

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Wednesday, June 7

- Senior Menu: Meatloaf, scalloped potatoes, creamed peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
- Olive Grove: Men's League
- United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
- Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
- Emmanuel Lutheran Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Campfire Night, 7 p.m.
- Groton Chamber Meeting, noon, at city hall
- Jr. Teener hosts Clark, 6 p.m. (2)
- U12BB hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U10BB B/W vs. Borge at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U8Blue vs. Borge at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U8SB hosts Oakes, 5:30 p.m.
- U10SB hosts Oakes, 7 p.m.
- U18SB vs. Claremont at Aberdeen, 6:30 p.m. (2)

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



Thursday, June 8

- Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, tossed salad, rainbow sherbet, whole wheat bread.
- Legion at Redfield, 5:30 p.m. (1)
- Jr. Legion at Redfield, 7:30 p.m. (1)
- U12BB vs. Hannigan at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U10BB R/W vs. Hannigan at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U8BB Red vs. Hannigan at Aberdeen North Complex, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U8SB hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m.
- U10SB hosts Britton, 6 p.m. (2)
- H12SB hosts Britton, 7 p.m. (2)

Friday, June 9

- Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, grape juice, breadstick, apple crisp.
- Olive Grove: Spring Fundraiser, 7 p.m.
- Amateurs host Aberdeen, 7 p.m.
- Jr. Legion at Moberge, 5 p.m. (2)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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GROTON LEGION 2023

<u>DATE</u>	<u>OPPONENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>TIME</u>
May 28	Clark	Clark	12:00 (1)
May 30	Watertown	Watertown	5:00 (2)
June 2	Lake Norden	Groton	5:00 (1)
June 3-4	Milbank Tournament	Milbank	TBD
June 6	W.I.N.	Groton	5:30 (1)
June 8	Redfield	Redfield	5:30 (1)
June 10	Milbank	Groton	2:00 (1)
June 12	W.I.N.	Northville	5:00 (1)
June 13	Claremont	Claremont	6:00 (2)
June 14	Sisseton	Sisseton	6:00 (1)
June 21	Hamlin	Groton	6:00 (1)
June 23	Lake Norden	Lake Norden	5:00 (1)
June 26	Hamlin	Bryant	6:00 (1)
June 28	Clark	Clark	6:00 (1)
June 29	Redfield	Groton	5:30 (1)
July 6-8	Clark Tournament	Clark	TBD
July 10	Claremont	Groton	6:00 (2)
July 11	Aberdeen Smitty's	Aberdeen	6:00 (1)
July 18-23	Region 6B Tournament	Groton	TBD
July 28-Aug 1	State B Tournament	Redfield	TBD

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JANUARY 24, 2023

World in Brief

Florida's controversial "stand your ground" law under more scrutiny.

Michael Tisius, 42, who fatally shot two Missouri jail guards in 2000, became the third person to be executed in the state of Missouri in 2023, despite protests from several jurors in the case who called for a reduced sentence.

The special counsel investigating Donald Trump's handling of classified documents is using a grand jury in Florida to gather evidence and witness testimony after relying on a grand jury in Washington, D.C., for months.

Pope Francis has been admitted to a hospital in Rome to undergo abdominal surgery to treat an intestinal blockage.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has claimed that 71 Russian soldiers have been killed in what he called "an unsuccessful Ukrainian offensive in recent days," and that Kyiv had suffered "significant and incomparable casualties."

TALKING POINTS

"It was so conflicting. It's only now, realizing what the [Mirror Group's] journalists were doing and how they were getting their information, that I can see how much of my life was wasted on this paranoia. I've always heard people refer to my mother as paranoid, but she wasn't. She was fearful of what was actually happening to her, and now I know that I was the same," Prince Harry contradicted Prince William's account of Princess Diana's paranoia during his witness statement in a phone hacking lawsuit against Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN).

"This will definitely help drought conditions in the short run. In the long run, we still face risks associated with higher temperatures due to climate change. Some areas will get wetter, and some will get drier. In all areas, we expect more precipitation to fall as rain than as snow, which makes capturing and storing the water more challenging," Tom Corringham, a research economist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, told Newsweek after record winter storms dramatically changed this year's drought outlook..

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

North Dakota's Republican governor, Doug Burgum, is also expected to announce his 2024 presidential campaign at a daytime event in Fargo.

Prince Harry is expected to testify for a second day in his trial against British tabloid publisher Mirror Group Newspapers.

Two people have died, and five others were injured after gunfire struck a crowd outside of a theater where a high school graduation had just finished in Richmond, Virginia. A 19-year-old suspect was arrested.

17 states, including New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, have issued serious air quality alerts as smoke from wildfires in Canada continues to drift south over the U.S.

A white Florida woman has been arrested after being accused of fatally shooting her black neighbor through her front door last weekend, in a case that has brought

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Groton FFA Awards Banquet



Chapter Degree recipients

Front Row: Ashlyn Sperry, Hannah Monson, Lexy Osterman. Back Row: Layne Hanson, Turner Thompson, Kellen Antonsen, Payton Mitchell, Logan Ringgenberg, Austin Aberle. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Greenhand Degree recipients

Front Row: Makayla Jones, Ashley Johnson, Emma Schinkel, Aiden Heathcote. Back Row: Charlie Frost, Bradyn Wienk, Karter Moody, Blake Pauli, Logan Warrington. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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2023-2024 Chapter Officers

Front Row: Cadence Feist, Treasurer; Faith Flihs, Secretary; Ava Wienk, Social Media Coordinator. **Back Row:** Hannah Monson, President; Turner Thompson, Vice President; Karter Moody, Sentinel; Logan Ringgenberg, Student Advisor; Layne Hanson, Reporter; Lexi Osterman, Activities Coordinator. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Adam Franken with seniors presenting him with a senior gift. Kamryn Flihs, Porter Johnson, Mr. Franken, Cole Bisbee, Caleb Hanten, Kaleb Antonson. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Adam Franken swearing in the new officer team. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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State Degree winners and scholarship winners

Kamryn Flihs, Porter Johnson, Mr. Franken, Cole Bisbee, Caleb Hanten, Kaleb Antonson.
(not pictured: Ethan Gengerke) (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Chapter Star Award winners

Karter Moody, Star Greenhand; Logan Ringgenberg, Star Agribusiness; Lexi Osterman, Star Farmer; Layne Hanson, Star Ag Placement. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



Belden wins Queen of Hearts

Greg Belden was the lucky winner of the first Queen of Hearts raffle. His name was drawn in Week 16 and he picked number 41 which happened to be the Queen of Hearts. He won half of the jackpot of \$29,722.

A new board will be started with the first drawing on June 8th at the Olive Grove Clubhouse.

Greg is pictured with his son, Brantley. (Photo courtesy of Brenda Waage)

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Groton Legion wins Milbank Tournament

Back row left to right. Coach Aaron Severson, Carter Simon, Gavin Englund, Cade Larson, Colby Dunker, Tate Larson, Bradin Althoff, Caden McInerney, Teylor Diegel, Coach Seth Erickson Bottom Row Left to right. Nick Morris, Karsten Flihs, Kellen Antonsen, Braxton Imrie, Cole Simon, Korbin Kucker, Brevin Flihs, Dillon Abeln, Ryan Groeblichhoff. (Courtesy Photo)

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion Runs Away With Early Lead in Victory

Groton Legion Post 39 watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 7-0 loss to Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion on Tuesday. Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion scored on a passed ball during Drew Bakeburg's at bat, a single by Andrew Bishop, a walk by Ashton Remily, and a single by Quinton Fischbach in the second inning.

The Groton Legion Post 39 struggled to put runs on the board and had a tough time defensively containing Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion, giving up seven runs.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion fired up the offense in the second inning, when.

One bright spot for Groton Legion Post 39 was a single by Logan Ringgingberg in the third inning.

Remily was the winning pitcher for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion. Remily lasted six innings, allowing four hits and zero runs while striking out six. Fischbach threw one inning in relief out of the bullpen.

Braxton Imrie took the loss for Groton Legion Post 39. The pitcher allowed five hits and seven runs over four innings, striking out eight.

Ringgingberg led Groton Legion Post 39 with three hits in three at bats. Groton Legion Post 39 didn't commit a single error in the field. Cade Larson had the most chances in the field with ten.

Bishop went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Legion in hits.

Late Score Costs Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion Against Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion stayed in it until the end, but Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion pulled away late in a 6-5 victory on Wednesday. The game was tied at five with Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion batting in the top of the fifth when Xavier Kadlec drew a walk, scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion lost despite out-hitting Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion seven to five.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion got things moving in the first inning. Gavin Lane drew a walk, scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion notched four runs in the fourth inning. Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion batters contributing to the big inning included Jarrett Erdmann, Karsten Flihs, and Brevin Flihs, who all drove in runs.

Devon Fischbach got the win for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion. The righty allowed seven hits and five runs over five innings, striking out eight. Fischbach recorded the last 15 outs to earn the save for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion.

Nicholas Morris took the loss for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The pitcher allowed two hits and two runs over two innings.

Taylor Diegel started the game for Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion. The righthander went two innings, allowing two runs on two hits and striking out one

Diegel led Groton Post 39 Jr. Legion with two hits in three at bats.

Mac Heinz went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern Jr Legion in hits.

Groton Transit Fundraiser



When: Thursday, June 15, 2023

Time: 5:00 pm-7:00 pm

Where: Groton Community Center

*** Groton Transit Fundraiser will be held at the Groton Community Center-
109 N 3rd Street- One block East of Groton Transit***

Let us do the Cooking for you!! Burgers, Brats, Beans, Watermelon, Chips,
and the Famous Mini Donuts!!

Food*Fun*Door Prizes

FREE WILL OFFERING

Please join us & Help support Groton Transit!

Guthmiller places 12th at state golf

The state golf tournament concluded on Tuesday with Carly Guthmiller placing 12th with a final score of 85. Carlee Johnson was 34th with a 93, Mia Crank was 76th with a 108, Shaylee Peterson was 87th with a 119 and Carly Gilbert was 90th with a score of 90. Groton Area placed 12th as a team.



Top 25 State A Girls Golfers in the state meet. Groton Area's Carly Guthmiller is the one in white, third from right, in the middle row. (Courtesy Photo from Joel Guthmiller)



Carly Guthmiller receives here medal at the state golf meet.

(Courtesy Photo from Joel Guthmiller)

Groton looking into surveillance options after disgruntled citizen incident

by Elizabeth Varin

An incident at Groton City Hall has prompted officials to look into security options at city facilities. A disgruntled Groton resident "conducted himself very unprofessionally," said Mayor Scott Hanlon when questioned after the meeting. This prompted the council to discuss surveillance options during the meeting. The resident "apparently had some interaction with city workers and citizens coming in to City Hall," said Councilwoman Karyn Babcock. "And I just feel like that's not what they're here for. They're not here to get cussed out and threatened."

Babcock asked the council about whether the city should install cameras at the city building at 120 North Main Street. When people are in front of a camera screaming obscenities, they can be held accountable. "People should be held accountable for their actions," she said. "We're representatives of the city, but if people get in our face and threaten us, they should be held accountable."

"...These girls aren't here for that," she added. "That's not their job."

Deputy Finance Officer April Abeln asked the council to instead look into purchasing panic buttons that would send a notice to police. This could bring police to City Hall faster without raising immediate ire.

Councilman Jason Wambach suggested that city police could offer training to abate situations that may come up.

Abeln replied, "We handled ourselves well. We had five witnesses, and it didn't matter."

Councilman Kevin Nehls said it wouldn't hurt to get pricing on cameras.

Wambach added, "In this day and age, you almost have to have it."

After it was revealed some city staff had also been approached at the city shop, Councilman Brian Bahr said the city should think of adding a camera there as well.

"Everybody's got to feel comfortable where they work," he said.

New park bathroom/tornado shelter plans on the way

Representatives with HKG Architects presented a preliminary floor plan for a tornado shelter and bathroom/shower facility at the city park.

The presented plan includes three toilets and two showers in the women's restroom, one toilet, two urinals and two showers in the men's bathroom, a utility room and a standing room for the shelter.

"It's certainly a plan, a layout for you to look at," said Dean Marske, president of HKG Architects. "...We have to have something to go off of."

The council was encouraged to provide feedback so a couple of options could be presented at the next meeting.

The architectural firm out of Aberdeen plans to bring a couple plans to walk through with the council at its next meeting June 20.

"The sooner, the better," said Mayor Hanlon. "...I think we're moving in the right direction."

Baseball Concession stand replacement discussion continues

City officials plan to wait for word on a grant to rebuild the baseball complex concession stand instead of moving forward with the project at a higher cost to the city.

The Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation has asked the city to consider starting the project to rebuild the concession stand and restrooms in order to get the new building in place by next summer, said Councilman Jason Wambach. The foundation would cover half of the about \$220,000 cost, with the city footing the rest of the bill.

The city has applied for a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant to cover some of the costs of the project. However, the council had been advised that they wouldn't be able to move forward with the project until the grant was in place, which may take about a year to finalize.

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Council members lamented not being able to move forward yet, but made clear they would wait until the grant application process was completed before moving ahead.

"I don't see any other way," said Councilman Brian Bahr. "I know they've fundraised a lot for it, but I just think we need to draw the line somewhere."

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock added the city risks losing out on possible grant money should construction begin this fall. City officials have agreed to move forward with the project on the condition that grant money go toward the building, and it's taxpayer money the city is dealing with.

The city has its hands tied, said Councilman Kevin Nehls.

"I know they've done a lot of work out there," he said. "And this is a vital piece to their ending, where they think they want it. I know it's hard to sit back and wait for a year.

"It's unfortunate it takes that long for these grants, but we have to do our due diligence," he added. "I wish it was a different answer."

"But that's sometimes how it goes," replied Mayor Scott Hanlon.

Old city jail lot to be reviewed

The old city jail will remain under city ownership for a bit longer.

A proposal to transfer ownership to the Groton Historical Society through a quitclaim deed was put on hold while the city proceeds to replat the lot the jail sits on.

The lot, located at the corner of North Third Street and East First Avenue just south of the Groton Community Center, hosts the jail and open land. The quitclaim deed brought to the council by Groton Historical Society's Topper Tastad includes an easement reservation restriction that would allow the city to take back the west 70 feet of the lot should the council want to in the future.

City Attorney Drew Johnson advised the council to make distinct the two areas of the property, the open space and the land the jail sits on. It's a lot of land to give away without payment.

"You don't know who's going to be in charge of this five or ten years down the road," he said. "It's a lot of property that's not needed to have the jail where it's at."

He added there was a lot of language in the quitclaim deed that isn't normally in one.

Mayor Scott Hanlon suggested the lot be replatted to separate out the two areas of land.

"I think we would be better off to do that," he said. "That way we aren't leaving an issue for a future council."

A replat is a process used to add lots or otherwise change a recorded plat.

A replat should be pretty easy as the property has been owned by the city for more than 100 years, Tastad said.

Sump pump violators to be penalized sooner

The city is moving forward with amending an ordinance to get to those who violate sewer restrictions sooner.

The council approved the first reading of Ordinance No. 768, which would reduce the sewer penalty timeframe to a 24-hour notice before fines can start to be assessed.

The ordinance amendment came before the council at its last meeting, and Councilwoman Babcock asked why there weren't additional notice requirements.

The ordinance requires a written notice be served by the city.

"There's nothing in here about an oral notice," Babcock said. "This strictly says written. It was supposed to be both.

"If you're not here to be served a written notice, someone has to pick up the phone and call," she added.

Deputy Finance Officer Abeln said the city isn't able to have solid proof that a verbal warning was issued. City Attorney Drew Johnson said that would prevent a "he said, she said" situation.

The council ultimately approved the first reading, but advised staff that a follow up call would be good to have as well.

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Sound system updates coming as early as next week

A new sound system is coming to the Groton Park.

Topper Tastad with Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. told the council work will begin Monday morning to dig electrical lines and add speakers to the park. The project, which will come in under \$21,000, has been funded by a \$5,000 grant and fundraising by Enrich Groton SoDak Inc.

Currently the group has two full pages of donors and many who have pledged money to the project, Tastad said. If all the pledges come in, the money will be there.

"We're really really really really close on this," he said.

As long as there aren't any disasters, Tastad said city staff will help put up speakers next week.

When not in use, the speakers will be housed at City Hall, Tastad said. The city will also receive an invoice from Pauer Sound, but it will be paid in full.

"You won't get a bill for this," he said. "This is a gift. This is a gift for the community."

Contentious swimming pool advertising

After complaints from some residents, the council discussed options for business signs currently on the swimming pool fence facing Main Street.

The city had to move banners previously placed high on nearby tennis court fencing, said Technology Specialist Paul Kosel. There has been an added benefit as the signs act as a privacy blocker for the pool and offer some shade in the evening.

Councilwoman Babcock asked if the banner placement could damage the fence surrounding the pool. She also said she has fielded a couple of calls from residents not happy to see the signage on Main Street.

"They put up the pool to see the pool, not advertising," she said.

She asked that the city discuss where those signs could be relocated to before next year.

One option if the banners are moved would be to add slats to the swimming pool fence to act as a privacy screen, Kosel said.

In an era of weirdos, privacy is good, added Councilwoman Shirley Wells.

If the banners are moved, Councilman Wambach suggested making them smaller to possibly keep the banners and wind from damaging fences in the area.

Discussion could continue into next year, but the signs won't be an issue when summer is over, Hanlon said.

"For now, we're going to leave them and see how it turns out because we don't have another fence to put them on," he said. "Summer's going to go boom, boom, boom."

- The new city reservoir has not been filled to capacity yet. WEB Water is maxed out on their water capacity. Residents are asked to continue to conserve water, and there will continue to be no outdoor watering which includes irrigation systems and using large quantities to fill pools and water gardens.

- City staff and council members plan to contact Pro Track and Tennis to discuss options to fix cracks and other issues at the Tennis/PickleBall Courts.

- The city added another lifeguard, Marlee Tollifson, to the summer staff roster at the swimming pool.

- The city approved upping the summer salary of the U12 day baseball coach and the U8/U10 day baseball coach. The positions, currently held by Claire Zbylut, are being combined for a total yearly salary of \$2,500.

- The city may try some "trial and error" moves to improve conditions at the ice skating rink. Discussion is set to continue on options to get rid of grass on the field and make for a better frozen surface.

- The council accepted the resignation of Planning and Zoning Board member Chris Khali effective July 1. Mayor Hanlon indicated he would appoint Keith Wipf to the board effective July 1, which was approved by the council.

- Resident Topper Tastad invited the community to the Groton Transit fundraiser from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. June 15 at the Groton Community Center.



Anti-abortion group sues South Dakota over campaign finance requirements

Students for Life Action wants to keep donors private in campaign materials

BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 6, 2023 6:40 PM

A Virginia anti-abortion group wants a federal judge to strike down a South Dakota law that requires nonprofit organizations to list their top five donors on political messaging.

Students for Life of America is a nonprofit advocacy group launched in 2006, with an aim to educate and connect anti-abortion students with messaging tools and one another. Students for Life Action is an associated group, but is a different type of nonprofit allowed to engage in political activities.

On Monday, Students for Life Action filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court in South Dakota alleging that the state's donor disclosure requirements violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The litigation names Attorney General Marty Jackley and Secretary of State Monae Johnson as defendants.

The lawsuit comes with the backdrop of an impending political battle over abortion in South Dakota. Advocates are collecting signatures for a ballot question that would codify the right to an abortion into the state constitution.

The lawsuit notes that Students for Life Action intends to send political messaging in 2024, the year voters may be asked to overturn the state's near-total abortion ban.

"Plaintiff Students for Life Action has engaged in independent expenditures in South Dakota in the past and intends to do so again in future elections, including the 2024 election," the lawsuit says.

Jacob Huebert, the Chicago lawyer representing the student group in the lawsuit, acknowledged that the nonprofit did not follow the law in 2022.

The group engaged in "independent expenditures" highlighting the abortion views of 12 candidates on South Dakota's primary election ballot that year. Among them were Rep. Greg Jamison, R-Sioux Falls, Rep. Jess Olson, R-Rapid City, and Rep. Tim Reed, R-Brookings.

According to the lawsuit, the communications took aim at the candidates' "voting records on banning chemical abortions" and their responses to surveys from the group. The group spent \$116.62 on each race.

That price tag triggered the requirement to list the organization's top five donors. The requirement has the effect of chilling speech, the lawsuit alleges.

Such disclosures amount to "doxxing" donors, the group says. The term refers to the release of personally identifying documents or information that might subject people to harassment and physical danger.

In 2021, the lawsuit says, a Texas Right to Life staffer received death threats when his home address was leaked on the internet.

"South Dakota's on-ad disclosure law discourages donors from making contributions to nonprofits like Students for Life Action that advocate positions with which they agree, for fear that their names will be highlighted in public advertisements," the lawsuit reads.

Huebert told South Dakota Searchlight that the group had not been accused of violating the law by any officials in the state as a result of its campaign spending.

The problem, he said, is the existence of the law and its potential penalties – up to 30 days in jail and a \$500 fine for a first offense and up to a year in jail and a \$2,000 penalty for repeat offenses.

The law violates the rights of any nonprofit that seeks to communicate its views, he said.

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"This law is on the books. They have to comply with it. If they don't comply with it, they are subject to being criminally prosecuted. They don't want to have to disclose their donors, and so the way to deal with this is to challenge the law, like we're doing, for violating the organization's First Amendment rights," Huebert said.

The law in question passed in 2013 as part of a broader campaign finance reform bill. It's unclear how many times it's been enforced since former Gov. Dennis Daugaard signed it into law. Representatives from Secretary of State Johnson's office did not return an email seeking comment on the lawsuit.

Attorney General Jackley did not have a comment, but pledged to defend the law as necessary through spokesman Tony Mangan.

"The Attorney General has not been served with the lawsuit," Mangan said in an emailed statement. "In the event, the Attorney General, or a proper state official is served, the Attorney General will undertake its responsibility to defend our state statutes, Constitution, and officials."

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

Regulators reduce Xcel's 18% electric rate hike to 6%

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 6, 2023 5:14 PM

A state regulatory agency is limiting a utility company's electric rate increase to about 6% after the company requested a nearly 18% rate hike. The change affects 97,500 South Dakota customers.

The 18% rate hike has been temporarily in effect for the last six months after an initial deadline passed for the regulatory agency, the Public Utilities Commission, to act on the request. The commission had six months to investigate and make a decision about the rate request before the company implemented it, but the three-member commission did not declare a decision in that timeframe. The commission rarely completes its investigations in six months.

After six more months of review, the agency made its new determination Tuesday during a public hearing in Pierre. Customers will now receive refunds for the past six months of extra payments, with the average customer receiving \$90.30.

The company, Xcel Energy, filed a notice of intent to implement the rate hike on Nov. 15, 2022, and increased its electricity rates by 17.9 percent starting Jan. 1, 2023.

Xcel stood to gain about \$44 million in annual revenue from the originally proposed rate increase – about \$30 million more than what it will receive from the lesser increase.

The new increase of 5.85% will raise the average customer's bill \$4.67 per month.

The commission's settlement also prevents Xcel from further rate increases until 2026.

The PUC's process

Xcel applied for the rate increase on Jun. 30, 2022. The three-member, elected commission then moved to suspend the rate increase for six months – providing time for its staff to investigate and for the commission to make a decision before the rate increase could go into effect. The commission staff consists of six analysts and two staff attorneys.

The staff sent Xcel 13 sets of requests. Each set of requests had a number of individual questions, which added up to a total of 343 questions.

In addition to written questions, the staff also had conversations, phone calls and meetings with Xcel's employees to ask for more information and clarification.

"And that is why it takes so long," Commissioner Chris Nelson said.

When the commission and its staff failed to complete the investigation or make a decision on the rate increase by the end of 2022, the rate increase went into effect while the commission and staff continued their work – resulting in customers temporarily paying 18% higher rates, only to have the increase now scaled back to 6%.

Nelson said that the procedure may need a review.

"I have to start to ask myself, does that interim rate law need to be tweaked?" Nelson said. "I think that's something we should have a discussion on."

The commission and staff review of the rate increase included gathering information on factors such as company operating expenses, employee benefits, executive compensation, corporate advertising, and the cost of generation and transmission facilities.

Xcel last filed a rate increase in 2014. Since then, the company says it has made significant investments in infrastructure, including new wind and natural gas generation facilities, large transmission projects, and decommissioning one of its nuclear reactors. The company also cited increased labor and operating costs.

Black Hills Energy made the most recent South Dakota electricity rate hike of comparable size in 2010. The company had requested a 19.4% rate increase.

The PUC investigation into that request also went past the initial six-month window, and the rate increase took effect in the interim. But upon completion of the commission's investigation, which took the entire 12 months the law allows, the commission approved a 12.7% increase, resulting in customer refunds.

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.

Minnehaha County passes rules for carbon pipelines despite opposition from both sides

Tie-breaking commissioner says vote sets 'rules of the road' for state's population center

BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 6, 2023 2:40 PM

SIOUX FALLS – Officials in South Dakota's largest county dealt a blow to opponents of two carbon pipeline companies with a vote to set shorter-than-requested spaces between homes and pipelines in their first-ever set of rules for such projects.

Minnehaha County commissioners convened Tuesday to take up the issue of setbacks in a long-debated pipeline ordinance. It arose from the controversy surrounding efforts by Summit Carbon Solutions and Navigator CO2 Ventures to ship pressurized carbon dioxide from Midwestern ethanol plants to underground sequestration sites.

Just four Minnehaha County Commissioners were present two weeks ago for what was meant to be a final vote on a draft pipeline ordinance that passed the county's planning and zoning commission unanimously. That original version sought to put 750 feet between rural property lines and pipelines, with further setbacks from cities. Were a pipeline to meet those setbacks, it wouldn't need to request a special permit from the county – and face a public hearing – to build.

Company representatives opposed those setbacks. The 750-foot distance, they said, would make it all but impossible to place their pipelines in Minnehaha County in the face of what's become intense opposition to the projects.

Shorter distances debated

The commission never got to a final vote on its first set of pipeline siting rules at its May 23 meeting. Instead, it deadlocked on an amendment from Commissioner Joe Kippley that would have shortened that distance from property lines to 330 feet. Kippley pointed to federal guidelines that recommend evacuating areas 330 feet from toxic gasses as a baseline for the figure.

Joining him was Commissioner Dean Karsky, with Commissioners Jen Bleyenbergh and Gerald Beninga opposed.

That tie vote pushed a final vote back two weeks, at which point Commission Chair Jean Bender would be present to break the impasse.

After taking about 10 more minutes of testimony on Tuesday from landowners opposed to the shortened

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distance, Bender sided with Kippley and Karsky.

Opponents had argued that 750 feet was a "minimum" for safety and the promotion of continued economic development in the rapidly growing county.

Bender didn't buy those arguments. She told the packed commission room that her goal was never to shut down pipelines, and that the original ordinance would have done that.

Bender pointed to a pipeline on 12th Street in Sioux Falls built decades ago, when the city that's nearing 200,000 residents had just a fraction of the population.

"Reasonable people can very much disagree on this, but I don't think pipelines hinder development," Bender said.

Carbon pipelines would allow ethanol producers to take advantage of federal tax credits meant to address climate change by keeping heat-trapping carbon out of the atmosphere. The pipelines would also help producers sell ethanol in states with tighter regulations for emissions.

Commissions take differing paths

Opponents of the projects cite safety concerns, pointing frequently to a carbon pipeline rupture in Sartia, Mississippi, that sickened dozens of people. On Tuesday, some pointed to a recent two-day meeting of the federal Pipelines and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, at which experts talked about the safety and potential regulatory adjustments that might be necessary in the face of a rush to build carbon pipelines for sequestration purposes.

