years is that there's no compromise to composition."

WHY NOT MAKE AN ENTIRE MOVIE IN IMAX?

The IMAX cameras are just too loud for dialogue heavy scenes, but Nolan is optimistic about the new cameras being developed.

WHAT'S THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BLACK AND WHITE SEQUENCES?

Some of "Oppenheimer" is presented in black and white for a very specific story reason.

"I knew that I had two timelines that we were running in the film," Nolan said. "One is in color, and that's Oppenheimer's subjective experience. That's the bulk of the film. Then the other is a black and white timeline. It's a more objective view of his story from a different character's point of view."

Nolan's desire for the black and white portions to be of equal image quality to the rest of the film led to the development of the first ever black and white IMAX film stock, which Kodak made and Fotokem developed.

"We shot a lot of our hair and makeup tests using black and white. And then we would go to the IMAX film projector at CityWalk and project it there," he said. "I've just never seen anything like it. To see such a massive black and white film image? It's just a wonderful thing."

NOLAN'S FAVORITE THEATRICAL FORMATS

For Nolan, the "best possible experience" to view "Oppenheimer" in theaters is the IMAX 70mm film presentations. These are also among the rarest, currently set for 25 locations in North America including the AMC Universal CityWalk in Los Angeles, the AMC Lincoln Square in New York, the Cinemark Dallas, the Regal King of Prussia near Philadelphia and the AutoNation IMAX in Fort Lauderdale.

The prints span over 11 miles of film stock, weigh some 600 pounds and run through film projectors horizontally.

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There will also be over one hundred 70mm prints ("a fabulous presentation," Nolan said) sent to theaters around the world, with over 77 (and more to come) on sale in North America at major chains and many independent locations like the Music Box in Chicago and the AFI Silver in Washington D.C.

"The two formats are sort of different and I love them both," he said.

The sequences projected in IMAX 70mm really "come to life" on those screens, and vice versa for the 70mm sequences on those specific projectors. In IMAX theaters, for example, things shot with IMAX film cameras will expand vertically to fill the entire screen.

IMAX DIGITAL, LASER AND EXHIBITOR PLF OPTIONS

The vast majority of moviegoers in North America will have easier access to digital presentations. These include IMAX digital, which can sometimes mean a laser projected image and other times involves a retro formatted screen, and what's called "exhibitor PLF," meaning large format screen and projection systems developed by individual theater chains (like Regal RPX, Cinemark XD and Cineplex UltraAVX). When in doubt, look for an "X" in the name.

But don't dismay: It'll still look great, according to Nolan, whose team has worked for six months to digitize the original film for other formats to ensure the best experience on every screen.

"This is the exciting thing about shooting an IMAX film: When you scan it for the digital format, you're working with the absolute best possible image that you could acquire, and that translates wonderfully to the new projector formats like the laser projectors," he said.

Nolan said the "IMAX impact" over the last 20 to 30 years has resulted in more theaters paying more attention to presentation, from projection to sound, which has been "great for filmmakers."

WHERE ARE THE BEST SEATS?

Well, that comes down to personal preference but here's where Nolan likes to sit.

"When I'm in a theater that's Cinemascope ratio, I like to be right near the front, middle of the third row," he said. "When I'm in a stadium, IMAX 1.43:1, then I actually like to be a little behind the center line right up at the middle. So, a little further back."

India pauses plans to add new coal plants for five years, bets on renewables, batteries

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — The Indian government will not consider any proposals for new coal plants for the next five years and focus on growing its renewables sector, according to an updated national electricity plan released Wednesday evening.

The temporary pause in the growth of the dirty fuel was hailed by energy experts as a positive step for a country that is currently reliant on coal for around 75% of its electricity.

Updated every five years, the plan serves as a guideline for India's priorities in its electricity sector.

India is the world's third highest emitter and most populous country. It plans to reach net zero emissions by 2070, which would mean significantly slashing coal use and ramping up renewable energy.

In a draft of the plan released in September, the Central Electricity Authority, which is in charge of planning for India's electricity needs, projected that nearly 8,000 megawatts of new coal capacity was required by 2027. But Wednesday's strategy proposes the build out of more than 8,600 megawatts of battery energy storage systems instead.

Battery storage is crucial for round-the-clock use of renewable energy.

"This plan is a step in the right direction," said Raghav Pachouri, an energy sector expert at Vasudha Foundation, a New Delhi-based think tank.

Pachouri said one reason the plans for new coal might have been scrapped is because there are already some coal plants under construction.

The country is also experiencing longer summers and hotter weather in part due to climate change, meaning greater electricity demand during the scorching day, making it easier to fulfill energy needs with renewables, said Pachouri.

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"When you need energy during the day, solar power can provide for it," he said.

India plans to install 500 gigawatts of clean energy by 2030, enough energy to power anywhere from 150 to 500 million homes depending on power use, but is not on course to meet that target, according to Aditya Lolla, an energy analyst at the think tank Ember.

"We're installing only up to 17 gigawatts a year, this needs to increase to 40 to 45 gigawatts to meet targets," said Lolla.

The new plan goes on to project that new coal power will be built after 2027, but Lolla says this should be taken with a pinch of salt.

"Traditionally, projections for the coming five years are more concrete and those for the subsequent years are essentially placeholders," said Lolla. "India wants to move towards a cleaner power system. With every electricity plan, the coal pipeline is falling."