Backers of the projects point to the economic value to South Dakota corn producers, who sell the majority of their crop for the production of ethanol. A recent report from the Dakota Institute estimated that together, the pipelines represent \$3.3 billion in value across the life of the two projects.

County commissions do not have authority to grant state-level permits to pipeline companies. They can, however, regulate zoning and development, which includes setting allowable distances between pipelines and cities, churches, schools and homes.

Prior to the discussions on a pipeline zoning ordinance commenced more than a year ago, Minnehaha County had no rules in place for pipeline placement.

Counties have taken differing approaches to writing such regulations in the face of the controversial projects. Brown County was sued over a pipeline ordinance more restrictive than the one on offer Tuesday in Minnehaha County. A week ago, Lake County commissioners in Madison shot down the possibility of any ordinance to regulate pipelines.

Given that Minnehaha County will have rules now and had none before, Bender said, passing something before the state Public Utilities Commission (PUC) takes up the pipeline permits is important.

"We need to get an ordinance in place before that PUC process begins so we know the rules of the road in Minnehaha County," Bender said.

The amendment to shorten the distance passed 3-2. Shortly thereafter, the entirety of the ordinance passed 4-1, with Beninga providing the dissenting vote.

Response from pipelines companies, opponents

After the vote, Navigator CO2 Ventures Vice President of Government and Public Affairs Elizabeth Burns-Thompson said the ordinance presents "an opportunity for additional dialogue" with the county.

"It would be nearly impossible to get through the county at 750 feet," said Burns-Thompson, who was confronted and questioned by at least three opponents after the meeting.

In an emailed statement, Summit Carbon Solutions Director of Regulatory Affairs John Satterfield did not address any specifics on the ordinance, which his company spoke against two weeks ago – even after the shortened setbacks were proposed.

"The 3.3 million miles of pipelines in active service across the United States, including the nearly 12,000 miles in South Dakota, are extensively regulated at both the federal and state levels, and those regulations preempt ordinances at the county level," Satterfield said. "Having a consistent process to oversee and regulate major infrastructure projects is important to ensure our economy continues to operate effectively."

Pipeline opponent Betty Strom, meanwhile, was unimpressed by the commission's final call. Strom is a

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Lake County landowner facing an eminent domain lawsuit from Summit. Strom, who also fought construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline that now runs beneath her property, has been engaged with the push for pipeline ordinances in multiple counties.

Strom spoke of her disappointment with her own county commissioners for their decision to avoid any kind of pipeline ordinance, then decried Minnehaha County's officials for passing what she sees as a watered-down ruleset.

After what she described as a year and a half of discussion on the issue with Sioux Falls-area leaders, she said the amended setbacks negate the value of anything else in the ordinance.

Strom is concerned that lives will be at risk in the event of a rupture. The 330-foot setback, she said, isn't far enough to protect the families who live within a mile of her land or the volunteer firefighters who might respond to an incident.

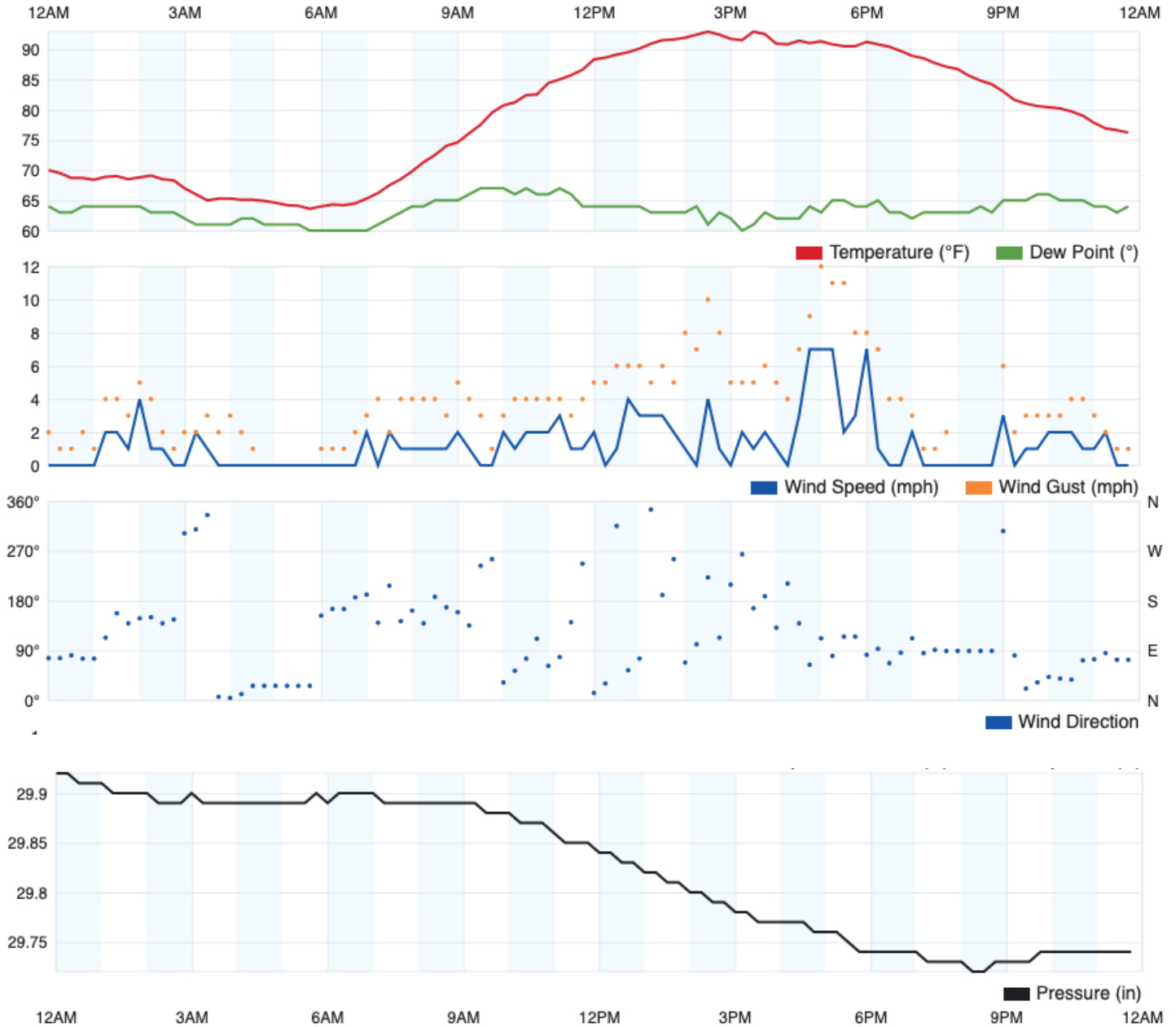
"It puts our emergency people in danger," Strom said.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
20% 30%	20%	30%	40%	40%	20%	
Slight Chance Showers then Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms then Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms	Mostly Sunny
High: 92 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 89 °F	Low: 64 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 59 °F	High: 81 °F

Marginal Risk for Severe Thunderstorms This Afternoon Into Evening

Probability of Thunder Forecast

	6/7 Wed			6/8 Thu			Maximum
	6am	12pm	6pm	12am	6am	12pm	
Aberdeen	10	25	20	10	15	30	40
Britton	20	25	20	10	15	20	35
Brookings	15	30	20	20	20	20	20
Chamberlain	0	20	15	10	10	25	25
Clark	10	30	25	10	15	30	30
Eagle Butte	0	5	5	5	5	20	35
Ellendale	15	25	20	15	15	40	45
Eureka	5	15	15	10	10	35	45
Gettysburg	5	10	10	10	5	25	35
Huron	0	45	30	15	15	25	30
Kennebec	5	5	10	10	5	20	25
McIntosh	5	5	5	10	5	25	40
Milbank	20	35	10	10	10	25	25
Miller	5	15	15	10	10	20	30
Mobridge	5	10	5	5	5	25	40
Murdo	0	0	5	5	5	20	25
Pierre	5	5	5	5	5	20	25
Redfield	5	20	20	10	10	25	40
Sisseton	20	25	15	15	15	30	35
Watertown	15	35	20	10	15	30	30
Webster	15	35	20	15	15	35	35
Wheaton	20	20	10	10	15	25	25

Severe Weather Outlook Wednesday, June 07, 2023

Centered Area: NWS Aberdeen, SD

Last Updated: Jun 07 2023 1244 AM CDT
Valid Until: Jun 08 2023 0700 AM CDT

Main Threat: Isolated to scattered showers and thunderstorms are possible. A few of these storms could produce strong to severe wind gusts & up to quarter sized hail

Timing: Mid/late this afternoon through the evening

Location: Across eastern and northeastern SD into west central MN

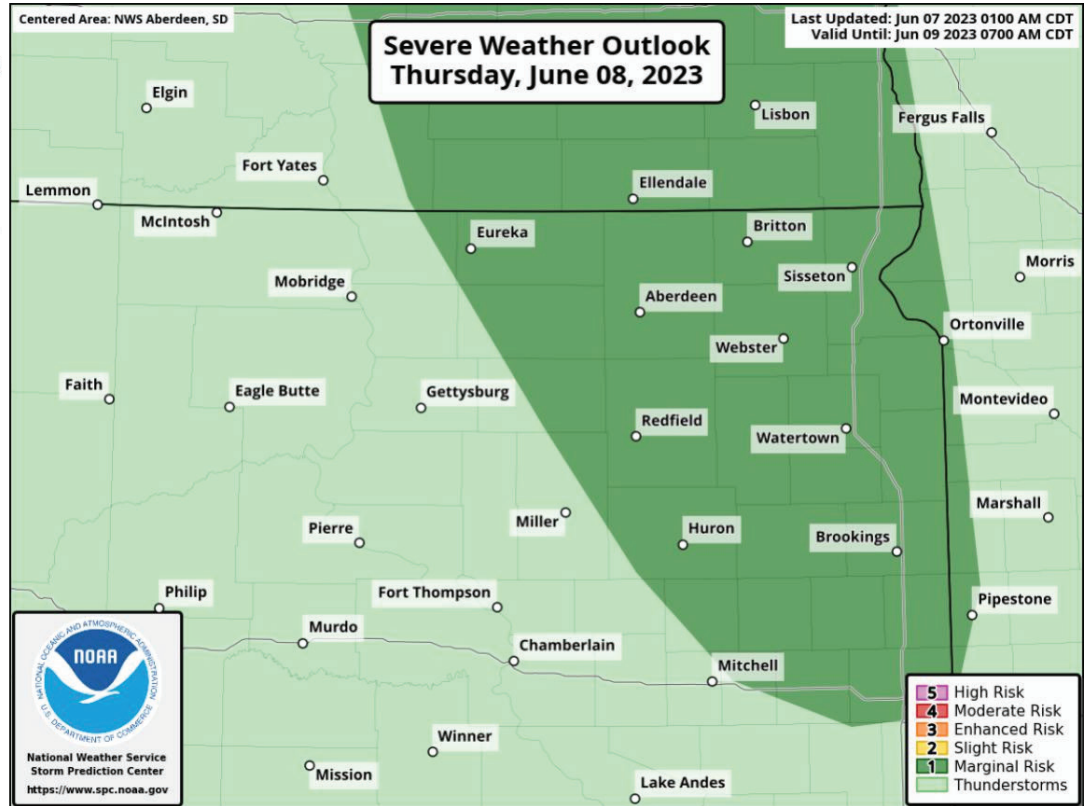
Isolated to scattered showers and thunderstorms are possible this afternoon and evening as a stationary front is positioned over the eastern Dakotas. There is a marginal risk that some of these storms could become severe with the main threat being strong to severe wind gusts and up to quarter sized hail.

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Marginal chances for severe storms are possible as well for Thursday

- Afternoon into the evening
- Strong to severe wind gusts and up to quarter sized hail



Severe storms are possible again for Thursday afternoon and evening along a stationary boundary. Main threat being strong to severe wind gusts and up to quarter sized hail.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 94 °F at 3:40 PM

Low Temp: 63 °F at 5:48 AM

Wind: 12 mph at 4:57 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 99 in 2021

Record Low: 28 in 1901

Average High: 78

Average Low: 53

Average Precip in June.: 0.78

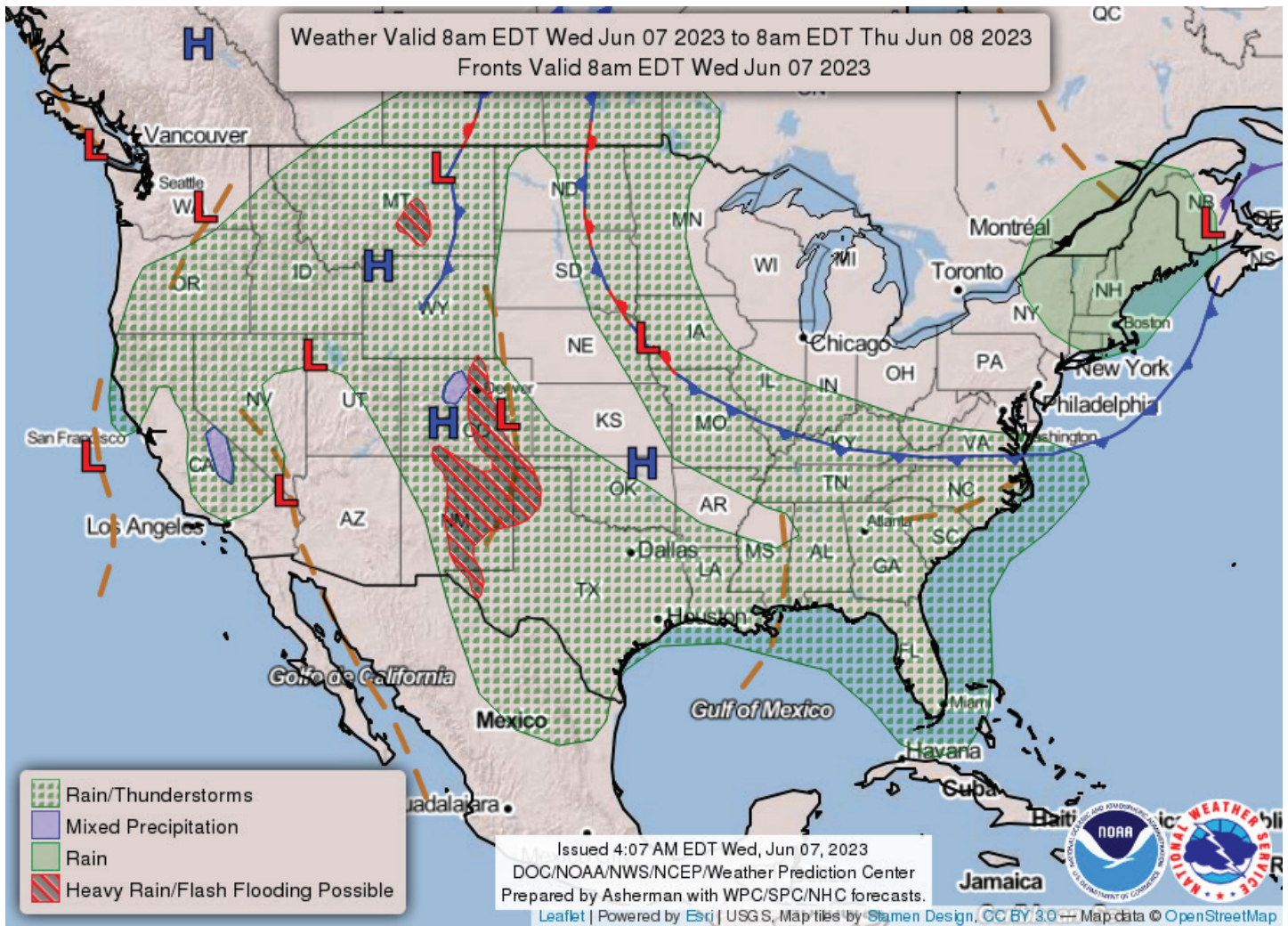
Precip to date in June.: 0.04

Average Precip to date: 8.03

Precip Year to Date: 7.95

Sunset Tonight: 9:19:49 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:42:26 AM



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Today in Weather History

June 7, 1982: Lightning struck a house in Sunshine Acres, north of Pierre, and the ensuing fire destroyed the interior. One person received minor burns. Over two inches of rain fell in Pierre causing Capital Lake to rise four feet. Water and mud flooded the State Maintenance Building.

June 7, 1993: A large F3 tornado destroyed a farmstead 9 miles southwest of Tulare. The tornado twisted the house on its foundation, virtually destroying it. This storm also destroyed a barn, three steel bins, three granaries, and two hog houses. Ten hogs were killed.

At least three more tornadoes damaged several farms in the Tulare and Redfield areas. A tornado hit one farm northwest of Tulare causing about 65,000 dollars in damage. Another tornado damaged a farm 5 miles west of Redfield.

1692: A massive earthquake strikes Port Royal in Jamaica, killing some 3,000 people. Click [HERE](#) for more information from the History Channel.

1816 - A famous June snow occurred in the northeastern U.S. Danville VT reported drifts of snow and sleet twenty inches deep. The Highlands were white all day, and flurries were observed as far south as Boston MA. (David Ludlum)

1816: The following is found on page 31, from the book, "History of the American Clock Business for the Past Sixty Year, and Life of Chauncey Jerome," written by Chauncey Jerome. The book was published in 1860. "The next summer was a cold one of 1816, which none of the old people will ever forget, and which many of the young have heard a great deal about. There was ice and snow in every month of the year. I well remember on the seventh of June, while on my way to work, about a mile from home, dressed throughout with thick woolen clothes and an overcoat on, my hands got so cold that I was obliged to lay down my tools and put on a pair of mittens which I had in my pocket. It snowed about an hour that day." This bitter cold event occurred in Plymouth, Connecticut.

1972 - Richmond VA experienced its worst flood of record as rains from Hurricane Agnes pushed the water level at the city locks to a height of 36.5 feet, easily topping the previous record of thirty feet set in 1771. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms in the Laramie Mountains of eastern Wyoming produced golf ball size hail, and up to five inches of rain in just one hour. Half a dozen cities in the Upper Mississippi Valley reported record high temperatures for the date, including La Crosse, WI, with a reading of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

1988 - Snow whitened some of the mountains of northern California and northwestern Nevada. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Rapid City SD with a reading of 104 degrees, and Miles City, MT, with a high of 106 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from southern Oklahoma and eastern Texas to northwestern Florida through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned 22 tornadoes, including a dozen in Louisiana, and there were 119 reports of large hail and damaging winds. A strong (F-2) tornado at Gross Tete LA killed two persons, injured thirty others, and another strong (F-2) tornado injured 60 persons at Lobdell LA. Softball size hail was reported at Hillsboro TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

SAY IT ISN'T SO

A deacon phoned his pastor who was on vacation in a distant city. When he answered the call, the deacon blurted out, "Pastor, a cyclone just came through our county and destroyed my house and barn."

"I'm not surprised," replied his pastor. Then he continued, "The punishment for unconfessed sin is inevitable! Sooner or later, God will judge all sin and sinners!"

"But Pastor," continued the deacon, "it destroyed your house as well."

"It did?" exclaimed the pastor. "The ways of the Lord are past human understanding."

There are times when it is difficult to offer love and kindness to those whom we feel do not deserve it. Our responses to another person's trials and tragedies, unfortunately and often, come from a distorted view of God's love. We are inclined to look at what happens to others from a normal, distorted, human response and believe that "they got what they deserved."

When we realize the loving kindness of God to us and His blessings on us, and then realize how undeserving we are of anything and everything, perhaps we may begin to see things differently. If God does not withhold anything good from us, we should treat others the same!

Prayer: Lord, may we look at others the way You look at us - with love, care and compassion. May we realize that we are all equal when we stand before You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And do everything with love. 1 Corinthians 16:14



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.06.23

6 12 23 29 57 4

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$240,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.23

6 15 33 42 43 7

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$3,550,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 50 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.06.23

3 35 38 43 47 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 20 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.03.23

7 8 9 14 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$85,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 50 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.23

3 11 14 37 44 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 49 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.05.23

2 31 45 46 49 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$285,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 49 Mins 22
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Canada wildfires are leading to air-quality alerts in US. Here's how to stay safe

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

Intense Canadian wildfires are blanketing the northeastern U.S. in a dystopian haze, turning the air acrid, the sky yellowish gray and prompting warnings for vulnerable populations to stay inside.

The effects of hundreds of wildfires burning across the western provinces to Quebec could be felt as far away as New York City and New England, blotting out skylines and irritating throats.

U.S. authorities issued air quality alerts. Hazy conditions and smoke from the wildfires were reported across the Great Lakes region from Cleveland to Buffalo.

A smoky haze that hung over New York City much of the day Tuesday thickened in the late afternoon, obscuring views of New Jersey across the Hudson River and making the setting sun look like a reddish orb. In the Philadelphia area, dusk brought more of a lavender haze.

Sal and Lilly Murphy, of Brooklyn, likened the burning scent to a campfire. They said they could even smell the smoke indoors, in a Manhattan restaurant, then walked outside and saw a sky that looked like it was about to storm — but was rainless. Lilly wore a mask for protection.

"It's a little scary," Sal Murphy said.

Smoke from the fires has wafted through northeast U.S. states for weeks now, but it's only recently been noticeable in most places.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said Tuesday's hazy skies "were hard to miss," and New York City Mayor Eric Adams encouraged residents to limit outdoor activities "to the absolute necessities."

Here's a closer look at what's happening and some suggested precautions for dealing with the haze:

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Smoke from Canada's wildfires has been moving into the United States since last month. The most recent fires near Quebec have been burning for at least several days.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said hazy skies, reduced visibility and the odor of burning wood are likely, and that the smoke will linger for a few days in northern states.

"It's not unusual for us to get fire smoke in our area. It's very typical in terms of northwest Canada," said Darren Austin, a meteorologist and senior air quality specialist with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. But, usually, the smoke has been aloft and hasn't affected people's health, he said.

The Quebec-area fires are big and relatively close, about 500 to 600 miles (roughly 800 to 970 kilometers) away from Rhode Island. And they followed wildfires in Nova Scotia, which resulted in a short-lived air quality alert on May 30, Austin said.

Jay Engle, a National Weather Service meteorologist based in Upton, Long Island, said the wind trajectory that allowed smoke and hazy conditions to be seen in the New York City area could continue for the next few days. Of course, he said, the main driver of conditions is the fires themselves. If they diminish, the haze would too.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CONCERN?

Air quality alerts are triggered by a number of factors, including the detection of fine-particle pollution — known as "PM 2.5" — which can irritate the lungs.

"We have defenses in our upper airway to trap larger particles and prevent them from getting down into the lungs. These are sort of the right size to get past those defenses," said Dr. David Hill, a pulmonologist in Waterbury, Connecticut, and a member of the American Lung Association's National Board of Directors. "When those particles get down into the respiratory space, they cause the body to have an inflammatory reaction to them."

Trent Ford, the state climatologist in Illinois, said the atmospheric conditions in the upper Midwest creating

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dry, warm weather made it possible for small particulates to travel hundreds of miles from the Canadian wildfires and linger for days.

"It's a good example of how complex the climate system is but also how connected it is," Ford said.

WHO SHOULD BE CAREFUL?

Exposure to elevated fine particle pollution levels can affect the lungs and heart.

The air quality alerts caution "sensitive groups," a big category that includes children, older adults, and people with lung diseases, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Kids, who often are encouraged to go out and play, "are more susceptible to smoke for a number of reasons," said Laura Kate Bender, the lung association's National Assistant Vice President, healthy air. "Their lungs are still developing, they breathe in more air per unit of body weight."

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR NOW?

It's a good time to put off that yard work and outdoor exercise. If you go out, consider wearing an N95 mask to reduce your exposure to pollutants.

Stay inside, keeping your doors, windows and fireplaces shut. It's recommended that you run the air conditioning on a recirculation setting.

"If you have filters on your home HVAC system, you should make sure they're up to date and high quality," Hill said. "Some people, particularly those with underlying lung disease, or heart disease, should consider investing in air purifiers for their homes."

Associated Press reporters Katie Foody in Chicago and David B. Caruso and Deepti Hajela in New York contributed to this story.

Author Haruki Murakami says pandemic, war in Ukraine create walls that divide people

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Japanese writer Haruki Murakami says walls are increasingly built and dividing people and countries after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic fueled fear and skepticism.

"With feelings of suspicion replacing mutual trust, walls are continually being erected around us," Murakami said in late April at Wellesley College. That speech, "Writing Fiction in the Time of Pandemic and War," was released Wednesday in *The Shincho Monthly* literary magazine published by Shinchosha Co.

"Everybody seems to be confronted with a choice — to hide behind the walls, preserving safety and the status quo or, knowing the risks, to emerge beyond the walls in search of a freer value system," he said.

Like the protagonist in his new novel.

"*The City and Its Uncertain Walls*" was released in April in Japan and an English translation is expected in 2024. The protagonist, as Murakami described, faces a tough choice between two worlds: an isolated walled city of tranquility with no desire or suffering, and the real world beyond the walls filled with pain and desire and contradictions.

The novel is based on a story he wrote for a magazine soon after becoming a novelist but was never published in book form. He said he knew it had important ideas and put it aside because he wanted to rewrite it.

Some 40 years later, he discovered "this tale fits perfectly with the age we live in now."

Murakami started rewriting the book in March 2020, soon after COVID-19 began spreading around the world, and finished it two years later, as the war in Ukraine passed its one-year mark.

"The two big events combined and changed the world in dramatic ways," he said.

The sense of safety that came with a common belief in globalism and mutual economic and cultural dependency "crumbled with Russia's sudden invasion of Ukraine," Murakami said, spreading fear of similar invasions elsewhere. Many countries, including his home Japan, have since bolstered their military preparedness and budgets.

As the war continues without an end in sight, so do the high walls being built around people, between

countries and individuals, Murakami said. "It seems to me that the psychic condition — if someone isn't your ally, he is your enemy — continues to spread."

"Can our trust in each other once more overcome our suspicions? Can wisdom conquer fear? The answers to these questions are entrusted to our hands. And rather than an instant answer, we are being required to undergo a deep investigation that will take time," Murakami said.

He says that, while there's not much a novelist can do, "I sincerely hope that novels and stories can lend their power to such an investigation. It's something that we novelists dearly hope for."

Murakami has made other efforts to encourage people to think, combat fear or tear down walls. He hosted the radio show "Music to put an end to war" a month after Russia' invaded Ukraine. His Japanese translation of "The Last Flower," a 1939 parable of war and peace by American humorist and former New Yorker cartoonist James Thurber, will be released later this month from Poplar Sha.

Did the protagonist stay inside the walls? "Please try reading the book yourselves," Murakami said.

Is it a 'skip' or a 'pause'? Federal Reserve won't likely raise rates next week but maybe next month

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When an increasingly fractious committee of Federal Reserve policymakers meets next week, Chair Jerome Powell will need to forge a consensus.

One group of Fed officials would like to pause their relentless campaign of rate increases after 10 straight hikes to allow time to look around and assess whether higher borrowing rates are slowing inflation.

But a second group worries that inflation is still too high and thinks the Fed should continue hiking at least once or twice more — beginning next week.

So how will Powell achieve an accord between the two?

By turning what might normally be considered a "pause" into a "skip." Whereas a "pause" might suggest that the Fed won't necessarily raise its benchmark rate again, a "skip" implies that it probably will — just not now. When Powell speaks at a news conference next week, he will likely make clear that the Fed's key rate — which has elevated the costs of mortgages, auto loans, credit card and business borrowing — may go even higher.

One way the Fed may signal the likelihood of a future rate hike could come in the quarterly economic projections the policymakers will issue. The projections may show that the officials expect their key rate to rise a quarter-point by year's end — to about 5.4%, above their estimate in March. This would illustrate their belief that next week's rate decision isn't so much a pause as a skip.

"That's probably the only way to keep the committee cohesive in an environment where they have seem to have somewhat broadening disagreements," said Matthew Luzzetti, chief U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank Securities.

For more than a year, the Fed's 18-member rate-setting committee has presented a united front: The officials were nearly unanimous in their support for rapid rate hikes to throttle a burst of inflation that had leapt to the highest level in four decades. (The committee has 19 members at full strength; one spot is now vacant.)

The Fed raised its rate by a substantial 5 percentage points in 14 months — the fastest pace of increases in 40 years, to a 16-year high. The policymakers hope that the resulting tighter credit will slow spending, cool the economy and curb inflation.

Yet several Fed officials contend that rates are already high enough to slow hiring and growth and that if they go much higher, they could cause a deep recession. This concern has left policymakers deeply divided about their next steps.

One camp is more "dovish," meaning it leans against another rate increase. The doves, who include Powell and other top officials, think it takes a year or more for rate hikes to deliver their full effect and that the Fed should stop hiking, at least temporarily, to evaluate the impact so far.

The more dovish officials also worry that this spring's banking turmoil, with three large banks collapsing

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in two months, might have compounded the brake on economic growth by causing other banks to restrict lending. Raising rates again too soon, they feel, could excessively weaken the economy.

The doves also think that pausing rate hikes to ensure that the Fed doesn't go too far might help achieve the tantalizing prospect of a "soft landing." This is the hoped-for scenario in which the Fed would manage to tame inflation without causing a recession, or at least not a very deep one.

"Maybe the majority of the tightening impact of what the Fed already did is still to come," Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, said last month. "And then you add the bank stresses on top of it. ... We have got to take that into account."

Another group expresses a more "hawkish" view, meaning it favors further rate increases. Although food and gas prices have come down, overall inflation remains chronically high, hiring remains hot and consumers are still stepping up their spending — trends that could keep prices high.

And some of the reasons Fed officials had previously cited in support of a pause no longer pose a threat. Congress, for example, approved a suspension of the federal debt ceiling, thereby avoiding a U.S. default that could have caused a global economic meltdown.

"I don't really see a compelling reason to pause — meaning wait until you get more evidence to decide what to do," Loretta Mester, president of the Cleveland Fed, said last month in an interview with the Financial Times. "I would see more of a compelling case for bringing (rates) up."

For now, the doves appear to have the upper hand. Powell signaled his support for a pause in carefully prepared remarks May 19.

"Given how far we've come, we can afford to look at the data and the evolving outlook and make careful assessments," Powell said, referring to the Fed's streak of rate hikes.

More recently, Philip Jefferson, whom President Joe Biden has nominated to serve as vice chair of the Fed, also expressed support for a pause in rate hikes while making clear that it was likely to be a skip.

"A decision to hold our rate constant at a coming meeting should not be interpreted to mean that we have reached the peak rate for this cycle," Jefferson said in a speech. "Skipping a rate hike at a coming meeting would allow (the Fed's policymakers) to see more data before making decisions" about interest rates.

In March, seven Fed officials indicated that they preferred to raise the Fed's key rate to about 5.4% or higher by the end of 2023. If three more policymakers were to raise their projections next week to that level, that would be enough to boost the median estimate a quarter-point above where it is now.

If only two officials raise their forecasts for rate hikes, it would leave the committee evenly split over whether to hike again later this year. This could create a more muddled message about what comes next.

Still, any skip in rate hikes might not last long. There won't be much major economic data released between next week's Fed meeting and the next one in July — just one more jobs report and one more inflation report.

As a result, inflation will likely still remain high, according to the most recent data, when the Fed meets in July, with hiring still strong. The hawks may well prevail at that session and win another rate hike.

A report on inflation in May will be issued on Tuesday, the first day of the Fed's two-day meeting. But most economists think the officials will largely have their rate decision in mind by then. So the inflation report for May will likely have more influence on what happens at the following Fed meeting in July.

Pope Francis to undergo intestinal surgery under general anesthesia

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis went to the hospital Wednesday to undergo abdominal surgery to treat an intestinal blockage, two years after he had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed because of a narrowing of the large intestine.

The Vatican said Francis, 86, would be put under general anesthesia for the procedure Wednesday afternoon and would be hospitalized at Rome's Gemelli hospital for several days.

Francis' Fiat 500 car pulled out of the Vatican shortly after 11 a.m. with an escort, and arrived at the

Gemelli some 20 minutes later.

The pope is undergoing what the Vatican said was a "laparotomy and abdominal wall plastic surgery with prosthesis" to treat a "recurrent, painful and worsening" constriction of the intestine.

A laparotomy is open abdominal surgery. It can help a surgeon both diagnose and treat issues. The statement said Francis was suffering from a blocked laparocoele, which is a hernia that formed over a previous scar.

"The stay at the health facility will last several days to allow for the normal post-operative course and full functional recovery," the statement said. An update was not expected until after the procedure.

Francis remains in charge of the Vatican and the 1.3-billion strong Catholic Church, even while unconscious and in the hospital.

In July 2021, Francis spent 10 days at Gemelli to remove 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his large intestine. He had suffered what the Vatican said was a severe inflammation and narrowing of the colon. In an interview with The Associated Press in January, Francis said the diverticulosis, or bulges in his intestinal wall, that had prompted the 2021 surgery, had returned.

Francis had come out of the 2021 surgery saying he could eat whatever he wanted, but he lamented that he hadn't responded well to the general anesthetic used in the longer-than-expected procedure. That reaction in part explained his refusal to have surgery to repair strained knee ligaments that have forced him to use a wheelchair and walker for over a year.

The fact that he is going back for surgery suggests he had little choice but to treat the intestinal issue, especially given the rigorous upcoming travel schedule this summer.

The Argentine pope had part of one lung removed when he was a young man. He also suffers from sciatica nerve pain. In late March, Francis spent three days at Gemelli for an acute case of bronchitis, during which he was treated with intravenous antibiotics. He emerged April 1 saying "Still alive!"

Francis initially went to the Gemelli on Tuesday for what the Vatican said were medical tests. It revealed no details at the time.

The 86-year-old had appeared in good form Wednesday morning at his audience in St. Peter's Square, zipping around the square in his popemobile greeting the faithful. He also had two meetings beforehand, the Vatican said.

Francis has had a packed schedule of late, with multiple audiences each day. The Vatican has recently confirmed a travel-filled August, when the Holy See and Italy are usually on vacation, with a four-day visit to Portugal the first week of August and a similarly long trip to Mongolia starting Aug. 31.

In a sign that the trips were very much on, the Vatican on Tuesday released the planned itinerary for Francis' visit to Portugal for World Youth Day events from Aug. 2-6. The itinerary confirms a typically busy schedule that includes all the protocol meetings of an official state visit plus multiple events with young people and a day trip to the Marian shrine at Fatima.

2 dead in shooting after high school graduation ceremony in Virginia capital

By SARAH RANKIN and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — Seven people were shot, two fatally, when gunfire rang out Tuesday outside a downtown theater in Richmond, Virginia, where a high school graduation ceremony had just ended, causing hundreds of attendees to flee in panic, weep and clutch their children, authorities and witnesses said.

A 19-year-old suspect tried to escape on foot but was arrested and will be charged with two counts of second-degree murder, Interim Richmond Police Chief Rick Edwards said during a nighttime news conference at which he confirmed the two fatalities.

Five others were wounded by the gunfire outside the state capital's city-owned Altria Theater, which is across the street from a large, grassy park and in the middle of the Virginia Commonwealth University campus. At least 12 others were injured or treated for anxiety due to the mayhem, according to police.

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"As they heard the gunfire, it was obviously chaos," Edwards said. "We had hundreds of people in Monroe Park, so people scattered. It was very chaotic at the scene."

Edwards said one of the people who was killed was an 18-year-old male student who had just graduated, while the other was a 36-year-old man who was there for the graduation. Their names were not released, but police believe the suspect, who was not immediately identified, knew at least one of the victims.

"This should have been a safe space. People should have felt safe at a graduation," Edwards said.

"It's just incredibly tragic that someone decided to bring a gun to this incident and rain terror on our community."

Six people were brought to VCU Medical Center and their conditions ranged from serious to critical late Tuesday, VCU Health System spokesperson Mary Kate Brogan said.

Multiple handguns were recovered. Police initially said two suspects were detained, but Edwards said later that they determined one of them was not involved.

Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney vowed to ensure anyone responsible faces justice.

"This should not be happening anywhere," Stoney said.

Officers inside the theater, where the graduation ceremony for Huguenot High School had been taking place, heard gunfire around 5:15 p.m. and radioed to police stationed outside, who found multiple victims, Edwards said.

School board member Jonathan Young told Richmond TV station WWBT that graduates and other attendees were leaving the building when they heard about 20 gunshots in rapid succession.

"That prompted, as you would expect, hundreds of persons in an effort to flee the gunfire to return to the building," Young said.

"It materialized in a stampede," he said.

Two people were treated for falls; one juvenile was struck by a car and sustained injuries that were not life-threatening; and nine people were treated at the scene for minor injuries or anxiety, according to police spokeswoman Tracy Walker.

Richmond Public Schools Superintendent Jason Kamras said the new graduates were outside taking photos with families and friends when the shooting broke out.

"I don't have any more words on this," Kamras said. "I'm just tired of seeing people get shot, our kids get shot. And I beg of the entire community to stop, to just stop."

As he heard the gunshots and then sirens, neighbor John Willard, 69, stepped onto the balcony of his 18th-floor apartment. Below, he saw students fleeing in their graduation outfits and parents hugging children.

"There was one poor woman in front of the apartment block next to ours who was wailing and crying," Willard said, adding that the scene left him deeply saddened.

Edythe Payne was helping her daughter sell flowers outside the theater to students as they left the ceremony. She told the Richmond Times-Dispatch that the shooting caused a panic on nearby Main Street, which was packed with people at the time.

"I felt bad because some elderly people were at the graduation and they got knocked down to the ground," Payne said.

The school district said a different graduation scheduled for later Tuesday had been canceled "out of an abundance of caution" and schools would be closed Wednesday.

The mass shooting, the latest in a nation increasingly accustomed to them, prompted calls for reform.

"The gun violence epidemic is a public health crisis that we must address," U.S. Rep. Jennifer McClellan, a Democrat whose district includes Richmond, said in a statement. "We cannot continue to live in fear. We must address the root causes of gun violence and pass common sense gun safety policies that protect our communities."

Republican Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, an ardent gun-rights advocate, said in remarks to news outlets near the scene that the problem lies not with guns but with criminals.

"We have to figure out what's going on in our communities," she said.

___ Associated Press journalists Jonathan Drew in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Beatrice Dupuy in New York contributed to this report.

White woman who fatally shot Black neighbor is arrested in Florida

By CURT ANDERSON and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

OCALA, Fla. (AP) — A Florida woman accused of fatally shooting her neighbor last week in the violent culmination of what the sheriff described as a 2½-year feud was arrested Tuesday, the Marion County Sheriff's Office said.

Susan Louise Lorincz, 58, who is white, was arrested on charges of manslaughter with a firearm, culpable negligence, battery and two counts of assault in the death of Ajike Owens, a Black mother of four, Sheriff Billy Woods said in a statement.

Authorities came under pressure Tuesday to arrest and charge the white woman who fired through her front door and killed a Black neighbor in a case that has put Florida's divisive stand your ground law back into the spotlight.

Woods said that this was not a stand your ground case but "simply a killing."

When interviewed, Lorincz claimed that she acted in self-defense and that Owens had been trying to break down her door prior to her discharging her firearm. Lorincz also claimed that Owens had come after her in the past and had previously attacked her. Through their investigation — including obtaining the statements of eyewitnesses — detectives were able to establish that Lorincz's actions were not justifiable under Florida law, a statement from the sheriff's office said.

About three dozen mostly Black protesters gathered outside the Marion County Judicial Center to demand that the shooter be arrested in the country's latest flashpoint over race and gun violence. The chief prosecutor, State Attorney William Gladson, met with the protesters and urged patience while the investigation continues.

"If we are going to make a case we need as much time and as much evidence as possible," Gladson said. "I don't want to compromise any criminal investigation and I'm not going to do that."

Owens, 35, was killed in the Friday night shooting, Woods said. The women lived in the rolling hills south of Ocala, a north Florida city that is the heart of the state's horse country.

Woods had said Monday that detectives were working with the State Attorney's Office and must investigate possible self-defense claims before they can move forward with any possible criminal charges. The sheriff pointed out that because of the stand your ground law he can't legally make an arrest unless he can prove the shooter did not act in self-defense.

On Tuesday, a stuffed teddy bear and bouquets marked the area near where Owens was shot. Nearby, children were riding bikes and scooters, and playing basketball. Protesters chanted "No justice, no peace" and "A.J. A.J. A.J" using Owens' nickname. They carried signs saying: "Say her name Ajike Owens" and "It's about us."

Outside, the Rev. Bernard Tuggerson said the Black community in Ocala has suffered injustices for years. "Marion County is suffering and needs to be healed completely," he said. "If we don't turn from our wicked ways of the world, it's going to be an ongoing problem. We want answers."

The sheriff said Owens was shot moments after going to Lorincz's apartment, who had yelled at Owens' children as they played in a nearby lot. He also said Lorincz had thrown a pair of skates that hit one of the children.

Deputies responding to a trespassing call at the apartment Friday night found Owens suffering from gunshot wounds. She later died at a hospital.

Before the confrontation, Lorincz had been yelling racial slurs at the children, according to a statement from civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Owens' family. He also represented Trayvon Martin's family in 2012, when the Black teenager was killed in a case that drew worldwide attention to the state's stand your ground law.

The sheriff's office hasn't confirmed there were slurs uttered or said whether race was a factor in the shooting.

Lauren Smith, 40, lives across the street from where the shooting happened. She was on her porch that

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day and saw one of Owens' young sons pacing, and yelling, "They shot my mama, they shot my mama." She ran toward the house, and started chest compressions until a rescue crew arrived. She said there wasn't an altercation and that Owens didn't have a weapon.

"She was angry all the time that the children were playing out there," Smith said. "She would say nasty things to them. Just nasty." Smith, who is white, described the neighborhood as family friendly.

The sheriff said that since January 2021, deputies responded at least a half-dozen calls in connection with what police described as feuding between Owens and Lorincz.

"There was a lot of aggressiveness from both of them, back and forth," the sheriff said. Lorincz told investigators. "Whether it be banging on the doors, banging on the walls and threats being made. And then at that moment is when Ms. Owens was shot through the door."

"I'm absolutely heartbroken," Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, told The Associated Press. She described the fatal shooting as "so senseless."

"We've seen this again and again across this country," she said, adding that "it's really because of lax gun laws and a culture of shoot first."

Ferrell-Zabala said stand your ground cases, which she refers to as "shoot first laws," are deemed justifiable five times more frequently when a white shooter kills a Black victim.

In 2017, Florida lawmakers updated the state's self-defense statute to shift the burden of proof from a person claiming self-defense to prosecutors. That means authorities have to rule out self-defense before bringing charges. Before the change in law, prosecutors could charge someone with a shooting, and then defense attorneys would have to present an affirmative defense for why their client shouldn't be convicted.

In fact, stand your ground and "castle doctrine" cases — which allow residents to defend themselves either by law or court precedent when threatened — have sparked outrage amid a spate of shootings across the country.

In April, 84-year-old Andrew Lester, a white man, shot and injured 16-year-old Ralph Yarl, a Black teenager who rang his doorbell in Kansas City after mistakenly showing up at the wrong house to pick up his younger siblings. Lester faces charges of first-degree assault and armed criminal action; at trial, he may argue that he thought someone was trying to break into his house, as he told police.

Missouri and Florida are among about 30 states that have stand your ground laws.

The most well-known examples of the stand your ground argument came up in the trial of George Zimmerman, who fatally shot Trayvon Martin.

Zimmerman, who had a white father and Hispanic mother, told police that Martin attacked him, forcing him to use his gun in self-defense. He was allowed to go free, but was arrested about six weeks later after Martin's parents questioned his version of events and then-Gov. Rick Scott appointed a special prosecutor.

Before trial, Zimmerman's attorneys chose not to pursue a stand your ground claim, which could have resulted in the dismissal of murder charges as well as immunity from prosecution. But during the trial, the law was essentially used as part of his self-defense argument. Jurors found him not guilty.

At a vigil Monday, Owens' mother, Pamela Dias, said that she was seeking justice for her daughter and her grandchildren.

"My daughter, my grandchildren's mother, was shot and killed with her 9-year-old son standing next to her," Dias said. "She had no weapon. She posed no imminent threat to anyone."

— Frisaro in Fort Lauderdale contributed to this report.

In Jerusalem's contested Old City, shrinking Armenian community fears displacement after land deal

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A real estate deal in Jerusalem's Old City, at the epicenter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has sent the historic Armenian community there into a panic as residents search for answers about the feared loss of their homes to a mysterious investor.

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The 99-year lease of some 25% of the Old City's Armenian Quarter has touched sensitive nerves in the Holy Land and sparked a controversy extending far beyond the Old City walls. The fallout has forced the highest authority of the Armenian Orthodox Church to cloister himself in a convent and prompted a disgraced priest who is allegedly behind the deal to flee to a Los Angeles suburb.

"If they sell this place, they sell my heart," Garo Nalbandian, an 80-year-old photojournalist, said of the Ottoman-era barracks where he has lived for five decades among a dwindling community of Armenians. Their ancestors came to Jerusalem over 1,500 years ago and then after 1915, when Ottoman Turks killed an estimated 1.5 million Armenians in what's widely regarded as the first genocide of the 20th century.

Alarm over the lease spread in April, following a surprise visit by Israeli land surveyors. Word got around that an Australian-Israeli investor, whose company sign appeared on the site, planned to transform the parking lot and limestone fortress of Armenian apartments and shops into an ultra-luxury hotel.

As anger, confusion and fears of possible evictions mounted, the Armenian patriarchate — the body managing the community's civil and religious affairs — acknowledged that the church had signed away the patch of land. The Armenian patriarch, Nourhan Manougian, alleged that a now-defrocked priest bore full responsibility for the "fraudulent and deceitful" deal that the patriarch said took place without his full knowledge.

The admission inflamed passions in the Armenian Quarter, where activists decried the deal as a threat to the community's longtime presence in Jerusalem. Jordan, with its historic ties to Jerusalem's Christian sites, said it feared for the "future of the holy city."

Palestinian officials accused Manougian of helping Israel in a decades-long battle between Israel and the Palestinians over a city that both sides claim as their capital. For Palestinians, such struggles over real estate are the centerpiece of the decades-old conflict, emblematic of what they see as a wider Israeli effort to remove them from strategic areas in east Jerusalem.

"From a Palestinian point of view, this is treason. From a peace activist point of view, this undermines possible solutions to the conflict," said Dimitri Diliiani, president of the National Christian Coalition of the Holy Land.

In a dramatic move, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Jordan's King Abdullah II suspended recognition of Manougian, the patriarch who has served for the past decade in what is normally a lifelong position. That renders him unable to sign contracts, make transactions and make decisions in the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

The priest who coordinated the deal, Baret Yeretsian, was deposed, assaulted by a mob of angry young Armenians and whisked away by Israeli police before seeking refuge in Southern California. Manougian has barricaded himself in the Armenian convent, unwilling or unable to be seen publicly, according to residents.

"This quarter is everything to me. It's the only place we have for Armenians to gather in the Holy Land," said 22-year-old community leader Hagop Djernazian. "We have to fight for it."

The quarter is home to some 2,000 Armenians with the same status as Palestinians in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem — residents but not citizens, effectively stateless. Israel annexed east Jerusalem, where the Old City is located, after capturing it in 1967, a move not recognized internationally.

For the past month — most recently last Friday — protesters have formed a human chain around the quarter and gathered under Manougian's window, shouting "traitor" and demanding that he come clean about who has leased the land and how.

While the Armenian church has refused to disclose details about the sale, Yeretsian identified the investor as Australian-Israeli businessman Danny Rothman. As the church's real estate manager, Yeretsian said he was acting at the request of the patriarch.

There is very little information available about Rothman, who also has used the last name Rubinstein, according to a 2016 Cyprus regulatory decision fining him for falsifying his academic background.

His LinkedIn page describes him as chairman of a hotel company called Xana Capital. Records show the firm — formed in the United Arab Emirates — was registered in Israel in July 2021. Weeks later, a dozen Armenian priests raised the first alarm about a property deal being struck without their consent.

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A sign recently popped up marking the Armenian parking lot as the property of Xana Capital. Rothman, who is based in London, declined to comment when reached by The Associated Press. "I never get interviewed by the press. I'm a private person," he said before hanging up.

The self-exiled priest, Yeretsian, said that Rothman plans to develop a high-end resort in the Armenian Quarter. The project, he added, would be managed by the One&Only hotel company based in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, which established diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020. The deal appears to be one of the most high-profile — and controversial — to come out of the business ties that were forged under the U.S-brokered agreements known as the Abraham Accords.

Israel's Foreign Ministry declined to comment, citing the political sensitivity.

Kerzner International, owner of One&Only Resorts, also declined to comment. The Dubai-based company said only that it is "always exploring opportunities to grow its portfolio of ultra-luxury resorts."

Renowned Israeli architect Moshe Safdie told the AP that Rothman would fund the project and that he would design it. Construction, he said, would start following excavations at the parking lot. It is unclear whether residents will be evicted, but the patriarchate has promised to assist any residents who are displaced.

The saga reflects the struggle over politics and real estate that has bedeviled the Holy Land for centuries.

Jewish investors in Israel and abroad long have sought to buy east Jerusalem properties. The Armenian Quarter is desirable because it abuts the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray.

Their goal is to expand the Jewish presence in east Jerusalem, cementing Israeli control of the part of the city claimed by Palestinians as their capital.

Scandals involving land sales to Jewish settlers have previously embroiled the Greek Orthodox Church, the custodian of many Christian sites in the region.

Two decades ago, the Greek Church sold two Palestinian-run hotels in the Old City to foreign companies acting as fronts for a Jewish settler group. The secretive deals led to the downfall of the Greek patriarch and prompted international uproar.

Yeretsian, in California, dismissed fears of an Israeli settler take-over of the Armenian Quarter as "propaganda" based solely on Rothman's Jewish identity.

"The intention was never to Judaize the place," he said, claiming that Rothman has no political agenda. He insisted that the Armenian patriarch was fully engaged in the long-running negotiations and personally signed off on the contract.

"I did my job faithfully in the best interest of the patriarchate," he said, declining to offer further details about the lease that he said expires after a century. The patriarchate declined to say what it would do with the money from the deal.

Meanwhile, Jerusalem's Armenians — long ruled by foreign powers, displaced by wars and squeezed between Israelis and Palestinians — are filled with nagging dread.

"Our lands were acquired inch by inch with blood and sweat," said 26-year-old resident Setrag Balian. "With one signature, they were given away."

In Kenya, lions are speared to death as human-wildlife conflict worsens amid drought

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI and DESMOND TIRO Associated Press

MBIRIKANI, Kenya (AP) — Parkeru Ntereka lost almost half of his goat herd to hungry lions that wandered into his pen located near Kenya's iconic Amboseli national park.

The 56-year-old's loss made headlines in the east African country as it led to the spearing to death of six lions in retaliation by the Maasai people, who have co-existed with wild animals for centuries.

The killings highlighted the growing human-wildlife conflict in parts of east Africa that conservationists say has been exacerbated by a yearslong drought.

At the same time, the predator population within the parks has increased. Hunger and thirst can send

them into communities.

Ntereka said losing 12 goats is a huge loss for his large family.

"I sell these livestock in order to afford school fees. I don't know how I will afford secondary school fees for some of my children," said the father of eight.

The Big Life Foundation, which runs conservation programs in the area, has been offering compensation to herders who lose their livestock to predators.

But the compensation does not match the market rate for cows, goats and sheep.

Herder Joel Kirimbu said compensation should match the market rate.

"Cows are expensive and can cost as much as 80,000 Kenyan shillings (\$577) each. One cannot compare 80,000 shillings to 30,000 shillings. We receive very little compensation. That is why we become angry and despite receiving compensation, we come out and kill the lions," he told The Associated Press.

Rosi Lekimankusi, a mother of five, said 13 of her goats were killed by lions in the same village, Mbirikani in Kajiado County, just 150 kilometers (93 miles) from the capital, Nairobi.

"This is a big loss for us because my husband and I have no other jobs," she told The Associated Press while standing outside her goat pen.

Her biggest fear is that such lion attacks will become even more common in her Maasai village that borders Amboseli national park.

The Big Life Foundation, which has run the compensation program for 20 years, said it cannot afford to pay the market price but asserted that the amount cannot be disregarded because it at least expresses solidarity with herders for their loss.

"It could be a little just to make sure your anger goes down but its better than nothing," said Daniel Ole Sambu, who coordinates the foundation's Predator Protection Program.

He said the foundation also gives the community scholarships for local children and support for medical facilities.

The human-wildlife conflict often makes headlines in Kenya, where tourism plays an important role in the economy.

Last month, one of Kenya's oldest lions, Loonkiito, was speared to death as it wandered out of the Amboseli national park in search for food.

The Kenya Wildlife Service said it is working on lasting solutions that would address the conflict while protecting both humans and wildlife.

Ntereka, the herder who lost almost half his goats, lives in fear of another lion attack.

"Since the olden days, we believed that when a lion invades your home and eats your cows, it will still return even after 10 years. It will never forget that your home was once a source of food," he said.

China trade tumbles in May, adding to signs economic recovery is slowing

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's exports fell 7.5% from a year earlier in May and imports were down 4.5%, adding to signs an economic rebound following the end of anti-virus controls is slowing as global demand weakens under pressure from higher interest rates.

Exports slid to \$283.5 billion, reversing from April's unexpectedly strong 8.5% growth, customs data showed Wednesday. Imports fell to \$217.7 billion, moderating from the previous month's 7.9% contraction. China's global trade surplus narrowed by 16.1% to \$65.8 billion.

Trade weakness adds to downward pressure on the world's second-largest economy following lackluster factory and consumer activity and a surge in unemployment among young people.

"China's exports will remain subdued, as we anticipate the U.S. economy to enter recession," Lloyd Chan of Oxford Economics said in a report.

Factory output and consumer spending revived after controls that cut off access to major cities for weeks

In Glendale, police quickly moved in to stop clashes, separated the two groups and cleared the parking lot. Police said they arrested two people on suspicion of obstructing officers and one person for unlawful use of pepper spray. TV reports also showed a man being taken away after lying down in the street and refusing to move.

No injuries were reported.

Inside the packed meeting room, the school board late Tuesday night approved, for the fifth year in a row, a resolution designating June as LGBTQ+ Pride month.

However, most of those who addressed the school board discussed broader issues of how sex and gender are handled under district policy, with supporters arguing that LGBTQ+ children need to feel safe and included in classrooms while opponents contended that schools are usurping parental authority and pushing unnecessary and even harmful views on gender.

In an earlier statement, the district said "intentional and harmful disinformation has been circulating about what is being taught" and said it follows state law and education policies.

Earlier Tuesday, the Los Angeles Unified School District school board unanimously voted to recognize Pride Month. The resolution also encouraged all schools in the nation's second-largest district to incorporate lessons on the LGBTQ+ community into the curriculum and affirmed a "commitment to creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive learning environment for all LGBTQ+ students, families, and staff members."

'Home is like a jail': Afghan soldier weathers injuries, uncertainty in US asylum bid

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The April visit to a Houston clinic was just one of a never-ending assembly line of medical appointments Abdul Wasi Safi has had since his January release from an immigration detention center.

The former Afghan soldier, called Wasi by family and friends, sat in a dental chair and conversed in Pashto with his older brother Sami as Carrie Underwood's "Cowboy Casanova" played in the background. It was a scene thousands of miles from the places he'd been the past two years.

After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, fear of retribution from the Taliban for sharing information with American soldiers while he was an intelligence officer drove Wasi Safi to flee to Brazil. The goal? Reaching the U.S. and applying for asylum.