Lolla predicts that with the current volatile global energy picture, due to Russia's war in Ukraine, climate change and pandemic recovery, India will take a call on its longer-term energy plan at a future date, depending on how things progress by 2027.

Follow Sibi Arasu on Twitter at @sibi123

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Today in History: June 2, Timothy McVeigh convicted

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 2, the 153rd day of 2023. There are 212 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 2, 1997, Timothy McVeigh was convicted of murder and conspiracy in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people. (McVeigh was executed in June 2001.)

On this date:

In 1924, Congress passed, and President Calvin Coolidge signed, a measure guaranteeing full American citizenship for all Native Americans born within U.S. territorial limits.

In 1941, baseball's "Iron Horse," Lou Gehrig, died in New York of a degenerative disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; he was 37.

In 1953, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place in London's Westminster Abbey, 16 months after the death of her father, King George VI.

In 1961, playwright and director George S. Kaufman, 71, died in New York.

In 1962, Soviet forces opened fire on striking workers in the Russian city of Novocherkassk; a retired general in 1989 put the death toll at 22 to 24.

In 1966, U.S. space probe Surveyor 1 landed on the moon and began transmitting detailed photographs of the lunar surface.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II arrived in his native Poland on the first visit by a pope to a Communist country.

In 1981, the Japanese video arcade game "Donkey Kong" was released by Nintendo.

In 1999, South Africans went to the polls in their second post-apartheid election, giving the African National Congress a decisive victory; retiring president Nelson Mandela was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki (TAH'-boh um-BEH'-kee).

In 2011, a judge in Placerville, California, sentenced serial sex offender Phillip Garrido to life in prison for kidnapping and raping Jaycee Dugard; Garrido's wife, Nancy, received a decades-long sentence.

In 2016, autopsy results showed superstar musician Prince died of an accidental overdose of fentanyl, a powerful opioid painkiller.

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In 2020, defying curfews, protesters streamed back into the nation's streets, hours after President Donald Trump urged governors to put down the violence set off by the death of George Floyd. Police said four officers were hit by gunfire after protests in St. Louis that began peacefully became violent.

Ten years ago: Egypt's highest court ruled that the nation's interim parliament was illegally elected, though it stopped short of dissolving the chamber immediately. Indiana Pacers center Roy Hibbert was fined \$75,000 by the NBA for using a gay slur and profanity during his news conference after Game 6 of the Eastern Conference finals; Hibbert apologized for the comments.

Five years ago: The number of homes destroyed reached 80 in an eruption of Hawaii's Kilauea Volcano. (The eruption would eventually destroy more than 700 homes.) Bare-knuckle boxing matches took place in front of 2,000 rowdy fans at a hockey rink in Cheyenne, Wyoming; the event, promoted as the first legal, regulated and sanctioned bare-knuckle fight event in U.S. history, featured 10 bouts and was viewed by tens of thousands via pay-per-view. In England, Masar beat odds-on favorite Saxon Warrior to win horse racing's Epsom Derby.

One year ago: After a school shooting in Uvalde, Texas that killed 19 students and two teachers, President Joe Biden delivered an address to the nation about the latest round of mass shootings in an attempt to increase the pressure on Congress to pass stricter gun limits after such efforts failed in the wake of past violence. A man who blamed his surgeon for continuing pain after a recent back operation bought an AR-style rifle and opened fire hours later at a Tulsa, Oklahoma medical office, killing the doctor and three other people in an attack that ended with him taking his own life. Queen Elizabeth II drew wild cheers from a crowd of tens of thousands as she carefully stepped on to the Buckingham Palace balcony at the start of four days of celebrations of her 70 years on the throne. (The queen's reign would end with her death three months later).

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ron Ely (EE'-lee) is 85. Filmmaker and movie historian Kevin Brownlow is 85. Actor Stacy Keach is 82. Actor Charles Haid is 80. R&B singer Chubby Tavares (Tavares) is 79. Movie director Lasse (LAH'-suh) Hallstrom is 77. Actor Jerry Mathers is 75. Actor Joanna Gleason is 73. NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman is 71. Actor Dennis Haysbert is 69. Comedian Dana Carvey is 68. Actor Gary Grimes is 68. Pop musician Michael Steele is 68. Rock singer Tony Hadley (Spandau Ballet) is 63. Actor Liam Cunningham is 62. Actor Navid Negahban is 59. Singer Merrill Bainbridge is 55. TV personality-producer Andy Cohen ("The Real Housewives" TV franchise) is 55. Rapper B-Real (Cypress Hill) is 53. Actor Paula Cale is 53. Actor Anthony Montgomery is 52. Actor-comedian Wayne Brady is 51. Actor Wentworth Miller is 51. Rock musician Tim Rice-Oxley (Keane) is 47. Actor Zachary Quinto is 46. Actor Dominic Cooper is 45. Actor Nikki Cox is 45. Actor Justin Long is 45. Actor Deon Richmond is 45. Actor Morena Baccarin is 44. R&B singer Irish Grinstead (702) is 43. Rock musician Fabrizio Moretti (The Strokes) is 43. Olympic gold medal soccer player Abby Wambach is 43. Singer-songwriter ZZ Ward is 37. Rapper/actor Awkwafina is 35. Actor Brittany Curran is 33. Actor Sterling Beaumon is 28.