He eventually made it after crossing 10 countries, but the journey came at a high cost. A brutal beating by police officers in Panama severely damaged his teeth and jaw and left him with permanent hearing loss.

Wasi Safi didn't appear nervous during his visit to the San José Clinic, a facility that serves low income and uninsured individuals. But dentist Michael Wisnoski still reassured him, telling him it was going to be an "easy day." He got two fillings but more complicated dental work loomed ahead.

Easy days for Wasi Safi have been few. His mind races with worry about his health. There's also the uncertainty of whether he'll be granted asylum. And he feels powerless to help his parents and other siblings, who have been threatened back in Afghanistan.

"I am scared for my life. I don't know about my future. I don't know what this government, what the United States (will) do with me," Wasi Safi said.

It's fear and frustration felt by other Afghans in the U.S. as well as by immigration activists, attorneys and others, who ask that those who were evacuated from Afghanistan receive permanent legal status and those left behind be given a path to safety.

"I do think that our government needs to take responsibility and figure out how to fix it, because these are people who helped us," said Debbie Berman, an attorney with the Chicago-based law firm Jenner & Block that's representing Afghans still trying to flee their country.

More than 88,500 Afghans who worked with American soldiers as translators and in other capacities since 2001 have arrived in the U.S. on military planes since the chaotic withdrawal, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Most were admitted under a program called humanitarian parole that

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grants them some legal status, including the ability to work.

However, many others were left behind and some, like Wasi Safi, made their way to the U.S. on their own — seeking the fulfillment of a promise of protection the U.S. made to its Afghan allies. It's a promise many feel has been broken.

Wasi Safi's monthslong journey on foot and by boat last year took him through raging rivers and dense jungle to the U.S.-Mexico border, where he was arrested in September and sent to a Texas detention center. With the help of lawyers and lawmakers, he was freed and reunited with his brother, who was a translator for the U.S. military and has lived in Houston since 2015.

Wasi Safi's attorneys didn't return calls or emails seeking comment on his asylum case.

His arrest at the border and the expedited removal order that remains in place likely complicate his asylum case, said Alex Miller, with the American Immigration Council, an advocacy group.

"It just is an incredible uphill battle," said Miller.

Wasi Safi and other Afghans seeking legal status in the U.S. are doing so within an already backlogged immigration system.

"They're just being added to this pile that the immigration judges are" handling, said Aleksandar Cuic, director of the Immigration Clinic at the School of Law at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

The Afghan Adjustment Act, a proposed law to streamline their immigration process, has stalled in Congress. As of the end of April, only about 8,100 applications for asylum or special visas for Afghans employed by the U.S. government had been approved, according to Homeland Security.

Wasi Safi was set to plead his case for asylum before an immigration judge in July. But that's been delayed to December. The postponement was a gut punch for the Safi brothers.

"Every time I'm having a piece of hope, they somehow take the hope away from me," said Sami Safi, 30.

Wasi Safi's unresolved immigration status has meant he's not authorized to work. It's also left him afraid to leave his Houston home.

"Home is like jail for me. I hope they give me my paper (legal documentation) and I start my life," Wasi Safi said.

If home is a cage, the Al-Noor Society of Greater Houston, a mosque in the city's diverse Gulfton neighborhood, has provided some outside solace.

In the midst of Ramadan on a Friday in April, the mosque's main prayer hall was filled with about 200 men and boys, some wearing Houston Astros jerseys or carrying bags emblazoned with the Texas flag.

"That's why we come to mosque ... asking God almighty to guide us, in the path of success, in the path of comfort," Sami Safi said.

Zahoor Gire, Al Noor's executive director, said the mosque is a place not just for prayer but a resource for many of the newly arrived from Afghanistan and other countries.

Community groups like Al Noor are the ones that help provide long-term support — including job training and activities for children — once the initial federal help ends, Gire said.

Erica Pertierra, a local businesswoman who's helped several Afghan families resettle in Houston, has taken on Wasi Safi's case. Using her fundraising skills, Pertierra gathered money for his lawyers and persuaded doctors and dentists she knows to donate their services.

"They deserve it. They served our country," Pertierra said of the brothers.

She's trying to raise more money through a GoFundMe campaign for Wasi Safi's long-term medical needs.

On May 23, Wasi Safi turned 27 years old. But eating birthday cake was out of the question due to pain from recent gum surgery.

"He says, 'I'll celebrate my birthday when I'm feeling better,'" Sami Safi said.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter: twitter.com/juanlozano70

The pause on student loan payments is ending. Can borrowers find room in their budgets?

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a good month, Celina Chanthanouvong has about \$200 left after rent, groceries and car insurance. That doesn't factor in her student loans, which have been on hold since the start of the pandemic and are estimated to cost \$300 a month. The pause in repayment has been a lifeline keeping the 25-year-old afloat.

"I don't even know where I would begin to budget that money," said Chanthanouvong, who works in marketing in San Francisco.

Now, after more than three years, the lifeline is being pulled away.

More than 40 million Americans will be on the hook for federal student loan payments starting in late August under the terms of a debt ceiling deal approved by Congress last week. The Biden administration has been targeting that timeline for months, but the deal ends any hope of a further extension of the pause, which has been prolonged while the Supreme Court decides the president's debt cancellation.

Without cancellation, the Education Department predicts borrowers will fall behind on their loans at historic rates. Among the most vulnerable are those who finished college during the pandemic. Millions have never had to make a loan payment, and their bills will soon come amid soaring inflation and forecasts of economic recession.

Advocates fear it will add a financial burden that younger borrowers can't afford.

"I worry that we're going to see levels of default of new graduates that we've never seen before," said Natalia Abrams, president of the nonprofit Student Debt Crisis Center.

Chanthanouvong earned a bachelor's in sociology from the University of California-Merced in 2019. She couldn't find a job for a year, leaving her to rely on odd jobs for income. She found a full-time job last year, but at \$70,000, her salary barely covers the cost of living in the Bay Area.

"I'm not going out. I don't buy Starbucks every day. I'm cooking at home," she said. "And sometimes, I don't even have \$100 after everything."

Under President Joe Biden's cancellation plan, Chanthanouvong would be eligible to get \$20,000 of her debt erased, leaving her owing \$5,000. But she isn't banking on the relief. Instead, she invited her partner to move in and split rent. The financial pinch has them postponing or rethinking major life milestones.

"My partner and I agreed, maybe we don't want kids," she said. "Not because we don't want them, but because it would be financially irresponsible for us to bring a human being into this world."

Out of the more than 44 million federal student loan borrowers, about 7 million are below the age of 25, according to data from the Education Department. Their average loan balance is less than \$14,000, lower than any other age group.

Yet borrowers with lower balances are the most likely to default. It's fueled by millions who drop out before graduating, along with others who graduate but struggle to find good jobs. Among those who defaulted in 2021, the median loan balance was \$15,300, and the vast majority had balances under \$40,000, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Resuming student loan payments will cost U.S. consumers \$18 billion a month, the investment firm Jefferies has estimated. The hit to household budgets is ill-timed for the overall economy, Jefferies says, because the United States is widely believed to be on the brink of a recession.

Despite the student loan moratorium, Americans mostly didn't bank their savings, according to Jefferies economist Thomas Simons. So they'll likely have to cut back on other things — travel, restaurants — to fit resumed loan payments into their budgets. Belt-tightening could hurt an economy that relies heavily on consumer spending.

Noshin Hoque graduated from Stony Brook University early in the pandemic with about \$20,000 in federal student loans. Instead of testing the 2020 job market, she enrolled at a master's program in social work at Columbia University, borrowing \$34,000 more.

With the payments paused, she felt a new level of financial security. She cut costs by living with her

parents in New York City and her job at a nonprofit paid enough to save money and help her parents.

She recalls splurging on a \$110 polo shirt as a Father's Day gift for her dad.

"Being able to do stuff for my parents and having them experience that luxury with me has just been such a plus," said Hoque, who works for Young Invincibles, a nonprofit that supports student debt cancellation.

It gave her the comfort to enter a new stage of life. She got married to a recent medical school graduate, and they're expecting their first child in November. At the same time, they're bracing for the crush of loan payments, which will cost at least \$400 a month combined. They hope to pay more to avoid interest, which is prohibited for them as practicing Muslims.

To prepare, they stopped eating at restaurants. They canceled a vacation to Italy. Money they wanted to put toward their child's education fund will go to their loans instead.

"We're back to square one of planning our finances," she said. "I feel that so deeply."

Even the logistics of making payments will be a hurdle for newer borrowers, said Rachel Rotunda, director of government relations at National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. They'll need to find out who their loan servicers are, choose a repayment plan and learn to navigate the payment system.

"The volume of borrowers going back on the system at the same time — this has never happened before," Rotunda said. "It's fair to say it's going to be bumpy."

The Education Department has promised to make the restart of payments as smooth as possible. In a statement, the agency said it will continue to push for Biden's debt cancellation as a way to reduce borrowers' debt load and ease the transition.

For Beka Favela, 30, the payment pause provided independence. She earned a master's in counseling last year, and her job as a therapist allowed her to move out of her parents' house.

Without making payments on her \$80,000 in student loans, she started saving. She bought furniture. She chipped away at credit card debt. But once the pause ends, she expects to pay about \$500 a month. It will consume most of her disposable income, leaving little for surprise costs. If finances get tighter, she wonders if she'll have to move back home.

"I don't want to feel like I'm regressing in order to make ends meet," said Favela, of Westmont, Illinois. "I just want to keep moving forward. I'm worried, is that going to be possible?"

AP Economics Writer Paul Wiseman contributed to this report.

The Associated Press education team receives support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Opponents compete to square off against Venezuela's powerful leader

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Leaders of Venezuela's fractured opposition are shaking voters' hands and promising — yet again — that they will defeat President Nicolás Maduro at the ballot box.

Maduro is backed by the all-powerful United Socialist Party of Venezuela, which has controlled the nation and its oil wealth for a quarter-century. The party was led for 15 years by Hugo Chávez and has been behind Maduro for a decade, all the while tilting the electoral system in its favor and using government benefits as incentives to vote for it.

Despite the sky-high odds against them, opposition leaders say that giving up would be worse, so they're holding an Oct. 22 primary to decide who will take on Maduro next year. They are getting a lukewarm reception from dispirited voters who were told for years to boycott elections.

Interested candidates could officially enter the race starting Tuesday but many election basics — such as who will vote, how and where — remain undetermined. Still, so far about 10 politicians think they have what it takes to face Maduro and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela.

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"All of us Venezuelans who want to live better, who want to live in a democracy, must do what is within our reach," said Jesús María Casal, a constitutional attorney who heads the body overseeing the primary.

The list of aspiring candidates includes Henrique Capriles, a two-time presidential candidate and former governor, and María Corina Machado, a former National Assembly member. Freddy Superlano, a onetime gubernatorial candidate, became his party's choice after Juan Guaidó, the former self-proclaimed acting president of Venezuela, left the country in late April.

Voters are being suffocated by a protracted crisis that has pushed more than 7 million people to migrate and has made food and other necessities unaffordable for those who remain.

Since Hugo Chávez was elected president in 1998, ushering in a movement that he said championed the working class, Venezuelans have participated in 17 elections, including presidential, legislative, gubernatorial and municipal contests.

The elections have been marked by the use of free food, home appliances and other goods as political tools. Pro-government candidates have had preferred access to subsidized gasoline, and favorable coverage on state television for the ruling party.

The elections have also featured so-called red checkpoints — named after the color that the ruling party coopted more than two decades ago. Checkpoints near polling sites are typically run by ruling-party allies who ask people to see the government-issued cards needed to receive food and other assistance.

The lack of fair electoral conditions prompted some opposition leaders to encourage boycotts over the past two decades. But the strategy failed, and the various parties and opposition factions have been working for months to reach agreements to hold the first primary since 2012.

Guaidó, who did not vote in the 2021 regional elections, this year encouraged Venezuelans living abroad to send friends money so that they could pay for trips to voter-registration offices.

"Your family and friends in Venezuela need your help to participate in the primary," a video tweeted by Guaidó in March explains. "Support them with the travel expenses."

Casal's group has asked the country's electoral authorities to update voting rolls and ease the voter registration process.

Opposition parties, interested candidates, longstanding leaders and primary organizers are yet to agree on whether to use government-owned electronic voting machines during the October contest. Whether polling centers will be set up at schools across the country is also undetermined.

Disagreements among the opposition extend to whether Venezuelans living abroad who are of voting age should vote in the primary. Venezuela's law contemplates absentee voting by allowing citizens to cast a ballot at consulates. But interested voters must be properly registered with their foreign address, and cannot be in that country illegally or seeking refugee or asylum status.

Ruling party leader Diosdado Cabello has insisted that the opposition will not manage to hold a primary. If he is wrong, then the opposition also must figure out how to handle a primary win by a candidate whom authorities have previously banned from running for office. Superlano and Capriles are under such bans, which many consider part of the government's anti-dissent tactics.

Superlano was a candidate for governor of Barinas, where Chávez was born, in 2021. As election results showed him winning, Venezuela's high court disqualified him. His wife, who was chosen as his successor, was also deemed ineligible to run. So was her substitute.

Guaidó, who is also banned from electoral activities, relocated to Miami in April, citing increasing safety threats to himself and his family. Last week, Capriles twice accused ruling-party loyalists of disturbing campaign events, including one on Friday in which women pushed and hit him several times, an incident captured in a video that Capriles posted on Twitter.

Capriles won the opposition's last presidential primary and ran against Chávez in October 2012. Six months later, he faced Maduro, who had become Venezuela's interim president when Chávez died.

"What is going to happen? I don't know what will happen," Capriles told reporters about the bans. "What I believe is that I cannot disbar myself nor am I going to ask the government for permission (to see) if I can run or not."

at a time and blocked most international travel were lifted in December. But forecasters say the peak of that rebound probably has passed.

Retail spending is recovering more slowly than expected because jittery consumers worry about the economic outlook and possible job losses. A government survey in April found a record 1 in 5 young workers in cities were unemployed.

Factory activity is contracting and employers are cutting jobs after interest rate hikes to cool inflation in the United States and Europe depressed demand for Chinese exports.

Exports to the United States tumbled 18.2% from a year earlier to \$42.5 billion after the Federal Reserve raised its benchmark lending rate to a 16-year high to curb surging inflation by slowing business and consumer activity.

Imports of American goods sank 9.9% to \$14.3 billion. China's politically volatile trade surplus with the United States narrowed by 21.9% to \$28.1 billion.

China's economic growth accelerated to 4.5% over a year earlier in the three months ending in March from the previous quarter's 2.9%. It would need to accelerate further to reach the ruling Communist Party's official growth target of "around 5%" for the year.

April's "disappointing activity data" suggest "suggests China's domestic demand recovery has lost steam following the reopening-induced bounce," Chan said.

For the year to date, imports fell 6.7% from the same five-month period of 2022 to just over \$1 trillion, while export growth fell close to zero. Exports edged up 0.3% to \$1.4 trillion.

Imports from Russia, mostly oil and gas, rose 10% over a year ago to \$11.3 billion. Exports to Russia surged 114% to \$9.3 billion.

China is buying more Russian energy to take advantage of price cuts, helping to shore up the Kremlin's cash flow after the United States, Europe and Japan cut off most purchases to punish Moscow for President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Beijing can buy Russian oil and gas without triggering Western sanctions. China has become Russia's biggest export market and an important source of manufactured goods.

Also in May, China's imports from the 27-nation European Union fell 38.6% to \$24.5 billion. Exports to Europe fell 26.6% to \$44.6 billion. Beijing's trade surplus with Europe narrowed by 3% to \$20.1 billion.

General Administration of Customs of China (in Chinese): www.customs.gov.cn

Protesters brawl as Southern California school district decides whether to recognize Pride Month

GLENDALE, Calif. (AP) — Protesters briefly scuffled and punches flew Tuesday as a Southern California school district decided whether to recognize June as Pride month.

Several hundred people gathered in the parking lot of the Glendale Unified School District headquarters, split between those who support or oppose exposing youngsters to LGBTQ+ issues in schools.

Some opponents wore T-shirts emblazoned with: "Leave our kids alone."

It was the same slogan used by some demonstrators last Friday outside Saticoy Elementary School in Los Angeles to protest a planned Pride assembly.

As in Glendale, police officers had to separate groups of protesters and counterprotesters who came to blows.

Across the nation, Pride month celebrations are kicking off amid rising backlash in some places against LGBTQ+ rights. Community parade organizers, school districts and even professional sports teams have faced protests for flying rainbow flags and honoring drag performers. While some Republican-led states are limiting classroom conversations about gender and sexuality and banning gender-affirming care, some Democratic cities and states are seeking to expand LGBTQ+ rights and to honor the community's contributions.

Oakland Athletics move to Las Vegas in flux as Nevada Legislature adjourns

By GABE STERN Associated Press/Report for America

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) — High-profile proposals to help build a stadium for the Oakland Athletics and lure major film makers to Las Vegas through billions of dollars in tax credits are in flux after Nevada lawmakers adjourned their four-month legislative session early Tuesday.

Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo called a special legislative session Tuesday evening in the midst of disagreements between him and the Democratic-controlled Legislature over a major budget bill. The agenda did not include Oakland Athletics funding, but that could still technically be heard in another special legislative session.

Lawmakers failed to pass the budget bill that included over \$1 billion to fund capital improvement projects that fund state public works and construction. The measure faltered in the Senate as they ran out of time for a second vote after party disagreements lasted Monday night until the midnight deadline.

Now, the prospects are murky for a bill that has revived the national debate over public funding for private sports stadiums. The measure could add professional baseball to Las Vegas' growing sports scene, but economists have warned that such a project would bring minimal benefits for a hefty public price tag.

The bulk of the public funding for the \$1.5 billion retractable roof stadium would have come from \$380 million in public assistance, partly through \$180 million in transferable tax credits, \$120 million in county bonds that would help finance projects and a special tax district around the stadium. Backers have pledged that the district will generate enough money to pay off those bonds and interest.

Chris Blake 9:06 PM Backers have pledged the district will generate enough money to pay off those bonds and interest.

The A's would not owe property taxes for the publicly owned stadium and Clark County, which includes Las Vegas, also would contribute \$25 million in credit toward infrastructure costs.

The major film tax credit bill would involve up to \$190 million annually for at least 20 years to recruit major film studios to Las Vegas. Sony has announced it would commit to a \$1 billion expansion in Las Vegas with a competitive deal.

Special sessions are fairly common in Nevada's Legislature, which lasts for four months every other year. There have been seven since 2013 for a variety of reasons — pandemic protocols, statewide redistricting, budget disputes and approval for \$750 million in public funding to help build Allegiant Stadium when the Oakland Raiders moved to Las Vegas.

For four months, Democratic leaders in the Senate and Assembly fought the new Republican governor on policy issues ranging from taxes and budgets to schools and crime, a conflict that came to a climax as Monday turned to Tuesday without a deal.

The budget disagreements stemmed from pay raises for charter school teachers that Republicans wanted and a handful of capital funds that they wanted for charter schools.

"The Senate Republicans fully support Governor Lombardo and await his call for a special session to find common ground solutions for Nevadans," Republican Senate Minority Leader Heidi Seevers Gansert said.

Democratic Speaker Steve Yeager's office canceled a scheduled press conference moments after midnight, when the Legislature failed to pass the fifth budget bill. In a statement, he said legislative Republicans "have once again put politics before policy" by not passing the capital improvements project.

The late-night conflicts came after lawmakers shuffled from room to room on Monday, hosting last-minute conference committees where they agreed on amendments to dozens of bills as the midnight deadline approached. Oftentimes committees would meet 10 minutes in advance and would last for as short as two minutes. The Legislature advanced dozens of bills to Lombardo's desk, who now has 10 days to sign or veto them.

Also on Monday, a widely-supported program that would allow the state to buy back and retire ground-water rights in diminished basins died after not receiving a hearing in the Senate finance committee. It comes after the state overallocated water rights decades ago, in-part leading to a scramble for how to

save groundwater water quickly. The program would have been one of the most expansive among Western states, and backers wanted at least \$5 million to start the program.

Lombardo also became the first governor in the nation to veto a medical aid in dying bill, which would have allowed patients with a terminal illness, under particular circumstances, to self-administer life-ending medication. It would follow other states recently adopting such a measure, including Oregon, Washington and California. The bill has now gone through the Legislature five times without passing.

Another bill that died in the state Senate was baby bonds legislation that would have established trust funds for children born into Medicaid, and parental leave for state workers. That was a top priority for Democratic treasurer Zach Conine.

Stern is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service that places journalists in newsrooms. Follow Stern on Twitter: @gabestern326.

As conservatives target schools, LGBTQ+ kids and students of color feel less safe

By ANNIE MA, CLAUDIA LAUER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

NOLENSVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The first encounter with racism that Harmony Kennedy can remember came in elementary school. On a playground, a girl picked up a leaf and said she wanted to “clean the dirt” from Harmony’s skin.

In sixth grade, a boy dropped trash on the floor and told her to pick it up, “because you’re a slave.” She was stunned — no one had ever said anything like that to her before.

As protests for racial justice broke out in 2020, white students at her Tennessee high school kneeled in the hallways and chanted, “Black lives matter!” in mocking tones. As she saw the students receive light punishments, she grew increasingly frustrated.

So when Tennessee began passing legislation that could limit the discussion and teaching of Black history, gender identity and race in the classroom, to Harmony, it felt like a gut punch — as if the adults were signaling this kind of ignorant behavior was acceptable.

“When I heard they were removing African American history, banning LGBTQ, I almost started crying,” said Harmony, 16. “We’re not doing anything to anybody. Why do they care what we personally prefer, or what we look like?”

As conservative politicians and activists push for limits on discussions of race, gender and sexuality, some students say the measures targeting aspects of their identity have made them less welcome in American schools — the one place all kids are supposed to feel safe.

Some of the new restrictions have been championed by conservative state leaders and legislatures, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who say they are necessary to counter liberal influence in schools. Others have been pushed by local activists or school boards arguing teachers need more oversight to ensure classroom materials are appropriate.

Books have been pulled from libraries. Some schools have insisted on using the names transgender students had before they transitioned. And teachers wary of breaking new rules have shied from discussions related to race, gender and other politically sensitive topics, even as students say they desperately need to see their lived experiences reflected in the classroom.

Among them are a transgender student at a Pennsylvania school where teachers are directed to use students’ birth names, a bisexual student in Florida who sensed a withdrawal of adult support, and Harmony, a Black student outside Nashville alarmed by efforts to restrict lessons on Black history.

For these and other students of color and LGBTQ+ kids, it can feel like their very existence is being rejected.

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'NEUTRALITY' POLICY MAKES SCHOOL FEEL LESS SAFE

In late 2020, during the pandemic school closures, Leo Burchell started using different pronouns, trying on new clothes and shorter hair. The changes felt right.

At school outside Philadelphia, Leo started telling teachers about using a different name and they/them pronouns, and the teachers were immediately accepting. A shift to using he/him pronouns followed.

"I changed my name to Leo, and for a while it was tough," he said. "I told some of my friends. I told the people close to me, but I wasn't ready to come out to everybody yet ... and I had the space to do that in my own time."

To tell his parents, Leo shared a poem he had written about his transition. He worried it would be hard for them, as parents who had always identified as "girl parents" to three daughters. His mom, dad, older and twin sister were all supportive.

Then, over the last year, the Central Bucks School District's board barred staff from using students' chosen names or pronouns without parental permission.

The board passed what it called a "neutrality" policy that bars social and political advocacy in classrooms — a measure opponents have seen as targeting Pride flags and other symbols teachers use to signal support for LGBTQ+ students. Reviews of the appropriateness of books have mostly targeted LGBTQ+ literature.

Each step felt like chipping away at the spaces that made Leo feel safe enough to explore his gender identity.

Across the district, parents and students told the board stories of slurs, hate speech and sometimes violence directed toward transgender children. But other adults pressed forward in their effort to restrict inclusion. During one board meeting when a transgender student was speaking, rather than listening, a group of parents whispered to each other. One adult audibly asked: "Is that a girl?"

One man told the school board transgender people posed a risk of violence in bathrooms. Leo expected another adult in the room to interrupt what felt to him like hate speech. No one did.

So at the next board meeting, Leo spoke up. "Attacking students based on who they are or who they love is wrong," he said. Leo has spoken regularly at meetings since.

Leo worries about what school will be like for younger transgender students.

"I don't want my friends to be misgendered and deadnamed every single day just because they don't want to come out to their parents," Leo said. "It really just breaks my heart to know that some of my friends, you know, might not want to go to school anymore."

NEW FLORIDA LAWS 'TOOK THE AIR OUT OF ME'

Jack Fitzgerald, a high school student in Broward County, Florida, came out to friends by accident at first.

At a book club meeting, he blurted out: "I don't really like romance books unless they're gay." He hadn't told anyone he was bisexual, but it came out easily in a place where he felt comfortable and safe.

Later, he would come out to his mother while watching television.

"So, I am bi," he told her.

"And why are you telling me this?" she said. A lifelong conservative, his mother told him she had long known about his sexuality. It was not a problem.

The confidence and relief he felt led Jack to start his school's gender and sexuality alliance club. Last year, as a junior, he led a school walkout to protest a new law that banned instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity for kindergarten to third grade. The law, part of the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation pushed by DeSantis, was dubbed "Don't Say Gay" by critics and recently expanded to encompass all grades.

Jack was surprised by two things. Most students initially knew little about the bill. And once they learned about it, support for the walkout was overwhelming.

Teachers have been more cautious.

Jack remembers talking to his debate teacher about covering some controversial topics. "You have to realize, ... teachers have families," he told Jack, who took it as a comment on teachers worried about losing their jobs.

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In another class, Jack recalls an environmental teacher told the class she could not answer a question during a discussion on climate change or she would be seen as “too woke.”

There also was a school board member, Debra Hixon, who won Jack’s admiration when she spoke last year at a town hall event for teens. Hixon, who became widely known after her husband was killed in the 2018 Parkland school shooting, expressed support for LGBTQ+ students.

“I think I even told my mom. I was like, ‘Oh, we’ve got to vote for her next time because she seems so impassioned, and she genuinely came across like she cared,’” he said.

When Jack asked her in April how the school district would react to the new laws, Hixon said they were going to comply with the law.

The response shocked Jack. He thought back to how the district had stood up to the DeSantis administration over COVID-19 policies like mask mandates. When it came to protecting LGBTQ+ students, it seemed, there was no appetite for defiance.

“They didn’t even try to act like they were going to try, you know?” he said. “And it was so disappointing. It really took the air out of me.”

Hixon said she felt badly that Jack had the impression she was not defending LGBTQ+ students.

“We have a lot of new laws to navigate, and I am still processing what they mean for our district, so I don’t want to overstep and say something that is incorrect or inappropriate,” she said. “I am more guarded with my responses, but I promise I will continue to defend our students to ensure they feel safe and welcome in our schools.”

AFTER SPEAKING UP, SOME STUDENTS FACE BACKLASH

In Harmony’s freshman-year English class, a boy started playing with his mask and joked, “I can’t breathe, just like George Floyd,” Harmony recalled.

“I was really upset. And I called him out on it. And I was like, ‘Are you kidding me? Someone died,’” she said.

She told her teacher, who said she was sorry it happened but there was not much she could do. Nothing happened to the boy, Harmony said.

To be a Black student in this environment, and to see efforts to minimize the teaching of Black history, Harmony said, is a reminder of why it’s important that a full version of history is taught.

“If people are taking this out of schools, it’s making the ignorance go on, because they’re not understanding the pain and agony we have to go through,” she said.

The incident led Harmony to join the Forward Club, which works to promote cultural and racial inclusion at her predominantly white high school. The club’s members come from a diverse array of backgrounds — including the children of some adults who have disparaged the group.

At times, students who speak out against new policies have been targeted for harassment. In Williamson County, Tennessee, where Harmony goes to school, a political action committee accused another high school’s Black student union of promoting segregation. The PAC posted the time and place of the student group’s meeting on social media. Elsewhere, trans and nonbinary students who have spoken up about bullying have faced only more insults on social media.

For some, the hostility can be exhausting. Milana Kumar, a rising senior in Collierville, Tennessee, who is genderqueer, is comfortable with their identity among friends. But it’s not a conversation they bring up at school, where they said teachers and other students often do not respect chosen pronouns.

“I’ve never tried to navigate that, I think just as a response to save myself from a lot of hurt that would happen,” Milana said.

Recently, Tennessee passed a bill that would protect teachers from discipline or other consequences if they misgender their students. At the time, Milana was at the Capitol testifying on other legislation. She thought about how routine a day it was.

“Taking away a whole group of people’s right to be who they are, that’s just like, this is a typical day. I think I was more scared that that was a reality than I was sad about the bill itself.”

Attending predominantly white schools means Harmony has had to go out of her way to learn about

Black culture and history — often outside of school. That has shaped where she wants to go next. She'd like to attend a historically Black college and pledge a Black sorority.

What Harmony wants, ultimately, is to be able to go to school like any other teenager and focus on learning. To go to a football game without hearing racial slurs. To stand up for herself without being seen as an aggressor.

Meantime, it's something she'll continue to speak up for.

"My sister is going to be an incoming freshman this year, and I want her to have a safe learning environment where she doesn't have to really deal with all the ignorance and things," she said. "I want her to be able to enjoy high school."

The Associated Press' reporting around issues of race and ethnicity is supported in part by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Florida grand jury involved in Trump documents probe by Justice Dept., AP source says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal prosecutors are using a grand jury in Florida as part of their investigation into the possible mishandling of classified documents at former President Donald Trump's Palm Beach property, a person familiar with the matter said Tuesday night.

The grand jury is in addition to a separate panel that has been meeting in Washington for months to consider charges against Trump over the retention of hundreds of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago and potential obstruction of the government's efforts to reclaim the records.

It is not clear why prosecutors are using an additional grand jury, which was described to The Associated Press by a person who insisted on anonymity to discuss secret proceedings, or which witnesses might be testifying before it.

A variety of witnesses, including lawyers for Trump, close aides to the former president and officials with the Trump Organization, have appeared over the last year before the grand jury in Washington. But the use of a different grand jury in Florida suggests that prosecutors may also be eyeing at least some potential charges in that state.

The Mar-a-Lago investigation, being led by special counsel Jack Smith's team of prosecutors, is thought to be in its final stages, with a charging decision expected soon. Trump's lawyers met at the Justice Department on Monday with officials including Smith, part of an effort by the legal team to raise concerns about what they say is prosecutorial misconduct and to try to argue against a potential indictment.

The investigation has centered not only on the possession of classified documents, including at the top-secret level, but also on the refusal of Trump to return the records when asked and on possible obstruction. The FBI last year issued a subpoena for classified records at the property, and after coming to suspect that Trump and his representatives had not returned all the documents, returned with a search warrant and recovered an additional 100 documents with classification markings.

Investigators have questioned a Trump associate who was seen on surveillance camera moving boxes of documents at Mar-a-Lago. As part of an obstruction probe centered in part on surveillance footage, they more recently have expressed interest in a worker's draining of a pool at the resort last October, an act that caused a flood at the property, according to another person who spoke on condition of anonymity. That area of interest was first reported by CNN.

A spokesman for Smith declined to comment Tuesday night on the existence of another grand jury.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Protesters call for arrest of white woman who fatally shot Black neighbor

By CURT ANDERSON and FREIDA FRISARO Associated Press

OCALA, Fla. (AP) — Authorities came under pressure Tuesday to arrest and charge a white woman who fired through her front door and killed a Black neighbor in a case that has put Florida's divisive stand your ground law back into the spotlight.

About three dozen mostly Black protesters gathered outside the Marion County Judicial Center to demand that the shooter be arrested in the country's latest flashpoint over race and gun violence. The chief prosecutor, State Attorney William Gladson, met with the protesters and urged patience while the investigation continues.

"If we are going to make a case we need as much time and as much evidence as possible," Gladson said. "I don't want to compromise any criminal investigation and I'm not going to do that."

Ajike Owens, a 35-year-old mother of four, was killed in the Friday night shooting that Marion County Sheriff Billy Woods said was the culmination of a 2½-year feud between neighbors. The women lived in the rolling hills south of Ocala, a north Florida city that is the heart of the state's horse country.

Woods said Monday detectives are working with the State Attorney's Office and must investigate possible self-defense claims before they can move forward with any possible criminal charges. The sheriff pointed out that because of the stand your ground law he can't legally make an arrest unless he can prove the shooter did not act in self-defense.

On Tuesday, a stuffed teddy bear and bouquets marked the area near where Owens was shot. Nearby, children were riding bikes and scooters, and playing basketball. Protesters chanted "No justice, no peace" and "A.J. A.J. A.J" using Owens' nickname. They carried signs saying: "Say her name Ajike Owens" and "It's about us."

Outside, the Rev. Bernard Tuggerson said the Black community in Ocala has suffered injustices for years. "Marion County is suffering and needs to be healed completely," he said. "If we don't turn from our wicked ways of the world, it's going to be an ongoing problem. We want answers."

The sheriff said Owens was shot moments after going to the apartment of her neighbor, who had yelled at Owens' children as they played in a nearby lot. He also said the neighbor, who has not been identified by police, had thrown a pair of skates that hit one of the children.

Deputies responding to a trespassing call at the apartment Friday night found Owens suffering from gunshot wounds. She later died at a hospital.

Before the confrontation, the shooter had been yelling racial slurs at the children, according to a statement from civil rights attorney Ben Crump, who is representing Owens' family. He also represented Trayvon Martin's family in 2012, when the Black teenager was killed in a case that drew worldwide attention to the state's stand your ground law.

The sheriff's office hasn't confirmed there were slurs uttered or said whether race was a factor in the shooting.

Lauren Smith, 40, lives across the street from where the shooting happened. She was on her porch that day and saw one of Owens' young sons pacing, and yelling, "They shot my mama, they shot my mama."

She ran toward the house, and started chest compressions until a rescue crew arrived. She said there wasn't an altercation and that Owens didn't have a weapon.

"She was angry all the time that the children were playing out there," Smith said. "She would say nasty things to them. Just nasty." Smith, who is white, described the neighborhood as family friendly.

The sheriff said that since January 2021, deputies responded to at least a half-dozen calls in connection with what police described as feuding between Owens and the woman who shot her.

"There was a lot of aggressiveness from both of them, back and forth," the sheriff said the shooter told investigators. "Whether it be banging on the doors, banging on the walls and threats being made. And then at that moment is when Ms. Owens was shot through the door."

"I'm absolutely heartbroken," Angela Ferrell-Zabala, executive director of Moms Demand Action for Gun

Sense in America, told The Associated Press. She described the fatal shooting as "so senseless."

"We've seen this again and again across this country," she said, adding that "it's really because of lax gun laws and a culture of shoot first."

Ferrell-Zabala said stand your ground cases, which she refers to as "shoot first laws," are deemed justifiable five times more frequently when a white shooter kills a Black victim.

In 2017, Florida lawmakers updated the state's self-defense statute to shift the burden of proof from a person claiming self-defense to prosecutors. That means authorities have to rule out self-defense before bringing charges. Before the change in law, prosecutors could charge someone with a shooting, and then defense attorneys would have to present an affirmative defense for why their client shouldn't be convicted.

In fact, stand your ground and "castle doctrine" cases — which allow residents to defend themselves either by law or court precedent when threatened — have sparked outrage amid a spate of shootings across the country.

In April, 84-year-old Andrew Lester, a white man, shot and injured 16-year-old Ralph Yarl, a Black teenager who rang his doorbell in Kansas City after mistakenly showing up at the wrong house to pick up his younger siblings. Lester faces charges of first-degree assault and armed criminal action; at trial, he may argue that he thought someone was trying to break into his house, as he told police.

Missouri and Florida are among about 30 states that have stand your ground laws.

The most well-known examples of the stand your ground argument came up in the trial of George Zimmerman, who fatally shot Trayvon Martin.

Zimmerman, who had a white father and Hispanic mother, told police that Martin attacked him, forcing him to use his gun in self-defense. He was allowed to go free, but was arrested about six weeks later after Martin's parents questioned his version of events and then-Gov. Rick Scott appointed a special prosecutor.

Before trial, Zimmerman's attorneys chose not to pursue a stand your ground claim, which could have resulted in the dismissal of murder charges as well as immunity from prosecution. But during the trial, the law was essentially used as part of his self-defense argument. Jurors found him not guilty.

At a vigil Monday, Owens' mother, Pamela Dias, said that she was seeking justice for her daughter and her grandchildren.

"My daughter, my grandchildren's mother, was shot and killed with her 9-year-old son standing next to her," Dias said. "She had no weapon. She posed no imminent threat to anyone."

— Frisaro in Fort Lauderdale contributed to this report.

Florida official says migrants flown to California went willingly, disputes claims of coercion

By TRÂN NGUYỄN and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration said Tuesday that three dozen migrants whom the state flew from the U.S. southern border to California on private planes all went willingly, disputing allegations by California officials that the individuals were coerced to travel under false pretenses.

The admission of responsibility — five days after the first flight touched down in California's capital — only served to heighten tensions between DeSantis and California Gov. Gavin Newsom, his frequent political sparring partner.

Two planes arrived in Sacramento, on Friday and Monday, each carrying asylum-seekers mostly from Colombia and Venezuela. The individuals had been picked up in El Paso, Texas, taken to New Mexico and then put on charter flights to California's capital of Sacramento, said California Attorney General Rob Bonta. He is investigating whether any violations of criminal or civil law occurred.

Alecia Collins, a spokeswoman for the Florida Division of Emergency Management, said in a statement that "through verbal and written consent, these volunteers indicated they wanted to go to California." She also shared a video compilation that appeared to show people signing consent forms and thanking officials for treating them well.

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The clips had no time stamps, and Collins declined to share additional details about when and where they were recorded. Representatives from Sacramento ACT and PICO California, two religious groups helping the migrants in Sacramento, did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment about whether the migrants in the videos were the same as those they were helping.

Bonta told CNN late Tuesday he would be requesting that Florida turn over any video footage, unedited, that it has of the group. A spokeswoman for his office could not confirm if any of the people seen in the video were among the migrants Bonta met.

This isn't the first time DeSantis' administration has transported migrants from Texas to other states. Last fall, Florida flew 49 Venezuelans to the upscale Massachusetts island of Martha's Vineyard. The move was intended to protest federal immigration policy. DeSantis has said he intends to send migrants who may end up in Florida to states that have immigrant-friendly policies, like California.

It's not clear whether Florida was the intended destination for any of the people who arrived in California. If so, they would represent just a sliver of the immigrants who arrive in Florida each year.

DeSantis signed a law providing \$12 million for his migrant-relocation initiative in early May, just weeks before announcing his Republican presidential bid. He has touted the earlier migrant flights to Martha's Vineyard on the campaign trail.

Newsom, a Democrat, indicated in a tweet Monday that California may consider kidnapping charges against DeSantis. Such charges would likely be extremely difficult to prove, particularly given the migrants signed waivers.

Bonta has not directly said he is considering kidnapping charges. The Bexar County Sheriff's Office in Texas on Monday said it had recommended misdemeanor and felony charges for "unlawful restraints" in the transport of migrants from San Antonio to Martha's Vineyard. The county district attorney must decide whether to pursue those charges and against whom.

Possible charges aside, Newsom's office doubled down on its criticism of DeSantis after Florida claimed credit.

"This is exploitative propaganda being peddled by a politician who has shown there are no depths he won't sink to in his desperate effort to score a political point," said Anthony York, a spokesman for Newsom.

Though Newsom has no plans to run for president in 2024, he and DeSantis have frequently used each other as political foils as they cast their own governing approach as a model for the nation. Beyond immigration policy, the two have sparred on abortion access, LGBTQ+ and civil rights, and a host of other cultural issues.

On the campaign trail, DeSantis has been eager to slap at progressive policies in Democratic strongholds such as New York and California, claiming that Florida's population boom in recent years has been driven by people fleeing blue-state policies.

DeSantis is currently positioned as the strongest alternative to former President Donald Trump in the GOP's crowded primary, although Trump maintains a big lead in early polls.

Bonta, who met with some of the migrants who arrived Friday, said they told him they were approached in El Paso by two women who spoke broken Spanish and promised them jobs. The women traveled with them by land from El Paso to Deming, New Mexico, where two men then accompanied them on the flight to Sacramento. The same men were on the flight Monday, Bonta said.

He said the asylum seekers have court dates in New York, Utah and Colorado and carried a document that "purports to be a consent and release form" that is designed to shield Florida from liability.

"Of course, what's important is what is actually said and represented and told to the individual, and we've got good indications of what that was and the fact that it was false, misleading, and deceptive," Bonta said.

His office didn't comment Tuesday following Florida's assertion that the migrants were not coerced.

Gabby Trejo, executive director of Sacramento ACT, a collaboration of religious congregations in the Sacramento area, said all of the migrants had already been given pending court dates by U.S. immigration officials before they were approached in Texas by people promising jobs. Trejo said that they had been "lied to and deceived."

It's not yet clear if the new arrivals in Sacramento plan to stay in California or will eventually seek to go

elsewhere, advocates said. Four who arrived on the first flight on Friday have already been picked up by friends or family members, but the rest remain in the care of local advocacy groups. _____

Rodriguez reported from San Francisco. Associated Press writers Anthony Izaguirre in Tallahassee, Florida, and Elliot Spagat in San Diego contributed.

Find more AP coverage of immigration: <https://apnews.com/hub/immigration>

Ukrainians make desperate escape from floods after dam collapse as shelling echoes overhead

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

KHERSON, Ukraine (AP) — As shelling from Russia's war on Ukraine echoed overhead, dozens of evacuees on an island in the Dnieper River scurried onto the tops of military trucks or into rafts to flee rising floodwaters caused by a dam breach upstream.

The unnerving bark of dogs left behind further soured the mood of those ferried to safety. A woman in one raft clutched the head of her despondent daughter. A stalled military truck stuck in swelling waters raised the panic level as Red Cross teams tried to manage an orderly evacuation.

Nobody knew just how high the waters rushing through a gaping hole in the Kakhovka dam would rise, or whether people or pets would escape alive.

The scrambled evacuation by boat and military truck from an island neighborhood off the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson downstream on Tuesday testified to the latest human chaos caused by Russia's war in Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities accused Russian forces of purposely destroying the dam. Russian authorities blamed recent Ukrainian military strikes.

"The Russians have hit the dam, and didn't think of consequences," said Oleksandr Sokeryn, who fled his house with his family after it was completely flooded. "They should not be forgiven."

Officials on both sides said the massive dam breach had caused no civilian casualties; the hurried escape aimed to keep it that way.

The island neighborhood was one residential area in the direct slipstream of Tuesday's catastrophe, which experts said was expected to play out over days as pent-up waters from the Kakhovka reservoir wash their way unhindered toward the Black Sea.

It could take days to know the real toll and damage.

In the early morning, before the floodwaters arrived, many residents tried to stick it out. But as the water level climbed in the streets, rising nearly to the tops of bus stops or the second floor of buildings, national guard teams and emergency crews fanned out to retrieve people who got stranded.

Some found themselves floating under the rafters of their homes as the waters rose. Space was limited on the trucks, and an effort to tow two rafts behind one went awry when the ropes snapped. One man chucked his German shepherd from the roof of the stalled truck onto another. Some residents clung to each other to keep from falling into the rising tide.

Officials said about 22,000 people live in areas at risk of flooding in Russian-controlled areas on the eastern side of the river, while 16,000 live in the most critical zone in Ukrainian-held territory on the western side — areas like those evacuated on Tuesday.

The United Nations said at least 16,000 people have already lost their homes, and efforts were underway to provide clean water, money, and legal and emotional support to those affected. Evacuations on the Ukrainian-controlled side of the river were ferrying people to cities including Mykolaiv and Odesa to the west.

"While towns and villages in downstream Dnieper River are going under water, the human and environmental cost of the destruction of the Kakhovka dam is a huge humanitarian disaster — and the international community must unite to bring those responsible to justice," said Amnesty International's regional

director for Eastern Europe Marie Struthers.

"The rules of international humanitarian law specifically protect dams, due to the dangers their destruction poses to civilians," she said.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the flood caused by the dam breach was projected "to have severe and longer-term consequences on the humanitarian situation in the area" such as by moving mines and explosive ordnance to new areas.

Kherson, which was liberated by Ukrainian forces last fall, has already seen some of the worst from Russia's blitzkrieg campaign against Ukraine — alleged rape, arbitrary killings, and enforced disappearances during months of Russian occupation.

Today, shelling regularly continues from across the nearby front line demarcated by the river.

AP writers Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations and Jamey Keaten in Kyiv, Ukraine, contributed to this report.

Artist Françoise Gilot, acclaimed painter who loved and later left Picasso, is dead at 101

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Françoise Gilot, a prolific and acclaimed painter who produced art for well more than a half-century but was nonetheless more famous for her turbulent relationship with Pablo Picasso — and for leaving him — died Tuesday in New York City, where she had lived for decades. She was 101.

Gilot's daughter, Aurelia Engel, told The Associated Press her mother had died at Mount Sinai West hospital after suffering both lung and heart problems. "She was an extremely talented artist, and we will be working on her legacy and the incredible paintings and works she is leaving us with," Engel said.

The French-born Gilot had long made her frustration clear that despite acclaim for her art, which she produced from her teenage years until five years ago, she would still be best known for her relationship with the older Picasso, whom she met in 1943 at age 21, his junior by four decades. The union produced two children — Claude and Paloma Picasso. But unlike the other key women in Picasso's life — wives or paramours — Gilot eventually walked out.

"He never saw it coming," Engel said of her mother's departure. "She was there because she loved him and because she really believed in that incredible passion of art which they both shared. (But) she came as a free, though very, very young, but very independent person."

Gilot herself told The Guardian newspaper in 2016 that "I was not a prisoner" in the relationship.

"I'd been there of my own will, and I left of my own will," she said, then 94. "That's what I told him once, before I left. I said: 'Watch out, because I came when I wanted to, but I will leave when I want.' He said, 'Nobody leaves a man like me.' I said, 'We'll see.'"

Gilot wrote several books, the most famous of which was "Life with Picasso," written in 1964 with Carlton Lake. An angry Picasso sought unsuccessfully to ban its publication. "He attacked her in court, and he lost three times," said Engel, 66, an architect by training who now manages her mother's archives. But, she said, "after the third loss he called her and said congratulations. He fought it, but at the same time, I think he was proud to have been with a woman who had such guts like he had."

Born on Nov. 26, 1921, in leafy Neuilly-sur-Seine in suburban Paris, Gilot was an only child. "She knew at the age of five that she wanted to be a painter," Engel said. In accordance with her parents' wishes, she studied law, however, while maintaining art as her true passion. She first exhibited her paintings in 1943.

That was the year she met Picasso, by chance, when she and a friend visited a restaurant on the Left Bank, amid a gathering that included his then-companion, Dora Maar.

"I was 21 and I felt that painting was already my whole life," she writes in "Life With Picasso." When Picasso asked Gilot and her friend what they did, the friend responded that they were painters, to which Picasso responded, Gilot writes: "That's the funniest thing I've heard all day. Girls who look like that can't be painters." The two were invited to visit Picasso in his studio, and the relationship soon began.

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Not long after leaving Picasso in 1953, Gilot reunited with a former friend, artist Luc Simon, and married him in 1955. They had a daughter — Engel — and divorced in 1962. In 1970, Gilot married Jonas Salk, the American virologist and researcher famed for his work with the polio vaccine, and began living between California and Paris, and later New York. When he died in 1995, Gilot moved full-time to New York and spent her last years on the Upper West Side.

Her art only increased in value over the years. In 2021 her “Paloma à la Guitare” (1965) sold for \$1.3 million at a Sotheby’s auction. Her work has shown in many prominent museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art. Her life with Picasso was illustrated in the 1996 movie “Surviving Picasso,” directed by James Ivory.

Simon Shaw, Sotheby’s vice chairman for global fine art, said it had been gratifying to see, in the past decade, Gilot’s paintings “achieve the recognition they truly deserved.”

“To see Françoise as a muse (to Picasso) is to miss the point,” Shaw wrote in an e-mail. “She was established on her course as a painter when first she met Pablo. While her work naturally entered into dialogue with his, Françoise pursued a course fiercely her own — her art, like her character, was filled with color, energy and joy.”

Engel noted that although the relationship with Picasso was clearly a difficult one, it gave her mother a certain freedom from her parents and the constraints of a bourgeois life — and perhaps enabled her to pursue her true dream of being a professional painter, a passion she shared with Picasso above all else.

“They both believed that art was the only thing in life worth doing,” she said. “And she was able to be her true self, even though it was not an easy life with him. But still she was able to be her true self.”

And for Engel, her mother’s key legacy was not only her creativity but her courage, reflected in her art, which was always changing, never staying safe.

“She was not without fear. But she would always confront her fears and jump in the void and take risks, no matter what,” Engel said.

House conservatives block GOP bills, voice frustration in response to last week’s debt ceiling vote

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House conservatives staged a mini-revolt Tuesday in retaliation for Speaker Kevin McCarthy’s leadership on last week’s vote to raise the debt ceiling, the right wing banding together to block progress on a mixture of bills and vent their frustration.

Led by outspoken members of the House Freedom Caucus, a group of 11 Republicans broke with their party on an otherwise routine procedural vote that threw the day’s schedule — and the rest of the week — into disarray. It’s the first such procedural rule vote to fail in nearly two decades.

The group is among some of the same conservative Republicans who tried to stop the debt ceiling bill from advancing last week and who then threatened to try to oust McCarthy after passage of the debt ceiling package that President Joe Biden signed into law. Short of taking that step, they have demanded a meeting with McCarthy, leaving it unclear how the standoff will be resolved.

“We’re frustrated with the way this place is operating,” said Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., one of the more outspoken members of the group. “We’re not going to live in the era of the imperial speaker anymore.”

At issue is not just a gas stove bill and others that are now stalled as the conservatives wage their protest, but the political standing of the House Republican majority. Is it just a one-day spat that allows members to make a point or a more lasting fracture?

McCarthy, R-Calif., is working with just a four-seat majority, which gives a small bloc of lawmakers considerable power to gain concessions from him.

“We’re trying to resolve internal tensions within the House Republicans. And from time to time you have to have an airing within your family, and I think that’s part of what happened today,” said Rep. Patrick McHenry, R-N.C.

Just hours earlier, Republican leaders were extolling how the House Republicans had learned to work

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together as a team after the rocky start of the year and the spectacle of McCarthy's protracted election to become speaker.

"In sports, it's called a game plan," said Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Minn., the top GOP vote-counter and a former hockey coach. "The debt limit last week displayed just how far House Republicans have come as a team."

What led the conservatives to revolt Tuesday is not fully clear — they outlined a list of grievances over McCarthy's leadership in handling the debt ceiling package. The House approved the package in an overwhelming bipartisan vote last week, despite objections from the conservatives, sending it to the Senate where it also passed with an overwhelming vote. Biden signed it into law on Saturday.

Rep. Dan Bishop, R-N.C., said the group was now demanding that McCarthy meet with them to hash out an agreement for how the House would operate.

"We had an agreement that had been forged by all of us together, and it was utterly jettisoned unilaterally by the speaker," Bishop said. "And there's been nothing so far to address the consequences of that."

Asked if the protest was about the debt ceiling vote, Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., said, "It's about a lot of things." Norman said the group is seeking "what we insisted in January: truthfulness, sincere cuts and putting economic security on the floor."

Republicans had scheduled a mid-afternoon vote on legislation that would prohibit the use of federal funds to regulate gas stoves as a hazardous product. But efforts to proceed to that matter stalled unexpectedly when the rule setting terms for debate was brought up for a vote. GOP leadership kept the vote open for an extended period as Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., listened to concerns in the back of the chamber from some of his animated GOP colleagues.

Eventually, GOP leadership acknowledged the obvious and it was announced that the procedural vote had failed with 220 lawmakers opposing it and 206 in support. After hours of discussions in McCarthy's office, it was announced that no other votes were to occur Tuesday.

"We've got some more conversations to be had," said Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, as he exited McCarthy's office in the early evening.

It took McCarthy 14 failed votes in January to become speaker amid objections from the conservative flank — a spectacle unseen in modern times. He finally seized the gavel on the 15th try after making a number of concessions to the Freedom Caucus and other members.

One issue that has frustrated conservatives in particular is an upcoming vote to reverse a Biden administration firearms-related regulation on so-called pistol braces, a stabilizing feature championed by some members of the Freedom Caucus. Some conservatives said House GOP leaders delayed consideration of the bill after members voted against last week's debt package.

Rep. Andrew Clyde, a member of the House Freedom Caucus and gun shop owner who backed the bill, met with McCarthy on Tuesday afternoon. He said they discussed his pistol brace bill and received an assurance it would get a vote on the House floor next week.

"I will hold them to this promise," Clyde said in a tweet. "And I will never back down in the fight to defend our natural rights."

The passage of the debt ceiling bill was hailed by McCarthy and other members of GOP leadership as a crucial first test of their new majority, as they pushed Biden to the negotiating table and forced spending restraints Republicans have long championed in return for lifting the nation's debt limit.

But dozens of GOP lawmakers voted against the measure, saying it didn't do enough to restrict spending. And their dissatisfaction spilled over Tuesday on the otherwise routine rules vote — a resolution establishing the rules for debate on various bills coming before the chamber.

It's common for such procedural votes to pass along party-line votes. Scalise joined with 11 Republicans voting no as part of a procedural step that would allow leaders to later bring the rule back up for a vote.

Associated Press writers Stephen Groves, Lisa Mascaro and Farnoush Amiri contributed to this report.

Virginia jet crash victims remembered: "I could not love a human being more"

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — One passenger was a caretaker from Jamaica known for her generous portions of plantain porridge. Another was a luxury real estate broker, returning from a family visit with her 2-year-old daughter. The man behind the controls of the plane, last seen slumped in the cockpit, was a skilled aviator with decades of experience.

All four died Sunday when the private jet they were traveling in lost contact with air traffic controllers and crashed into a mountain in rural Virginia. At one point, the unresponsive Cessna Citation flew directly over Washington, prompting the launch of military fighter jets that set off a sonic boom around the capital region.

As federal investigators continue to piece together what happened, new details are emerging about the people who lost their lives in a tragedy that has left friends and family reeling from the Hamptons to South Florida.

Adina Azarian, 49, was well known in New York's real estate circles, a luxury broker whose portfolio of exclusive listings were the envy of colleagues, friends said. She conceived her daughter during the pandemic, then hired Evadnie Smith, 56, as a live-in nanny in her East Hampton home.

Known to the family as "Nanny V," Smith traveled frequently with the mother and daughter, serving as a calming counterweight to Azarian's occupation of high-stress deal-making.

"Adina used to joke that she'd hired the nanny not just for her daughter, but for herself," recalled Raphael Avigdor, a longtime friend of the realtor. He said he was so impressed that he hired Smith's step-sister to care for his mother in Florida.

Smith leaves behind one son in Jamaica, who could not be reached.

Prior to the crash, Azarian, her daughter Aria and Smith were in North Carolina to visit Azarian's adoptive parents, the prominent Republican donors John and Barbara Rumpel.

Azarian, who grew up in Connecticut and New Hampshire with her biological mother, met the Rumpels by chance as an adult. The couple said Azarian reminded them of their daughter, Victoria, who had died at age 19 in a scuba diving accident.

"We just grew closer and closer and closer together," John Rumpel recalled.

They felt such a strong connection with Azarian that they decided to adopt her — a process that was finalized when Azarian was 40 years old. Seven years later, Azarian conceived her daughter, Aria, through in-vitro fertilization.

"I could not love a human being more than I loved her and my grandbaby," Rumpel said.

In recent years, Azarian had also re-established contact with her biological mother, Christina Graham, of Nashua, New Hampshire. Graham said she learned of the death after it was announced by the Rumpels, but hadn't heard from them directly.

"I have a hard time accepting that she's gone," Graham said. "We were building our relationships. We were getting there."

Rumpel identified the pilot as Jeff Hefner.

Rumpel, who owns several planes, said he'd recently hired Hefner, 69, to work for him fulltime as a pilot and mechanic. He said he'd worked with Hefner previously for about five years.

"He was top shelf, absolutely top shelf," Rumpel said of Hefner's piloting skills. "I wouldn't have had my daughter and my grandbaby fly with him if he wasn't."

Dan Newlin, an attorney who heads a Florida law firm where Hefner worked as a flight captain, said Hefner was "a highly accomplished and skilled aviator" who flew for 25 years as a captain with Southwest Airlines and had more than 25,000 flight hours. After retiring from Southwest, Hefner became certified to fly numerous private aircraft, Newlin said in an email. He said Hefner was married with three children.

Hefner's wife and children said he began as a crop duster and had an aviation career that spanned more than 40 years.

"We are devastated by the the news of this tragedy which took the lives of Jeff and all three passengers. Our hearts are full of sorrow for John and Barbara Rumpel for the loss of their daughter, granddaughter and nanny," the family said in a statement.

Officials said the pilot stopped responding to air traffic control instructions within minutes of taking off from Tennessee. The plane flew to New York, near its destination on Long Island, then reversed course, flying directly over Washington.

Fighter pilots tasked with intercepting the wayward flight said Hefner appeared to be unresponsive and slumped over, according to officials.

The cause of the crash remains under investigation, though experts said a loss of pressurization inside the cabin was the leading theory.

Lavoie reported from Richmond, Virginia

Apple's Vision Pro goggles unleash a mixed reality that could lead to more innovation and isolation

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

CUPERTINO, Calif. (AP) — Reporters are a skeptical bunch, so it was unusual to hear so many of them raving about their firsthand experience with Apple's next Big Thing: the high-priced headset called Vision Pro, a device infused with totally virtual reality as well as augmented reality that projects digital images on top of real-world settings.

But after wearing the Vision Pro during a half-hour demonstration meticulously orchestrated by Apple, I joined the ranks of those blown away by all the impressive technology Apple has packed into the goggles-like headset. Still, that excitement was muted by a disquieting sense of having just passed through a gateway that eventually will lead society down another avenue of digital isolation.

THE POTENTIAL UPSIDES

But first the good stuff: Vision Pro is a highly sophisticated device that is fairly easy to set up and incredibly intuitive to use. The setup requires using an iPhone to automatically take some assessments of your eyes and ears. If you wear prescription glasses (I wear contacts) some additional calibration will be needed, but Apple promises that won't be complicated.

Once that's all done, you will quickly find that putting on the Vision Pro is also simple, thanks to a knob on the side that makes it easy to ensure a the headset fits comfortably. And unlike other headsets, the Vision Pro isn't an awkward-looking piece of nerdware, although the goggles aren't exactly chic, despite looking a bit like something you might see people wearing on a ski slope, jet fighter or race car.

Controlling the Vision Pro is astoundingly easy. Users just press a button above the right goggle to pull up a virtual screen of apps, including familiar standbys for photos, messaging, phone calls, video streaming and web browsing. Opening an app just requires looking straight at it, then pinching a thumb and finger together. The same app can be closed with a finger pinch or can be moved to the side by holding two fingers together and moving them in the direction where you want to place it.

Not surprisingly, Apple's well-curated demonstration cast the Vision Pro in the best-possible light. The headset clearly seems like it could be quite popular for business purposes, improving productivity, collaboration and video conferencing, especially in an era when more work is being done remotely.

Without causing the disorienting effects common in other virtual-reality headsets, the Vision Pro can immerse you in stunning visuals, 3-D displays of faraway places. It can insert you into videos of past memories recorded with one of the device's 12 cameras (the demo included heartwarming scenes of a child's birthday party and a campfire scene). It can make watching a 3-D movie, such as the latest Avatar film, feel like you are sitting in an IMAX theater while relaxing on your own couch. It can thrust you into surreal moments (at one point, I watched in wonder as a butterfly first shown in a virtual screen depicting a prehistoric era seemingly fluttered across the room and landed in my outstretched hand as I sat on a couch).

And the demo featured just enough glimpses of the way sporting events appear through the goggles to realize that the powers that be in professional and collegiate football, basketball, baseball and hockey are bound to find ways to incorporate the technology into subscription services that make viewers feel like they are sitting in the front row.

To Apple's credit, the Vision Pro is also designed in a way that allows users to still see those around them, if they so choose.

THE POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES

My mixed feelings about Apple's first foray into mixed reality ironically stems from just how well-designed the Vision Pro is by a company that has been behind this sort of game-changing technology on numerous occasions during the past 40 years, ranging from the Macintosh computer to the iPhone.

It feels like this may be another instance in which Apple has accomplished something that has eluded other tech companies by cracking the code to make both virtual- and augmented-reality more compelling and less disorienting than a variety of other ho-hum headsets have done over the past decade or so.

The only reason the Vision Pro isn't going to be an immediate sensation is its cost. When it hits the U.S. market early next year, it will sell for \$3,500, which makes it probable it will start out as a luxury item unaffordable to most households — especially because the headset isn't going to supplant the need to buy a new iPhone or smartphone running on Android every few years.

The most likely scenario is that Vision Pro in some ways is Apple's testbed for mixed reality that will encourage the development of more apps especially designed to take advantage of the technology. The next ripple effect will be an array of other products equipped with similarly compelling technology at lower price points that stand a better chance sucking more people — including children — into a realm that threatens to deepen screen addictions to the detriment of real-world interactions among humans.

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

PGA Tour commissioner has 'heated' meeting with players after LIV Golf merger

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan spent more than an hour explaining to players Tuesday afternoon why he changed his mind about taking Saudi funds in a surprise collaboration, saying it ultimately was for their benefit.

And to think it was nearly a year ago to the day that Saudi-funded LIV Golf teed off in its inaugural event as a rival and a threat, flush with defectors from golf's top circuit.

Morals were questioned. Lawsuits were filed. Golfers doubled down on their affiliations.

A merger, it seemed, wasn't in the cards. But on Tuesday, professionals from both tours were caught off guard by news that their worlds would collide — that the PGA Tour, European tour and LIV Golf were merging.

"As time went on, circumstances changed," Monahan said in a conference call after the meeting. "I don't think it was right or sustainable to have this tension in our sport.

"I recognize everything I've said in the past. I recognize people will call me a hypocrite. Any time I've said anything, I've said it with the information I had, and I said it with someone trying to compete with our tour and our players."

Before Monahan could send a memo to players, a news outlet broke the embargoed announcement that the tours were merging commercial interests. Some players learned about it on social media.

And that's where they responded.

"Nothing like finding out through Twitter that we're merging with a tour that we said we'd never do that with," Mackenzie Hughes tweeted.

"And everyone thought yesterday was the longest day in golf," tweeted Collin Morikawa, who also said he found out about the merger on Twitter.

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Justin Thomas was in the middle of a practice session when he said his phone lit up with notifications. Tyrell Hatton simply tweeted an NFL blindside hit. Sepp Straka felt that was an accurate depiction.

Not getting in on the social media reaction was Rory McIlroy, who spent the past year vehemently defending the PGA Tour against LIV before going quiet on the topic in recent weeks. McIlroy is the defending champion at the Canadian Open.

Monahan described Tuesday's meeting as "intense, certainly heated."

"I'm not surprised," he said. "This is an awful lot to ask them to digest. This is a significant change for us. As I'm trying to explain as we go forward, this ultimately was a decision in the best interests of all at the PGA Tour."

Phil Mickelson, among the loudest LIV defectors, called Tuesday "an awesome day."

It wasn't immediately clear how the unification would work going forward.

Players who switched to LIV inked lucrative signing bonuses — in Mickelson's case, a reported \$200 million — yet now might have a way to rejoin players who opted not to take money from a league that some have called a Saudi Arabia "sportswashing" initiative.

Michael Kim jokingly tweeted that he might live stream the meeting. But he added: "Very curious how many people knew this deal was happening. About 5-7 people? Player run organization right?"

Monahan said he was operating under a pledge of confidentiality and the circle of trust had to shrink.

He relied mainly on two board members, New York attorney Ed Herlihy (the PGA Tour board chairman) and financier Jimmy Dunne, who lost colleagues and friends from Sandler O'Neill when terrorists flew a jetliner into the south tower of the World Trade Center.

Still to come are details on how this venture will work and what it means to the tour — players that want to return, what consequences they face for defecting, and whether LIV Golf will even exist next year. Monahan said an evaluation would determine how to integrate team golf.

"I don't want to make any statements or make any predictions," he said. "But what is in place is a commitment to make a good-faith effort to look at team golf and the role it can play."

PGA Tour member Byeong Hun An joked that Hideki Matsuyama "could have bought spirit airlines" if he had signed with LIV (Matsuyama was seen boarding a Spirit Airlines flight after the Memorial in Ohio). He also said his guess is "liv teams were struggling to get sponsors and pga tour couldn't turn down the money."

"Win-win for both tours but it's a big lose for (players) who defended the tour for last two years," he tweeted.

Dylan Wu, a 26-year-old second-year player on the PGA Tour, called the merger "hypocrisy."

"Tell me why Jay Monahan basically got a promotion to CEO of all golf in the world by going back on everything he said the past 2 years," Wu tweeted, adding: "I guess money always wins."

AP Sports Writer Ryan Kryska in New York contributed to this report.

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

PGA Tour and Europe join forces with Saudi's LIV Golf. Here's what you need to know

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

The announcement was so shocking that not even PGA Tour players knew what was coming. The tour was fighting the threat of Saudi-backed LIV Golf for more than a year. On Tuesday, they decided to start working together.

The PGA Tour, European tour and Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund say they will combine their commercial businesses into a new company with hopes of unifying golf.

That means all lawsuits are being dropped immediately. The other details create as many questions as answers. That starts with whether top stars like Phil Mickelson and Brooks Koepka — suspended for taking massive Saudi money to leave the PGA Tour for LIV — will have a way back. They would rejoin players

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who stayed loyal to the tour.

The PGA Tour was in federal court trying to require Yasir Al-Rumayyan, the governor of the Public Investment Fund, to give testimony in an antitrust case. And now, Al-Rumayyan is on the PGA Tour board of directors. He also will be chairman of the new business venture involving the three tours.

Some players felt they were betrayed. Top players have not commented because they know so little about what this means.

Missing from all the announcements was Greg Norman, the commissioner of LIV Golf.

WHAT IS LIV GOLF?

LIV Golf is a rival league funded by the Saudi Arabia sovereign wealth fund that has tried to reinvent the structure of professional golf with 48-man fields, no mid-tournament cuts and up to \$25 million in prize money. There also is a team component. The league is run by Greg Norman, a former PGA Tour star who tried nearly 30 years ago to create a world tour. LIV Golf lured away 13 former major champions, including Phil Mickelson and Dustin Johnson, who then were suspended by the PGA Tour.

WHY DID SAUDI ARABIA WANT TO CREATE A GOLF LEAGUE?

The kingdom has been investing in sports and entertainment in recent years as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's initiative called "Vision 2030" to diversify and reduce its dependence on oil. Golf was a natural fit.

It has led to accusations of "sportswashing," an attempt to use sports investments to gloss over human rights abuses, such as the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which the CIA says occurred on the orders of bin Salman.

WHY ARE PGA TOUR PLAYERS ANGRY AT THE LIV DEFECTORS?

LIV Golf was trying to get all the top players in the world ranking. A majority of them turned down bonuses estimated at \$100 million or more to stay loyal to the PGA Tour.

Rory McIlroy accused LIV defectors of "taking the easy way out" and Tiger Woods said they "turned their backs" on the very tour that made them famous. It also caused a great divide in golf, because LIV players were not allowed to play on the PGA Tour. Now they are angry over the notion LIV players might return without consequences.

The PGA Tour looks nothing like it did when LIV Golf started. PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan says he couldn't match Saudi money, but it wasn't because of a lack of effort. This year the PGA Tour had 13 "elevated events" with \$20 million purses. For 2024, it has returned its schedule to start in January and end in August. There will be about 15 tournaments with \$20 million purses — nearly twice as much as they were — for the top 50 in the season points race on the PGA Tour.

WHY DID THE PGA TOUR MERGE WITH LIV GOLF?

Monahan refused to meet with the Saudi Golf group for two years. But a few months ago, PGA Tour board member Jimmy Dunne arranged a meeting. Monahan, European tour CEO Keith Pelley and Al-Rumayyan began working out an agreement. Monahan realized LIV Golf had a deep well of funds and wasn't going anywhere. He says golf was too divided and had too much tension and it was best for everyone to come together.

WHO WILL BE IN CHARGE OF THE PGA TOUR AFTER THE MERGER?

The PGA Tour policy board will add Al-Rumayyan, and then it will either add another player or remove one of the spots that belong to the corporate world. The new commercial company — it still doesn't have a name — will have Al-Rumayyan as the chairman and Monahan as the CEO. The PGA Tour will have a majority stake in the new company. However, PIF at first will be the exclusive investor alongside the PGA Tour, LIV Golf and the DP World Tour. Going forward, PIF will have the exclusive right to further invest.

The PGA Tour will keep tax-exempt status as a 501-c-6 organization that is charity driven. As far as fans are concerned, it will still be the same logo and the same tour. Ditto for the European tour, whose com-

mercial name is DP World Tour.

WHERE WILL THE LIV GOLF DEFECTORS PLAY NEXT YEAR?

LIV Golf will finish its second season this year as scheduled. After that is anyone's guess. Monahan says officials will conduct a thorough evaluation of how to integrate team golf into the PGA Tour. LIV Golf was trying to turn its 12 teams into franchises. No one had sponsored a team.

It is unlikely that if LIV Golf still exists, players can play both sides. That's what led to this in the first place. Curiously missing from all the announcements was Norman's name. Al-Rumayyan said on CNBC that he told Norman about the merging tours only a few minutes before the announcement.

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

Giuliani denies claims he coerced woman to have sex, says she's trying to stir 'media frenzy'

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani says a woman's lawsuit alleging he coerced her into sex and owes her nearly \$2 million in unpaid wages is "a large stretch of the imagination" filled with exaggerations and salacious details "to create a media frenzy."

Giuliani said in court papers that he had a consensual relationship with Noelle Dunphy "for a few months" in 2019, during his time as former President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, but denied she ever worked for him or that he pressured her into sex.

Dunphy's lawsuit, filed last month in state court in New York, "contains a blunderbuss of contradictory allegations," Giuliani said in his written response last Friday. Her "singular objective" is to defame him, he said.

Giuliani wants a judge to throw out the lawsuit. If that doesn't happen, he wants what he described as the most "frivolous, inflammatory, and unnecessary" accusations removed from the case. He's also asking for Dunphy to be penalized by the court for "inappropriate behavior."

Dunphy's lawyer, Justin Kelton, said Tuesday that Giuliani is the one filling his court papers with "misrepresentations" in a "transparent attempt to avoid having to answer" her allegations under oath.

"The allegations at issue in his motion go directly to the heart of Ms. Dunphy's claims that she worked for Mr. Giuliani, that she was subjected to an outrageously hostile work environment, and that he repeatedly pressured her into unwanted sexual contact," Kelton said. "Ms. Dunphy will vigorously oppose Mr. Giuliani's attempt to erase his alleged conduct, and will hold Mr. Giuliani to account for his false statements."

Giuliani's political and communications adviser Ted Goodman said: "I'd encourage everyone to read the motion in full. The motion speaks for itself."

Dunphy claimed in her lawsuit that she worked off the books as Giuliani's business development director and public relations consultant from 2019 to 2021. She is seeking at least \$10 million in damages.

Dunphy claims Giuliani promised to pay her \$1 million per year for her consulting work but told her that he had to defer paying her until he settled his divorce from his third wife, Judith.

Giuliani reached a divorce settlement in December 2019, but Dunphy said all she got from Giuliani were a few cash payments totaling \$12,000 to cover living expenses and that he still owes her \$1,988,000.

Among the allegations Giuliani wants stricken from the lawsuit are Dunphy's claims that he was a hard-drinking, Viagra-popping womanizer who made satisfying his sexual demands "an absolute requirement of her employment."

Giuliani also took issue with Dunphy comparing some of his behavior to the scene in the 2020 film "Borat: Subsequent Moviefilm" where he is shown lying on a bed, tucking in his shirt with his hand down his pants with a young woman acting as a television journalist nearby.

"This is the very definition of a scandalous and prejudicial allegation," Giuliani wrote.

Dunphy claimed in the lawsuit to have made numerous audio recordings of Giuliani, including some in which she says he can be heard making sexual comments, demanding sex and making sexist, racist, and

antisemitic remarks.

Her legal team has declined a request from The Associated Press to share those recordings, saying they are part of the litigation.

Dunphy, in her lawsuit, also accused Giuliani of renegeing on a promise to represent her, for free, in a protracted legal fight involving claims of domestic violence.

In that legal fight, Dunphy had accused a romantic partner of raping her and throwing her down a flight of stairs. The man she sued filed a counter lawsuit, saying he was the one being physically assaulted and harassed. He also sued for defamation, saying he was being extorted.

Giuliani, in his response to Dunphy's lawsuit, cited her previous legal dispute as evidence that she is a "seasoned professional at accusing former romantic partners of misdeeds in civil litigation."

Dunphy agreed to accept \$10,000 to settle her claims in 2016. But the two sides were still fighting over a final resolution as recently as last year.

The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual abuse unless they grant permission, as Dunphy has done.

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

US judge blocks Florida ban on trans minor care in narrow ruling, says 'gender identity is real'

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A federal judge temporarily blocked portions of a new Florida law championed by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis that bans transgender minors from receiving puberty blockers, saying in a Tuesday ruling that gender identity is real and the state has no rational basis for denying patients treatment.

Judge Robert Hinkle issued a preliminary injunction, saying three transgender children can continue receiving treatment. The lawsuit challenges the law DeSantis signed shortly before he announced a run for president.

"Gender identity is real. The record makes this clear," Hinkle said, adding that even a witness for the state agreed.

Transgender medical care for minors is increasingly under attack — Florida is among 19 states that have enacted laws restricting or banning treatment. But it has been available in the United States for more than a decade and is endorsed by major medical associations.

Hinkle's ruling was narrowly focused on the three children whose parents brought the suit. Simone Chriss, a lawyer for Southern Legal Counsel representing the parents, said she hopes health care providers and prosecutors see the ruling as applying statewide, like when Hinkle issued an injunction in 2014 declaring the state's same-sex marriage ban unconstitutional as it applied to a single couple.

"The state no longer has any valid interest in enforcing something that's unconstitutional," Chriss said.

As she spoke, DeSantis's office issued a statement saying the opposite, and the law will be enforced for all except the three children.

"We will continue fighting against the rogue elements in the medical establishment that push ideology over evidence," press secretary Jeremy Redfern said.

"Wow! Jiminy Crickets! I have no words," Chriss said. "I am always saddened by the things our state chooses to put out."

She said her hope is that regardless of DeSantis' position, state attorneys won't prosecute doctors for providing care "that is aligned with every major medical organization — not a rogue few, but all of them."

Attention on the new law has focused on language involving minors, and Hinkle's ruling focuses on the use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones. The ruling doesn't address other language that makes it difficult to near impossible for adults to receive or continue gender-affirming care.

Some Florida parents of transgender children have sought help leaving the state because of the law, including Kim, a Pensacola mother who didn't want her last name used out of fear of her child becoming a political target. The narrow ruling doesn't help Kim or other families who aren't plaintiffs in the case, and she's concerned the legal battle can stretch on for years.

In the meantime, her family is fundraising online and job-hunting to move to states that haven't passed laws like Florida, said Kim.

"They're moral policing," said Kim. "Their claims are baseless, and that's one of the hardest things to swallow — it's based on Ron DeSantis' personal beliefs."

Hinkle, who was appointed by former President Bill Clinton, said people who mistakenly believe gender identity is a choice also "tend to disapprove all things transgender and so oppose medical care that supports a person's transgender existence."

Banning treatment for minors ignores risks patients might face, Hinkle said.

Research suggests that transgender youth and adults are prone to stress, depression and suicidal thoughts, and the evidence is mixed on whether treatment with hormones or surgery resolves those issues.

Even ahead of contemplating medical treatment, experts agree, allowing children to express their gender in a way that matches their identity is beneficial, such as letting children assigned male at birth wear clothing or hairstyles usually associated with girls, if that is their wish.

"There are risks attendant to not using these treatments, including the risk — in some instances, the near certainty — of anxiety and depression and even suicidal ideation. The challenged statute ignores the benefits that many patients realize from these treatments and the substantial risk posed by foregoing the treatments," Hinkle said.

He also noted that hormone treatments and puberty blockers are often used to treat non-transgender children for other conditions, so the law makes their use legal for some, but not for others.

The three children in the lawsuit will "suffer irreparable harm" if they cannot begin puberty blockers, Hinkle said.

"The treatment will affect the patients themselves, nobody else, and will cause the defendants no harm," Hinkle said.

This story has been corrected to remove an inaccurate reference to when DeSantis announced his run for president.

Recalled pillows linked to 10 infant deaths still being sold on Facebook Marketplace, US agency says

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal safety regulators are urging consumers to stop using baby pillows that have been linked to 10 infant deaths but are still being sold on Facebook Marketplace, despite being recalled two years ago.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission said Tuesday that Boppy Newborn Loungers are no longer legally for sale but it has found thousands of them on Facebook Marketplace since the 2021 recall began.

The agency wrote to Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook parent Meta Platforms, on Tuesday saying it had made repeated requests to have recalled items taken down from Marketplace. It cited the Boppy loungers as "a particularly egregious example" of a product that puts consumers at risk.

"Until these sales are stopped, babies will continue to be at risk of death," CPSC Commissioner Richard Trumka said in a statement. He added that Meta "has not taken effective action" in response to CPSC's average of one thousand takedown requests made each month over the last year for the Boppy loungers.

The Boppy Co. recalled more than 3 million of its infant pillows due to suffocation risk in September 2021 — with reports of eight deaths associated with Boppy's loungers between 2015 and 2020. The CPSC said Tuesday that two additional babies died shortly after the recall began.

The CPSC is urging consumers to stop using the recalled loungers — as babies can suffocate if they roll over, are placed on the lounger in a position that restricts breathing or move off the infant pillow.

Meta's online policy states that listings on Marketplace cannot promote or sell recalled products and encourages users to check current recalls before purchasing items. The company says that Marketplace posts featuring recalled products are removed when identified.

"Like other platforms where people can buy and sell goods, there are instances of people knowingly or unknowingly selling recalled goods on Marketplace," Meta said in a statement. "We take this issue seriously and when we find listings that violate our rules, we remove them."

CPSC said it has also made similar takedown requests to other online secondhand marketplaces and for other recalled products, including the recalled Fisher Price Rock 'n Play sleepers, which have also been linked to infant deaths.

The Boppy loungers under recall are Boppy Original Newborn Loungers, Boppy Preferred Newborn Loungers and Pottery Barn Kids Boppy Newborn Loungers. The products were sold online and at retailers nationwide, including Target and Walmart, between January 2004 and September 2021, according to the CPSC's original recall notice. Consumers can contact The Boppy Company to get a refund and for instructions for how to dispose of the products.

"CPSC continues to emphasize that the best place for a baby to sleep is on a firm, flat surface in a crib, bassinet, or play yard," the agency said in its Tuesday notice. "Parents and caregivers should never add blankets, pillows, padded crib bumpers, or other items to an infant's sleeping environment. Babies should always be placed to sleep on their backs."

The Associated Press reached out to The Boppy Co. for further comment Tuesday.

A look at restrictions on LGBTQ+ people in the US, and the pushback

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A Florida law banning transgender youth from getting medical treatment is temporarily on hold after a surprise decision Tuesday by a federal judge.

The ruling comes amid a bevy of legislation sweeping state houses this year restricting gender-affirming care for transgender minors.

Meanwhile LGBTQ+ communities and their allies are organizing Pride events and calling for pushback against what they say are discriminatory laws.

Here's a look at the latest developments:

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN FLORIDA?

A federal judge on Tuesday temporarily blocked portions of a new Florida law that bans transgender minors from receiving puberty blockers.

"Gender identity is real," Judge Robert Hinkle said, ruling that the state has no rational basis for denying patients treatment.

Hinkle issued a preliminary injunction saying three transgender children can continue receiving treatment.

The lawsuit brought by the three children's parents challenges the law Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis signed shortly before he announced a run for president.

The judge's decision focuses on the use of GnRH agonists, known as puberty blockers, and cross-sex hormones. The litigation focuses on language involving minors and doesn't address other wording that makes it difficult to nearly impossible for adults to receive or continue gender-affirming care.

LOUISIANA'S RESTRICTIONS

A bill banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender youths in Louisiana has passed in the Senate and is heading to the governor's desk.

The measure would prohibit hormone treatments, gender-affirming surgery and puberty-blocking drugs for minors.

The House, which has already passed it, is expected to approve some amendments before the bill goes

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before Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat who opposes it.

Edwards has not said whether he would veto the legislation. If he does, lawmakers could convene a veto session to try to override his decision.

Last session, the governor chose not to block a law banning transgender athletes from participating in women and girls sports competitions in Louisiana, although he successfully vetoed a similar measure the year before.

Louisiana legislators are also expected to give final passage to two other anti-LGTBQ+ measures — a “Don’t Say Gay” bill and one restricting pronoun usage.

AN LGTBQ+ ‘EMERGENCY’

The Human Rights Campaign has declared a “state of emergency” for LGBTQ+ people in the U.S., calling on people in government and the business community to fight for equal rights.

“We need champions right now,” HRC President Kelley Robinson said.

The campaign released a guidebook for LGBTQ+ Americans to help them navigate laws it deems discriminatory in certain states. It includes a “know your rights” information section and resources to help people relocate to states with stronger LGBTQ+ protections.

The nation’s largest organization devoted to LGBTQ+ rights said travel advisories aren’t enough to help people already living in states where lawmakers have targeted LGBTQ+ people.

FLAG FLAP IN MISSISSIPPI

Some residents are protesting after the Veterans Administration flew an LGBTQ+ pride flag at Mississippi’s Biloxi National Cemetery.

All the Republicans in the state’s congressional delegation have signed a letter demanding the VA remove the flag. The delegation’s only Democrat, Rep. Bennie Thompson, did not sign it.

The rainbow flag was added to a lineup of several U.S. flags last week to mark June as Pride Month.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough has authorized flying the pride flag at all VA facilities throughout June, as he has done in previous years.

The VA said in a statement that it’s flying the flag to show its commitment “to inclusion and as a tribute to the service and sacrifice of LGBTQ+ Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.”

WHERE TRANSGENDER BANS STAND NATIONALLY

Hundreds of bills have been proposed restricting the rights of transgender people, and LGBTQ+ advocates say they’ve seen a record number of such measures in statehouses.

In addition to Florida, at least 18 states have enacted laws restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, South Dakota and West Virginia.

Federal judges have blocked enforcement of laws in Alabama and Arkansas, and Oklahoma has agreed to not enforce its ban while opponents seek a temporary court order blocking it.

Every major doctors’ group, including the American Medical Association, has opposed the bans and supported the care for youth when administered appropriately.

Lawsuits have been filed in several states where bans have been enacted this year.

Prince Harry's drug use cited in push to release visa records by conservative US group

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The past drug use that Prince Harry detailed in his explosive memoir should spark the release of his immigration paperwork, a conservative American think tank argued in a Washington court Tuesday as they appealed to a judge for a quicker response a records request the U.S. government has so far deemed private.

The hearing played out, coincidentally, as the Duke of Sussex himself testified London in another lawsuit he filed against British newspapers. In Washington, U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols told the Heritage Foundation and the Department of Homeland Security to work on the speed of the response, and he would rule if they could not reach an agreement on their own.

Harry moved to Southern California with his wife Meghan Markle and their young family in 2020 after they left royal life and embarked on new projects, including the release of his memoir "Spare" in January.

The book's myriad revelations included an exploration of Harry's grief after the death of his mother, Princess Diana, disputes with his brother William and his past drug use. Harry said he took cocaine several times starting around age 17, in order "to feel. To be different." He also acknowledged using cannabis and psychedelic mushrooms.

The U.S. routinely asks about drug use on its visa applications, and it has been linked to travel headaches for celebrities, including chef Nigella Lawson, singer Amy Winehouse, and model Kate Moss. But acknowledgement of past drug use doesn't necessarily bar people from entering or staying in the country.

With that history in mind, the conservative Heritage Foundation sent a public-information request to the Department of Homeland Security for Prince Harry's immigration records.

They argue there is "intense public interest" in whether Harry got special treatment during the application process. The politically conservative group also linked those questions to wider immigration issues in the U.S., including at the southern border with Mexico.

"What this case is truly about is DHS," said Samuel Dewey, a lawyer for the Heritage Foundation.

The request has largely been denied since the group doesn't have Prince Harry's permission to get the private information.

"A person's visa status is confidential," said John Bardo, an attorney for the Department of Homeland Security.

The agency's policy does allow the release of information about issues of public interest, but the agency argued that media coverage of how Harry's drug use connects to his visa status in the U.S. hasn't been widespread among mainstream American publications.

The questions that have been raised, meanwhile, aren't the kind of weighty queries about possible government misdeeds that warrant the fast processing the Heritage Foundation is asking for, federal attorneys argued.

A representative for Harry did not immediately respond to an email message seeking comment.

While two of the three agencies involved have denied the request, Department of Homeland Security headquarters hasn't formally responded and is fighting the foundation's push to act quickly. Nichols expressed frustration at being asked to decide the narrow question whether to order a fast response, but said he would rule if the two sides couldn't come to an agreement on their own within a week.

Privacy is also at the center of the lawsuit Harry filed against the publisher of the Daily Mirror that was the subject of his testimony in London on Tuesday.

That suit is playing out thousands of miles away over 33 articles published between 1996 and 2011. He says they were based on phone hacking or other illegal snooping methods. Harry testified that Britain's tabloid press had a "destructive" role throughout his life, but also faced sharp questioning from a newspaper's lawyer about whether he could remember reading the articles.

Plane that crashed in Virginia lost contact with air traffic controllers during ascent, feds say

By SARAH BRUMFIELD, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

Only minutes into a doomed journey that ended on a remote Virginia mountain, the pilot of a business jet was not responding to air traffic control instructions and the situation was soon reported to a network that includes military, security and law enforcement agencies, according to federal aviation officials.

Despite being out of contact on its ascent Sunday afternoon, the jet that had just taken off from a Tennessee airport continued toward its intended destination on New York's Long Island, then turned to fly back to Virginia where it slammed into a mountain, killing the four people aboard.

Family and friends identified two of the victims as an entrepreneur known in New York real-estate circles and her 2-year-old daughter.

Outside aviation experts speculated the pilot likely lost consciousness from a lack of oxygen inside the jet when it climbed above 10,000 feet (3,048 meters), the altitude that typically requires cabin pressurization.

"The most likely scenario right now is a pressurization failure or a mis-setting of the pressurization system," said Alan Diehl, an aviation psychologist who previously worked for the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board and the U.S. Air Force. In the late 1960s, Diehl also helped design the original model of the plane, the Cessna Citation, that crashed in Virginia.

It's unclear when the pilot stopped responding to air traffic controllers. But their last attempt to reach him occurred 15 minutes after takeoff, according to the FAA.

The plane could have surpassed 10,000 feet (3,048 meters) in just a few minutes, Diehl said. However, the pilot may have had to wait for some period of time after takeoff before he was cleared for higher altitudes.

Depending on the jet's altitude as well as the pilot's age and health, he likely had minutes — or even less than a minute — to react as his brain suffered a decline in oxygen, Diehl said.

"The one other thing that they probably can't eliminate at this point is some kind of medical issue," Diehl said.

A heart attack, brain aneurysm and over-the-counter medications, such as antihistamines, can affect a pilot's ability to fly the airplane and recognize there may be a problem with the cabin's oxygen levels and pressurization.

Fighter jet pilots sent to intercept the business jet reported that its pilot appeared slumped over and unresponsive, three U.S. officials said Monday. The officials had been briefed on the matter and spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss details of the military operation.

The plane took an erratic flight path — turning around over Long Island to fly directly over the nation's capital — which prompted the military to scramble fighter jets. This caused a sonic boom heard in Washington, Maryland and Virginia.

John Rumpel, the owner of the plane, said his daughter, Adina Azarian, 2-year-old granddaughter, Aria, and the girl's nanny were the victims, along with the pilot. He said they were returning to their home on Long Island, after visiting his house in North Carolina.

Rumpel told The Associated Press Tuesday that new radios had been installed in the plane two or three weeks ago and the aircraft was equipped with emergency oxygen. Rumpel said he also believes the pilot, who he identified as Jeff Hefner, probably lost consciousness from a lack of oxygen. Rumpel said Hefner had recently had a physical and he was not aware of any concerning medical conditions.

"He was top shelf, absolutely top shelf. I wouldn't have had my daughter and my grandbaby fly with him if he wasn't," Rumpel said Tuesday.

Rumpel said he wonders if a flashing light on the plane that should have warned the pilot that he was losing oxygen somehow malfunctioned.

"To the best of my knowledge, the emergency masks never dropped," he said.

Rumpel also said it is common practice for pilots to put their destination, along with an "emergency return destination" into the auto pilot system, which he said would explain why the plane turned around and headed south again once it flew over its destination of MacArthur Airport on Long Island. He said the

emergency return destination would have been the airport in Elizabethton, Tennessee, where the flight took off from.

On Monday, it took investigators several hours to hike into the rural area where the plane crashed about 60 miles (97 kilometers) southwest of Charlottesville. They expected to be on the scene for at least three to four days.

Diehl, the aviation psychologist, said investigators often dig deeply into a pilot's background following a crash. For instance, did he or she have training in the military to recognize the signs of low-cabin pressure? Were they a risk taker? What were the results of their last flight physical?

Investigators will also review the recordings of the pilot's last communications with air traffic control. They'll check for a change in speech patterns, such as slower talking, that could indicate low-oxygen levels. But testing oxygen levels in blood and human tissue could be unlikely given the high impact of the crash, Diehl said.

At a briefing Monday, NTSB investigator Adam Gerhardt said the wreckage is "highly fragmented. It was not clear if the plane had a flight data recorder. A preliminary report will be released in 10 days.

The plane flew directly over the nation's capital. According to the Pentagon, six F-16 fighter jets were deployed to intercept the plane, including two from a base in Maryland, two from New Jersey and two from South Carolina.

The plane climbed to 34,000 feet (10,363 kilometers), where it remained for the rest of the flight until 3:23 p.m. when it began to descend and crashed about nine minutes later, according to the NTSB.

Brumfield reported from Silver Spring, Maryland. Associated Press writer Denise Lavoie contributed from Richmond, Virginia. Associated Press researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York, and White House Correspondent Zeke Miller contributed to this report.

Judge rejects attempt to block new Washington state gun restrictions

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — A federal judge on Tuesday rejected a request to block a new Washington state law banning the sale of certain semi-automatic rifles, one of three measures recently signed by Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee in an effort to reduce gun violence.

The law, which took effect immediately when Inslee signed it in April, prohibits the sale, distribution, manufacture and importation of more than 50 types of guns, including AR- and AK-style rifles. The measure does not bar the possession of such weapons by people who already have them.

It drew a quick legal challenge from two gun-rights advocacy groups — the Second Amendment Foundation, based in Bellevue, and the Firearms Policy Coalition, based in Sacramento, California — as well as individual gun owners and a dealer. They sought a court order blocking the law pending a trial on the merits of their claim that it violated their constitutional right to bear arms.

"Considering the exceptional dangerousness of these weapons, the public interest in their regulation by the State outweighs the Plaintiffs' desire to purchase more assault weapons," U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan in Tacoma. "In light of recent mass deaths caused by assailants using assault weapons, it is appropriate for governmental bodies to find ways to protect the public from dangerous weapons, within the limits of the Second Amendment."

A U.S. Supreme Court decision last June expanded gun rights, dividing judges and sowing confusion over what restrictions can remain on the books. It made more explicit that gun laws must be consistent with the "historical tradition of firearm regulation."

Bryan found that the state's ban does fit in with the nation's long history of regulating dangerous weapons, including colonial-era bans on "trap guns" that could be fired without the owner present. Other historical targets of regulation have included long-bladed Bowie knives and the Thompson submachine gun, or Tommy gun, popular with gangsters in the years after World War I.

Inslee and state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, both Democrats, pushed for the Democratic-controlled Legislature to pass the ban on many semi-automatic weapons this session after years of failed attempts, making Washington the 10th state to enact such a law.

"This common-sense gun reform will save lives by restricting access to the preferred weapon of mass shooters," Ferguson said Tuesday in a news release.

The U.S. is setting a record pace for mass killings this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

"We're disappointed with the Court's ruling but remain undeterred in our fight for and defense of the People's natural right to self-defense," Cody J. Wisniewski, an attorney with the Firearms Policy Coalition, said in an emailed statement.

The two other laws signed by Inslee imposed a 10-day waiting period for firearms purchases and cleared the way for lawsuits against gun makers or sellers in certain cases.

A federal trial is underway in Oregon on a challenge to a voter-approved measure there that requires residents to undergo safety training and a background check to obtain a permit to buy a gun.

Voters narrowly passed it last November. The legislation also bans the sale, transfer or import of gun magazines with more than 10 rounds unless they are owned by a member of law enforcement or the military or were owned before the measure's passage.

New Jersey utilities float solar panels on reservoir, powering water treatment plant

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

MILLBURN, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey's Canoe Brook Water Treatment plant produces 14 millions gallons of drinking water a day.

Each one of those gallons weighs around 8 pounds, so it's quickly apparent that a large amount of energy is needed to move water from a reservoir to the treatment plant and into the 84,000 homes and businesses that the New Jersey American Water Company serves in the area.

So the water utility partnered with NJR Clean Energy Ventures, the renewable energy subsidiary of the natural gas firm New Jersey Resources, for a solution.

NJR Clean Energy Ventures built a vast array of solar panels, linked them together, and placed them on the surface of the water at Canoe Brook Reservoir.

The companies say the 17-acre solar array, consisting of 16,510 solar panels, is the largest floating solar array in North America — about twice the size of the next-largest facility, an array of floating panels on a body of water in Sayreville, New Jersey owned by that municipality.

The Millburn facility, which began operating in January, produces 8.9 megawatts of electricity, enough to power 1,400 homes.

But the power doesn't go to residential customers. Instead, it provides 95% of the water treatment plant's substantial energy requirements.

"It takes a lot of energy to pump that water," said Mark McDonough, president of New Jersey American Water. "When we can use a cleaner, greener, more efficient energy source, we want to seize that opportunity."

Long popular in Asia, floating solar arrays are starting to catch on in the U.S.

A study published in the journal Nature Sustainability in March found that thousands of cities -- more than 6,000 in 124 countries -- could generate an amount equal to all their electricity demand using floating solar, making it a climate solution to be taken seriously.

Neither company would say how much it cost to build the New Jersey solar facility, although Robert Pohlman, vice president of NJR Clean Energy Ventures, said, "It's a project that makes a lot of sense for both organizations."

The Sayreville solar array, which is about half the size of the one in Millburn, cost \$7.2 million to build, according to RETTEW, the Lancaster, Pennsylvania-based company that built it.

Shawn LaTourette, New Jersey's environmental protection commissioner, said the project enables the companies "to chip away at the rather considerable energy use of our water systems."

Because salt water corrodes the equipment, floating solar arrays are generally placed on man-made bodies of fresh water such as reservoirs or holding basins for water treatment plants.

Putting solar panels atop plastic floats that are moored to the bottom of the reservoir helps reduce evaporation of water into the air, and the temperature of the water helps cool the solar panels, enabling them to work more efficiently, officials said.

This story has been updated to correct the weight of a gallon of water. It is around 8 pounds, not 7 pounds.

Follow Wayne Parry on Twitter at www.twitter.com/WayneParryAC

Black man shot in the mouth by Mississippi deputy to file federal civil rights lawsuit

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG Associated Press/Report for America

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Two men — one of whom was shot in the mouth by a law enforcement officer — announced on Tuesday that they will file a federal civil rights lawsuit against a Mississippi sheriff's department alleging a pattern of excessive force against Black people.

In a news release announcing the lawsuit, attorneys for Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker also publicly identified for the first time the deputy who they say put a gun inside Michael Corey Jenkins' mouth before firing it. Parker confirmed the deputy's identity in a follow-up interview with The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The upcoming lawsuit comes amid an ongoing Justice Department civil rights investigation into the encounter between Jenkins, Parker and Rankin County Department Sheriff's deputies in January.

In a news release, Attorney Malik Shabazz said that he would file 22 claims of federal civil rights violations in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi before Monday. The men will seek \$400 million in compensatory and punitive damages.

"If there ever were a case where punitive damages needed to be levied against police officers, this is the case," attorney Shabazz wrote in the release. "This incredible, nasty, violent ordeal exposes that Rankin County deputies and the Department have had a long pattern and practice of deadly excessive force and hate crimes against its African American citizens."

A spokesperson for the sheriff's department and an attorney representing the deputies did not respond to emails and phone calls seeking comment Tuesday.

The Mississippi Bureau of Investigation has confirmed that a deputy shot Jenkins, but the agency has not identified the deputy or released any other details about the case. Jenkins was hospitalized for weeks, and his medical records show he suffered a lacerated tongue and a broken jaw. Deputies have not said whether a weapon was found at the scene.

Jenkins has said he didn't know the name of the deputy who shot him. Parker, Shabazz and attorney Trent Walker claim it was Deputy Hunter Elward, based partly on a separate court document in which Elward swore that Jenkins had pointed a gun at him. In addition, Parker said he recognized Elward from online photos of the deputy.

Jenkins and Parker said on the night of Jan. 24, six white Rankin County deputies suddenly came into the home where Parker was living and proceeded to handcuff and beat them. They said the deputies shocked them repeatedly with stun guns over roughly 90 minutes and, at one point, forced them to lie on their backs as the deputies poured milk over their faces.

The men also said deputies attempted to assault them with a sex toy they found while searching the home. Jenkins said the encounter culminated with a deputy placing a gun in his mouth and firing.

Deputies said the raid was prompted by a report of drug activity at the home. Jenkins was charged with

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possessing between 2 and 10 grams of methamphetamine and aggravated assault on a police officer. Parker was charged with two misdemeanors: possession of paraphernalia and disorderly conduct. Deputies have not said whether they obtained a warrant to search the home. The lawsuit will allege deputies illegally entered.

There is no body camera footage of the incident. Automated Taser records obtained by The AP show that Tasers were turned on, turned off or used dozens of times during a roughly 65-minute period before Jenkins was shot.

An AP investigation in March revealed that several Rankin County Sheriff's Department deputies have been involved in at least four violent encounters with Black men, including the one with Jenkins and Parker, since 2019 that also left two dead. A second man besides Jenkins also alleges that deputies shoved guns into his mouth.

The allegations against the deputies have sparked a Justice Department probe into the encounter. In a community meeting in Mississippi on June 1, Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division said the investigation is still ongoing.

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>.

5 things to know from Prince Harry's day in court

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — It was a rare sight — a senior British royal testifying in a court of law.

What Prince Harry said, both during cross-examination in the witness box Tuesday and in his written witness statement, was just as unusual. By turns defensive, frank and accusatory, his testimony shone a light on life as a royal and on Harry's bitter personal feud with the press.

Here's what to know after a historic day at the High Court in London.

A LIFETIME OF INTRUSION

Harry, 38, is suing the publisher of the Daily Mirror over 33 articles published between 1996 and 2011 that he says were based on phone hacking or other illegal snooping methods.

The stories represent a fragment of decades of press coverage that Harry says has warped his life and those of his friends and loved ones.

In his witness statement, Harry claimed that during his adolescence and young adulthood, tabloids cast him in a role — "the 'thicko,' the 'cheat,' the 'underage drinker,' the 'irresponsible drug taker.'"

"I ended up feeling as though I was playing up to a lot of the headlines and stereotypes that they wanted to pin on me mainly because I thought that, if they are printing this rubbish about me and people were believing it, I may as well 'do the crime,' so to speak," Harry said. "It was a downward spiral, whereby the tabloids would constantly try and coax me, a 'damaged' young man, into doing something stupid that would make a good story and sell lots of newspapers."

Harry alleged that journalists' behavior was ruinous to his mental health, spurring "bouts of depression and paranoia."

"I now realize that my acute paranoia of being constantly under surveillance was not misplaced after all," he said.

RELATIONSHIPS DESTROYED

Many of the articles deal with Harry's relationship with Chelsy Davy, his first serious girlfriend. He says he relationship eventually fell apart under media scrutiny, and accuses newspapers of trying to wreck his relationships "using whatever unlawful means at their disposal."

"I always felt as if the tabloids wanted me to be single, as I was much more interesting to them and sold more newspapers," his statement said. "Whenever I got into a relationship, they were very keen to report the details but would then, very quickly, seek to try and break it up by putting as much strain on it and creating as much distrust as humanly possible, as I shall go into in more detail later in this statement."

"This twisted objective is still pursued to this day even though I'm now married," he said.

PAINFUL MEMORIES OF DIANA

Harry has long blamed the press for the death of his mother Princess Diana, killed in a car crash in 1997 while being pursued by paparazzi.

He told the court he was distraught to discover Diana's private conversations might have been hacked by the Mirror Group. He said he felt "sick" to learn of payments by the newspaper to private investigators for information related to Diana.

He lashed out at TV host Piers Morgan, who was editor of the Daily Mirror from 1995 to 2004.

"The thought of Piers Morgan and his band of journalists earwigging into my mother's private and sensitive messages ... three months prior to her death in Paris, makes me feel physically sick," Harry wrote. He called it "vile and entirely unjustified behavior."

FAULTY RECALL?

Harry's anguish is evident, but the lawyer for Mirror Group thought his memory was flawed. Attorney Andrew Green took Harry through the articles one by one Tuesday, asking whether he could remember reading them at the time of publication. In many cases he could not.

Green also said Harry was "in the realms of total speculation" when he said stories must have been acquired by phone hacking or other illicit means.

The lawyer said there have been "many different routes" by which information about Harry had made its way into the media and "it doesn't always require unlawful press activity."

A CALL TO ARMS

Having left royal life in 2020, citing unbearable media scrutiny and alleged racism toward his wife, Meghan, Harry is on a mission to reform the British media.

His witness statement ends with a call to arms, calling for press regulation and accusing some journalists of having "blood on their typing fingers."

"They claim to hold public figures to account, but refuse to hold themselves accountable. If they're supposedly policing society, who on earth is policing them, when even the government is scared of alienating them because position is power. It is incredibly worrying for the entire U.K.," Harry said.

He's no fan of Britain's Conservative government, either. "Our country is judged globally by the state of our press and our government — both of which I believe are at rock bottom," he said.

Gun tragedies hit close to home for Stanley Cup Final opponents, who helped their communities heal

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — The Vegas Golden Knights and Florida Panthers didn't have much of a joint history on the ice before meeting in the Stanley Cup Final — just 10 regular-season games before the series opened Saturday.

Off the ice, the teams were connected by tragedy just over five years ago. Within months of each other, Las Vegas and South Florida were devastated by mass shootings not far from their arenas — and the then-expansion Knights and the Panthers played a role in the healing that has followed.

The teams mourned the Las Vegas Strip and Parkland high school victims during pregame ceremonies, brought relatives to games, honored first responders and donated to family foundations. They erected permanent memorials inside their arenas — in Vegas, to its 60 victims, and in Florida, to the 17 who died at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High.

"The idea that these two teams, impacted by gun violence at almost the same time, are now playing each other for the Stanley Cup is such a huge deal," said Fred Guttenberg, whose 14-year-old daughter Jaime died at Stoneman Douglas.

"The Knights, even though they were a new team, they stepped into their community and became such an important part of helping that community heal," he said. "The Florida Panthers, not only are they my hometown team, they are now like family to me."

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Orin Starn, a Duke University cultural anthropology professor who studies the impact sports have on society, said teams often contribute to their communities' recovery after tragedies. He pointed to the New York Yankees' first home game after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and New Orleans Saints players assisting relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina.

There are other examples, including the Miami Heat giving jerseys and also hosting families of Stoneman Douglas victims and the Houston Astros hosting residents of Uvalde, Texas, after last year's school shooting there.

"Tragedy, like the Stoneman or (Vegas) killings, rips apart the fabric of society," Starn said. "Returning, after proper time for mourning, to the rink or the court marks a gesture of refusing to give in to forces of violence and intolerance, and beginning to mend."

VEGAS

On Oct. 1, 2017, the Golden Knights were finishing training camp, five days from playing the first NHL game in team history and nine days from their home opener. Vegas sports fans were abuzz about the city's first major league team.

But then a sniper opened fire from a Strip hotel's 32nd floor, initially killing 58 at an outdoor country music concert. Two more died years later. More than 800 people were wounded.

The team scrapped its raucous opening night celebration. The boards that surround the ice were stripped of ads, replaced by the motto "Vegas Strong." The pregame focus was on victims and first responders. It culminated with then-defenseman Deryk Engelland giving an emotional speech.

"To the families and friends of the victims, know that we will do everything we can to help you and our city heal," said Engelland, who now works for the team's foundation.

During that season's home games, the Knights recognized the Vegas Strong Hero of the Game, a first responder or citizen who risked their life to save the wounded.

At the regular season's conclusion, the Knights retired the number 58 for the victims who had died to that point. The names of all 60 victims are on a banner hanging in the arena's rafters.

Amber Manka said the Knights' lasting support has been a source of light for the tens of thousands of people affected by the Las Vegas shooting. Her mother, Kimberly Gervais, died of her wounds in 2019.

The team's work "gives people hope and reassurance that there is good in the world," she said. "I think one good deed leads to another, and it makes a difference. That's what they're doing."

That inaugural team shocked the NHL by winning its division and three playoff rounds before falling to the Washington Capitals in the Cup final. By far, it is the best performance by a modern expansion team in North America's four major sports leagues.

Forward Jonathan Marchessault, an original Knight still with the team, said it has been a "love-love situation" with the fans.

"It's been really great to be part of this. It's been an unbelievable run for the past six years," he said last week.

PANTHERS

When a former Stoneman Douglas student gunned down 14 students and three staff members on Feb. 14, 2018, the Panthers were in Vancouver to play the Canucks — as far from South Florida as possible within the NHL. Parkland, a well-off bedroom community just north of the team's practice facility, is home to many players, coaches and executives.

Shawn Thornton, a 14-year NHL player and the team's chief revenue officer, said owner Vincent Viola told him to do anything needed and not worry about the cost. Thornton turned to friends working for the Knights and two Boston teams, the Red Sox and Bruins, for advice as they had dealt with tragedies in their communities.

"The thing we learned is that everyone is going to grieve differently, that everybody needs support in different ways. Just sit back and listen to what's needed and not expect to know what's needed," Thornton said, his voice breaking throughout an interview.

At the team's next home game a week after the shooting, a 15-minute pregame memorial that brought some players to tears ended with a speech by then-goalie Roberto Luongo.

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"To the families of the victims, our hearts are broken," Luongo said. "Just know that we're there for you if you guys need anything. You'll be in our prayers, and let's try to move on together."

Eleven days after the shooting, the Stoneman Douglas hockey team — which included Guttenberg's son, Jesse — won the Florida state championship. As the Eagles prepared for the national tournament in Minnesota, the Panthers hit them with surprises.

First, the Eagles practiced at the Panthers arena, with players and Thornton, a hard-nosed brawler during his career, giving pointers — including Thornton's lighthearted lessons on fighting.

When practice ended, to the players' amazement, Thornton brought out the Stanley Cup for them to skate with — only NHL champions usually do that. The Panthers then flew the Eagles and their families on the team plane to the tournament and brought them back.

"Shawn Thornton coming out with the Stanley Cup was just surreal," said Matthew Hauptman, that team's captain. "Everything that the Panthers did for us was just very high class. It made us feel very welcomed. ... Five years later, it is still something I think about."

On the shooting's first anniversary, the Panthers unveiled a memorial in the arena's main concourse that includes the victims' portraits and the phrase "MSD Strong." On the recent fifth anniversary, the team wore special shirts while traveling honoring the victims, and their arena has hosted graduations and other student events.

"They have been supportive over and over through the years," said Tony Montalto, president of Stand with Parkland, the group that represents most victims' families. His 14-year-old daughter, Gina, died in the shooting.

Florida state Rep. Christine Hunschofsky, then-Parkland's mayor, hopes no other teams ever have to step up.

"There are too many opportunities for people to help one another after these awful, awful tragedies," she said.

Fred Guttenberg said some of his happiest memories with Jaime are from Panthers games. When she was young, when the team scored he would prop her on his shoulders as they clapped and yelled.

"There is one more super fan who is there every (Panthers) game and that's my daughter," he said. "I have no doubt she is watching these games."

Rio Yamat and Mark Anderson of The Associated Press contributed to this report in Las Vegas

AP NHL playoffs: <https://apnews.com/hub/stanley-cup> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Bluesky, championed by Jack Dorsey, was supposed to be Twitter 2.0. Can it succeed?

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Bluesky, the internet's hottest members-only spot at the moment, feels a bit like an exclusive club, populated by some Very Online folks, popular Twitter characters, and fed up ex-users of the Elon Musk-owned platform.

Musk is not on it — and this might be part of the appeal for those longing for the way things were before the Tesla billionaire bought Twitter and upended nearly everything about the social network, from rules against harassment to content moderation to its system for verifying prominent users' identities. It also helps that Bluesky grew out of Twitter — a pet project of former CEO Jack Dorsey, who still sits on its board of directors.

"It was designed to replace Twitter," said Sol Messing, who worked at Twitter as a data scientist until January and is now associate professor at New York University's Center for Social Media and Politics. "And you can see it in the way that the the system is designed. It works like Twitter."

But can Bluesky replace Twitter? Prominent Twitter users such as the model Chrissy Teigen, U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Dril, a humorous account that grew out of "weird Twitter" and has been

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poking fun at Musk since the billionaire took over the platform, are active users. Journalists, academics and politicians — the users who helped make Twitter into the culture's zeitgeist — are also flocking to the app (if they can score invite codes).

"Really wondering about where the line is to leave the other place," wrote — or "skeeted" Ocasio-Cortez recently, expressing concern about how Musk's Twitter will handle next year's presidential elections. "There's a line where the harm of unchecked disinfo exceeds the benefits of direct, authentic communication. It's really sad."

Bluesky, though, has bigger ambitions than to simply supplant Twitter. Beyond the social network itself, it is building the technical foundation — what it calls "a protocol for public conversation" — that could make social networks work more like email, blogs or phone numbers.

In computer science, protocols are technical rules for processing and transmitting data, shared standards to which everyone agrees to adhere. Without the TCP/IP protocol, for instance, we wouldn't have the internet.

When you call someone on the phone, it doesn't matter if they use Verizon or AT&T or Cricket Wireless — as long as their phone has service, they can pick up and talk to you. But on Facebook, or TikTok, or Twitter, you can't cross over to another social network to leave a comment on someone's account. Twitter users must stay on Twitter and TikTok users must stay on TikTok if they want to interact with accounts on those services.

There's no crossing over — no interoperability. Big Tech companies have largely built moats around their online properties, which helps serve their advertising-focused business models. Your Twitter friends are your Twitter friends, and if you move on to a new social network, you can't easily bring them with you — if you can bring them at all. Bluesky is trying to reimagine all this. Moonshot or delusion, what is clear is that invites to the Bluesky social networking app are hot commodity, some even offered on eBay for \$100 or more.

But as everyone — including Musk, who paid \$44 billion for Twitter — knows, a social network's value is not simply in the technology behind it. It is in the people — the network of people who use and contribute to a platform. And getting people, especially people who aren't teenagers, to move to a new social network, is quite a challenge. Just ask Mastodon, Truth Social or any other alternative network that's sprung up more recently.

"We are all active on Twitter because we are all active on Twitter. And so it's very, very difficult to migrate to a different social media platform once you have thousands of followers on Twitter," said Messing, who also worked on data science at Facebook and the Pew Research Center.

While it seems unlikely that Bluesky could replace Twitter as a global information conduit any time soon, it is more intuitive and easy to use than 7-year-old Mastodon, which not long ago was touted as a possible Twitter replacement but which many find befuddlingly complicated and lacking in important features. While it looks and feels similar to Twitter, Bluesky lacks many of the features Twitter has built out over the years. There is no way to send direct messages, for instance, and there is no verification system.

For now, Bluesky is like the back room at a house party where the cool kids and misfits found refuge from the increasingly rowdy rager out front — at least until it, too, is enveloped by chaos. Fewer than 100,000 people are on it right now. That's by design.

"Once you open it up and allow different forms of content moderation to dominate, it's going to be a very different platform," Messing said.

Bluesky's approach to content moderation is similar to its approach to algorithms to decide what users see. That is, giving users a choice in what they see. The app launched with a chronological feed, meaning you see posts in the order they are posted in. Other social platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter use secretive algorithms to show you what you're more likely to be interested in. Bluesky also has "custom feeds," which let users pick the algorithm that controls what they see.

"Imagine you want your timeline to only be posts from your mutuals, or only posts that have cat photos, or only posts related to sports — you can simply pick your feed of choice from an open marketplace," CEO Jay Graber wrote in a recent blog post. Bluesky did not respond to a request for comment.

It's an open question whether Bluesky will soar or remain a pie in the sky. But some of Twitter's earliest supporters are cautiously optimistic. After all, Twitter started out similarly small, and along the way both its creators and users learned a lot.

"There's a whole community of people doing these experiments at these projects that are all learning from each other and sharing things back and forth and with the overall hope and idea that we cannot make the same mistakes we made last time," said Evan "Rabble" Henshaw-Plath, who worked on Twitter predecessor Odeo with Dorsey and is now CEO of Planetary.Social, another decentralized social network.

"In some ways, we democratized the media. We changed the world. We gave everyone a voice. But we didn't figure out what to do with that," he said. "We didn't give ourselves great tools to handle it."

Could Bluesky be the Twitter do-over it was set up to be?

"I would like to see these guys figure out a smart way to maintain data portability, without losing the ability to essentially moderate content," Henshaw-Plath said. "And yeah, that might be impossible, but that's what I would ultimately like to see."

Judge rules to release names of Rep. Santos bond cosigners, will stay secret as appeal considered

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal magistrate ruled Tuesday to make public the names of the cosigners on indicted Rep. George Santos' \$500,000 release bond, but said she'll keep them secret for now to give his lawyer time to appeal the decision.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Anne Shields' ruling came a day after Santos' lawyer said the New York Republican would risk going to jail to protect the identities of his cosigners whose backing enabled his pretrial release.

The decision was a victory for news outlets including The Associated Press and The New York Times that petitioned Shields last week to unseal the names, citing a need for "the greatest transparency possible."

Santos' lawyer, Joseph Murray, urged Shields to keep the names secret. He suggested that the congressman's cosigners could "suffer great distress," including possible job losses and physical harm, if they're identified publicly.

Murray said he, Santos and Santos' staff have been receiving threatening and harassing calls and messages, including death threats. He said he worries Santos' critics "are just waiting to pounce" on the people backing his release.

"My client would rather surrender to pretrial detainment than subject these suretors to what will inevitably come," Murray wrote.

Shields gave Murray until 12 p.m. Friday to appeal. A message seeking comment was left with Murray.

Santos, 34, represents parts of Queens and Long Island. He pleaded not guilty May 10 to charges he duped donors, stole from his campaign, lied to Congress about being a millionaire and cheated to collect unemployment benefits he didn't deserve.

At Murray's request, Shields agreed at Santos' arraignment to keep the cosigners' names out of the public court record. In her ruling Tuesday, Shields reversed that decision.

Santos has defied calls to resign and has said he won't drop his bid for a second term. He is due back in court on June 30.

Santos' bond is unsecured. That means his cosigners didn't have to put up any money up front, but could be forced to pay the full amount if he doesn't comply with his release conditions or fails to show up for court.

A boat carrying 180 Rohingya refugees vanished. A frantic phone call helped untangle the mystery.

By KRISTEN GELINEAU Associated Press

TEKNAF, Bangladesh (AP) — The wind had whipped the waves to nearly three times the woman's height when her panicked voice crackled over the phone.

"Our boat has sunk!" Setera Begum shouted, as a storm threatened to spill her and around 180 others into the inky black sea south of Bangladesh. "Only half of it is still afloat!"

On the other end of the line, hundreds of miles away in Malaysia, was her husband, Muhammed Rashid, who picked up the phone at 10:59 p.m. his time on Dec. 7, 2022. He had not seen his family in 11 years. And he had only learned days earlier that Setera and two of their daughters had fled surging violence in Bangladesh's camps for ethnic Rohingya refugees.

Now, Rashid feared, his family's frantic bid to escape would cost them the very thing they were trying to save — their lives. For despite Setera's pleas, no help would come, not for her or for the babies, the 3-year-old afraid of the sea or the pregnant women also on board.

Rashid listened to his wife's terrified voice with growing dread.

"Oh Allah, it's sunk by the waves!" Setera cried. "It's sunk by the storm!"

The call disconnected.

Rashid tried to call back. On board the boat, the satellite phone rang. But no one answered.

Rashid tried again. He tried more than 100 times.

The phone rang out.

The Rohingya are a people nobody wants.

This stateless Muslim minority has suffered decades of persecution in their homeland of Myanmar, where they have long been viewed as interlopers by the Buddhist majority. Around one million have fled across the border to Bangladesh, only to find themselves trapped for years in a squalid camp and held hostage by migration policies that have given them almost no way out.

And so, in a bid to get somewhere — anywhere — safe, they are taking to the sea.

It is a life-or-death gamble. Last year, more than 3,500 Rohingya attempted to cross the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea — a 360 percent increase over the previous year, according to United Nations figures that are almost certainly an undercount. At least 348 people died or went missing, the highest death toll since 2014.

It's impossible to know whether any of those lives could have been saved, because almost no one was looking to save them in the first place. Instead, the Rohingya are often abandoned and left to die on the water, just as on land. Even when officials knew the boats' locations in recent months, the United Nations' refugee agency says its repeated pleas to maritime authorities to rescue some of them have gone ignored.

Governments ignore the Rohingya because they can. While multiple international laws mandate the rescue of vessels in distress, enforcement is difficult.

In the past, the region's coastal nations hunted for boats in trouble — only to push them into other countries' search and rescue zones, says Chris Lewa, director of the Arakan Project, which monitors the Rohingya crisis. But now, they rarely even bother to look.

The lucky ones are eventually towed to shore in Indonesia by local fishermen. Yet even rescue can be perilous — a Vietnamese oil company saved one boat, then promptly handed the Rohingya over to the same deadly regime in Myanmar from which they'd fled. And the Myanmar authorities themselves patrol for Rohingya migrants.

There is no reason why regional governments could not or cannot coordinate and rescue these boats, says John Quinley, director of human rights group Fortify Rights.

"It was a total lack of political will and extremely heartless," he says. "The accountability and the onus really lies on everyone."

Several countries in the region did not respond to requests for comment.

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The reasons the Rohingya escape are written on face after gaunt face, in haunted eyes and across slumped shoulders. Any hope that once existed in the Bangladesh camps has long since died, replaced by a stoic sadness and a palpable fear. These are a people who have come to expect nothing, and often get that or worse.

Most of the Rohingya in these camps fled what the United States has declared a genocide in Myanmar in 2017. In recent years, however, brutal killings by gangs and warring militant groups — many in broad daylight — have become commonplace.

Fires are frequent, some of them acts of arson. One afternoon in March, a blaze that investigators say was set by criminals tore through thousands of shelters. The billowing smoke was so thick and black it blocked the view of the sun. Wide-eyed children huddled together, crying, as the inferno left 15,000 homeless.

Beyond fear is hunger. The Rohingya are banned from working and rely on food rations, which have been slashed due to a drop in global donations. Meanwhile, a military coup in 2021 in Myanmar has made any safe return home at best a distant dream.

And so, out of options, they do again what they have done before: They flee.

Jutting up from the dust and the dirt of Nayapara camp in Bangladesh are bamboo, tarp and tin huts jammed along labyrinthine pathways.

This tight-knit warren is Block H, home to Setera and 64 other passengers, including the boat's captain, Jamal Hussein.

Virtually everyone in Block H was connected to the boat somehow. Many residents have spent most, or all, of their lives here, after fleeing Myanmar during earlier waves of violence. Their shelters now bake below sun-scorched mountains that are home to violent gangs.

Jamal himself was afraid for his life, says his sister, Bulbul. Inside her shadowy shelter, she weeps at the memories of her brother. "He was my heart," she says.

Back in Myanmar, Jamal was a rice farmer and a youth leader of their village. After his dad died, he became a father figure to his younger siblings, including Bulbul, who was 15 years his junior.

Their life in the camps was difficult, she says, but they managed. More recently, though, Jamal had received death threats, Bulbul says. He started making plans to get out.

He bought a boat and took a video of it to share with prospective passengers. In the video, obtained by the Associated Press, the wooden vessel sits docked in murky brown water. It appears old and shabby, with a cramped compartment below deck, and clearly too small to safely carry 180 people 1,800 kilometers (1,100 miles) to Indonesia, Jamal's target.

From there, most passengers planned to make their way to their ultimate destination, Malaysia.

Though Bulbul denies it, residents of Block H say Jamal was a seasoned captain who had successfully guided several other boats of Rohingya refugees across the sea. It was his experience, they say, along with his willingness to put 16 of his own relatives on the boat — including his wife, six children, five grandchildren and two pregnant daughters-in-law— that prompted so many to trust him. One mother said Jamal promised her he would watch over her teenage son and daughter along with his children.

In a shelter a short walk from Jamal's, Setera's father holds up a photo of his daughter, with her full lips and wide-set eyes so much like her mother's.

"She was the most beautiful person in our family," says Abdu Shukkur.

Shukkur had never heard anyone say a bad word about Setera, a warm and doting mother to her own daughters. She rarely complained, despite raising her girls on her own in the misery of the camps since 2012. That's the year her husband, Rashid, fled to Malaysia to support his family with the wages he sent from his restaurant job.

But the money had also made the family targets of kidnappers, Shukkur says, and Setera had begun to fear for their lives. The local gangs know which of the block's residents have relatives abroad who could afford a ransom.

Two years ago, they snatched Setera's 4-year-old nephew and took him to the mountains, Shukkur says.

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They held him there for 6 days, drugging him to keep him quiet. The family eventually paid a ransom of 300,000 taka (\$2,800) to get him back — a fortune in the camps.

In late November, Setera went to her father and asked his permission to go on Jamal's boat, along with her two younger daughters, aged 18 and 15. Her eldest daughter was married and would stay behind.

Shukkur forbade her to go.

"If you want to go to Malaysia by boat, just divorce your husband," he told her. "It's too dangerous."

His wife, Gul Faraz, intervened. "She's been living without her husband here for 11 years now," Faraz said. "Let her go."

Shukkur relented.

Grief steals his breath as he recounts his goodbye with his granddaughters, and he pauses to calm himself. They had a habit of stealing Shukkur's unripe guavas, plums and mangoes whenever they visited, prompting scoldings from their grandfather.

"Grandpa, you will not need to scold us anymore," one of the girls told Shukkur. "Everything will be all right."

Setera, angry that her father had tried to stop her, did not come to say goodbye.

In a nearby shelter, another family was in agony.

Jamal's cousin, Muhammed Ayub, was fighting to stop his daughter, Samira, and her children, aged 6 and nine months old, from getting on the boat. But his son-in-law, Kabir Ahmed, was resolute. Villagers outside the camps had beaten him with an iron rod, and he was afraid.

"It is not safe here. People are getting killed every day," Ahmed told his father-in-law. "If you stop me from leaving, I will not visit you anymore."

And so, powerless, Ayub hugged his daughter and son-in-law goodbye. Then, riddled with anxiety, he wrapped his grandsons in an embrace. His entire body ached as he watched them leave.

"They were my lovely ones," he says.

At the southernmost tip of mainland Bangladesh lies a wild, wind-swept beach, fringed to the east by forest and mountains and to the west by the Bay of Bengal. This stretch of grey sand is barren but for a few wooden fishing boats and an army of bright red crabs that hide in their holes when any human comes near.

It was from here that a small fishing boat began ferrying passengers to Jamal's waiting vessel. The AP has reconstructed their journey based on interviews with 28 relatives of those on board, audio recordings of calls from the boat, interviews with three eyewitnesses, and photos and videos.

Late on the night of Dec. 1 and through around 4 a.m. the following day, many of those on Jamal's boat called their anxious families.

It was only then that Setera told her husband she and two daughters were headed his way.

Rashid had told them countless times never to get on a boat. But this time, Setera would not be stopped. She told him she'd sold her jewelry to help pay for their passage, a total of 360,000 taka (\$3,400).

Rashid was stunned. He apologized to Setera for any mistakes he'd made in their 20 years of marriage. And then, he says, he heard Jamal tell Setera to get off the phone. She hung up.

Rashid began to cry with excitement and fear. He couldn't believe he might soon see his girls.

Setera made at least one more call, to her father, Shukkur.

"The boat is waiting for fuel," Setera said. "We're leaving soon, and we'll be out of service."

Shukkur was too angry to speak. He couldn't believe she hadn't even come to say goodbye. So he passed her mobile number onto his nephew in Malaysia, and told him to ring Setera and order her to come home.

Meanwhile, Jamal's daughter-in-law, Bibi Ayesha, called her parents to say she and her family had also made it on board. Alongside Bibi was her 17-year-old brother, her husband, and her 3-year-old son, Abu.

The little boy was frightened of the water. Bibi and her husband passed him back and forth, trying to comfort him, as they spoke with her parents. "Pray for us," they said.

Jamal got on the phone with the parents to reassure them. "The boat is big," Jamal said, according to

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the couple. "We have enough food for 15 days."

Asma Bibi, who was married to another of Jamal's sons, also made a call to her mother, Hasina Khatun. Eighteen-year-old Asma was 9 months pregnant, and excited to meet her child after a stillbirth with her first baby one year earlier.

Asma hadn't wanted to go on the boat, says Hasina. But Asma's husband did.

"How can I stay here without my husband? I'm pregnant," Asma had told her nervous mother days earlier. "How can my child survive without a father?"

And so, Hasina gave her daughter two sets of baby clothes — one pink, and one white, since they didn't know the baby's gender. She also gave her daughter medicine, towels and a green blanket to wrap the newborn in after birth.

Asma packed them along with snacks from her father's shop, plus three sets of clothes to fit her pregnant and postpartum body. Then Asma reluctantly followed her husband onto Jamal's boat, along with her 13-year-old brother.

At 4:04 a.m., back in Block H, Jannat Ara's phone rang. It was her aunt, Kurshida Begum, who said she'd boarded with her husband and two sons, aged 3 and 4.

In the recorded call, shared with the AP, Kurshida recites a prayer, then asks her niece to do the same.

"The journey has begun," Kurshida told her niece.

News of the call quickly reached Kurshida's mother-in-law, Momina Begum, who became hysterical. She had no idea Kurshida and the boys were on the boat.

"Where are you going with these children?" Momina screamed. "Why are you crossing the dangerous sea with these children?"

But it was too late. Jamal's boat was headed into the Bay of Bengal.

What happened next is best told through the eyes of the refugees on yet another boat that set out for Indonesia one day later.

On board were 104 people, including a man named Kafayet Ullah. According to Kafayet, he was merely a passenger. According to others, he was the captain.

Not long into the journey, Kafayet spotted a boat in the distance. As they moved closer, they realized the boat was Jamal's. And it was in trouble.

Jamal called out that his engine was having problems. He borrowed some electrical wire from Kafayet's boat and went to work repairing the fault.

Kafayet was worried. His own niece and nephew were aboard Jamal's vessel, which looked old and overloaded, the passengers packed in tight like animals.

But unlike Kafayet, Jamal had experience and a satellite phone. So when Jamal finished fixing the engine, he set off again, and Kafayet followed.

Four days later, the sky cracked open.

A powerful storm descended upon them. The boats thrashed in the merciless waves. Kafayet's terrified passengers sobbed as the rain pounded down and the tempest washed their supplies overboard.

The water in Kafayet's boat began to rise, and a man on board spotted sharks. The passengers prepared themselves to die.

Through the darkness, they could see a light shining on Jamal's boat. It was still above water.

But not for long.

The recording of Setera's call to Rashid lasts 44 seconds.

"Oh Allah, our boat has sunk!" Setera shouts into the satellite phone. "Only half of it is still afloat! Please pray for us and tell my parents!"

"Where are you?" Rashid asks.

"We are about to reach Indonesia."

"Indonesia?" Rashid repeats.

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"Please tell me the name of the place," Setera says to someone else on board, before replying to her husband: "Yes, it is India. Please try to send..."

"Are you in India?" Rashid asks, bewildered.

"Our boat has sunk! Our boat has sunk!"

"Who?" Rashid replies in a panic.

"Oh Allah, it's sunk by the waves, it's sunk by the storm!"

"Oh, is it sunk by the storm?" Rashid repeats. "Oh Allah..."

The call cut out.

Rashid began to pray.

Not even the shrieking wind could drown out the screams of Jamal's passengers.

Kafayet could just make out the shape of Jamal's boat as it made a sharp turn in the waves, and then flipped over. Kafayet threw empty water drums overboard in case his niece or nephew or any of the others could grab onto them.

He says he couldn't see anyone in the water. But he could hear them screaming.

Then the screams stopped. The light on Jamal's boat blinked out.

"I saw with my own eyes," Kafayet says. "The boat sank."

Within hours, the recording of Setera's call spread through Block H. In shelter after shelter came the wails of families cracking apart.

Jamal's cousin, Muhammed Ayub, was lying on his mat when he received the recording. As he listened, he began to howl in agony.

All he has left now of the grandsons he called his "lovely ones" are their clothing and his memories. He stares at a pair of little brown shoes with Velcro straps that 6-year-old Tasin once wore, and weeps. When he holds them, he says, he feels he is holding his grandson.

Crouched on the floor next to him, his wife, Minara Begum, inhales the scent from their daughter Samira's yellow dress. Then she presses a pair of 9-month-old Samir's tiny blue shorts to her face, the fabric growing damp with her tears.

"Oh, my grandson, why did you leave?" she moans. "Where have you gone?"

Families already pushed to breaking point are now broken. One man who lost four relatives tried to kill himself.

Momina Begum, whose young grandsons were on board, feels she is burning in a fire or sinking under water. She sits next to a plastic basket of her 4-year-old grandson's toys and searches for the will to live.

"It would be better to kill us by poison instead of taking away my family," she says.

Hasina Khatun, whose pregnant daughter, Asma, and 13-year-old son were on the boat, now finds herself begging to hold other people's babies. She wasn't able to hold her daughter's stillborn baby, either, she says through tears.

Hasina, like some others, still holds out hope her loved ones are alive. Without their bodies, they say, their deaths are difficult to accept.

One man, Muhammed Rashid, believes he sees his teenage son, Saiful, in an online photo of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia. He had it laminated.

Muhammed cradles Saiful's backpack in his lap. He pulls down a sack of his boy's belongings and dumps it on the bed, a strangled sob erupting from his throat. Then he tenderly kisses his son's English book, on which Saiful had scrawled: "I love you."

"My son is everything," Muhammed murmurs. "We believe he is alive."

But the only known survivors from that night were Kafayet and his passengers.

After Jamal's boat sank, they drifted for another 10 days, their engine damaged, their food and water gone. Kafayet's brother could not stop crying, thinking about what must have happened to their niece and nephew.

Delirious with thirst and hunger, they suddenly spotted a speed boat in the distance and frantically waved their clothes in the air. The Sri Lankan navy towed Kafayet's boat to shore.

"Allah gave me a new life," Kafayet says from a Colombo shelter.

His brother, Muhammed, knows how close they came to death. He hopes no one else will attempt to do what they did.

Yet back in the camps, such plans are already underway. In early March, Jamal's sister, Bulbul, listened in horror as her 20-year-old son told her he was preparing to leave by boat.

Her heart stopped. "I will never allow you to go on this dangerous journey," she told him. "My brother died on a boat."

So he agreed to stay — for now. If he flees, she says, she will die of worry.

Rashid's eyes are ringed with black, a result, he says, of crying for months for Setera and their daughters.

He accepts now that they drowned in the dark, screaming for help from a world gone deaf.

"I spent a long time here for my family. But now I've lost them," he says.

"I feel I am dead."

Papa Jake survived D-Day on Omaha Beach, now he's a TikTok star

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France (AP) — World War II veteran Jake Larson, a 100-year-old American best known on social media under the name "Papa Jake," enjoyed giving hugs to the many fans he met during his trip to Normandy for D-Day commemorations.

Larson, who has more than 600,000 followers on TikTok, attended a ceremony on Tuesday at the American Cemetery marking the 79th anniversary of the assault that led to the liberation of France and Western Europe from Nazi control.

"I got in on the planning of D-Day ... I'm just a country boy. Now I'm a star on TikTok," he told The Associated Press with enthusiasm. "You can see me all over: 'Papa Jake.' I'm a legend! I didn't plan this, it came about."

Larson landed on Omaha Beach, where he ran under machine-gun fire and made it to the cliffs without being wounded.

"I'm 100 without an ache or a pain. You can't fake that," he said.

On Monday, Larson went to the Pegasus Memorial, a site commemorating a key D-Day operation, when troops had to take control of a strategic bridge.

That's where he met Bill Gladden, a 99-year-old British veteran : "I want to give you a hug, thank you. I got tears in my eyes. We were meant to meet," Larson told Gladden, their hands clasped.

He also went Sunday into a parade alongside other U.S. veterans, using wheelchairs, at Sainte-Mere-Eglise, where thousands of paratroopers jumped not long after midnight on June 6, 1944.

At every stop on his Normandy trip, "Papa Jake" was greeted by people asking for a selfie — in return, he offered up a big hug, to their greatest joy.

Several French followers posted comments on his TikTok account to tell their emotion at seeing him.

Jake Larson was born in Owatonna, Minnesota. He enlisted in the National Guard in 1938, lying about his age since he was only 15 years old at the time.

In January 1942, he was sent overseas and was stationed in Northern Ireland. He became operations sergeant and assembled the planning books for the invasion of Normandy. After D-Day, he continued this duty through the Battle of the Bulge.

Larson was in Normandy with a group of more than 40 U.S. veterans who traveled with the Best Defense Foundation, a nonprofit organization that helps them visit former battlefields.

Oscar winner Cuba Gooding Jr. settles civil sex abuse case, averting trial

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

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NEW YORK (AP) — Just as a trial was to begin, it was revealed Tuesday that Cuba Gooding Jr. has settled accusations that he raped a woman in a New York City hotel a decade ago, according to court records. The actor had insisted through lawyers that his encounter with the woman was consensual after the two met at a nearby restaurant.

The trial was to start with jury selection in New York federal court as the Oscar-winning "Jerry Maguire" star faced allegations that he met the woman in Manhattan, persuaded her to join him at a hotel, and convinced her to stop at his room so he could change clothing.

Minutes after jurors were to begin assembling in a courtroom, a calendar entry in the official court record said: "TRIAL OFF." It added: "Reason for cancellation (on consent): the parties have resolved the matter."

The woman had proceeded anonymously until last week, when Judge Paul A. Crotty ruled that she would have to reveal her name at trial. She said in her lawsuit that Gooding raped her in his room. His lawyers, though, insisted that it was consensual sex and that she bragged afterward to others that she had sex with a celebrity.

The lawsuit sought \$6 million in damages. Attorney Gloria Allred, one of several representing the woman, declined comment. Other lawyers, including those representing Gooding, did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The lawsuit was filed against a man who authorities say has been accused of committing sexual misconduct against more than 30 other women, including groping, unwanted kissing and other inappropriate behavior.

Late last week, the judge seemed to strengthen the woman's hand at trial and in settlement negotiations by ruling that he would let three women testify that they also were subjected to sudden sexual assaults or attempted sexual assaults after meeting Gooding in social settings such as festivals, bars, nightclubs and restaurants.

One of the women who had planned to testify at the trial was Kelsey Harbert, who told police Gooding fondled her without her consent at Magic Hour Rooftop Bar & Lounge near Times Square in 2019.

Harbert said last year after Gooding pleaded guilty in New York state court to a charge that spared him from jail or a criminal history that never getting her day in court was "more disappointing than words can say."

The Associated Press does not typically identify people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they grant permission, as Harbert has done.

Gooding, a star in films including "Boyz n the Hood" and "Radio," was permitted to plead guilty in April 2022 to a misdemeanor, admitting that he forcibly kissed a worker at a New York nightclub in 2018.

By staying out of trouble and completing six months of alcohol and behavioral counseling, Gooding was permitted to withdraw his guilty plea and plead guilty to a non-criminal harassment violation, eliminating his criminal record and preventing further penalties.

Normandy marks D-Day's 79th anniversary, honors World War II veterans

By SYLVIE CORBET and TARA COPP Associated Press

ON OMAHA BEACH, France (AP) — An overwhelming sound of gunfire and men's screams. That's how World War II veteran Marie Scott described D-Day, as Tuesday's ceremonies got underway in honor of those who fought for freedom in the largest naval, air and land operation in history.

This year's tribute to the young soldiers who died in Normandy also reminds veterans, officials and visitors what Ukraine faces today.

On Tuesday, the whistling sound of the wind accompanied many reenactors who came to Omaha Beach at dawn to mark the 79th anniversary of the assault that led to the liberation of France and Western Europe from Nazi control. Some brought bunches of flowers; others waved American flags.

Scott lived it all through her ears. She was just 17 when she was posted as communication operator in

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Portsmouth, England. Her job was to pass on messages between men on the ground and Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and senior officers who were supervising the operation.

"I was in the war. I could hear gunfire, machine guns, bombing aircraft, men screaming, shouting, men giving orders," she recalled.

"After a few moments of horror, I realized what was happening ... and I thought, well, you know, there's no time for horror. You've got a job to do. So get on with it. Which is what I did."

Now about to turn 97, Scott said D-Day was a "pivotal point" in her life.

"As a noncombatant, I was still in the war and I realized the enormity of war. People were dying in that moment."

Scott said she was "disgusted" that another war was now raging on the European continent following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"For me, war should only be undertaken if it's absolutely (necessary), if there's no other way of solving the problem. It's an atrocity. That's how I feel," she said.

British veteran Mervyn Kersh, who landed on D-Day on Gold Beach, said Western allies should send maximum military aid to Ukraine: "The only way to stay free is to be strong."

Kersh, 98, added with a sense of humor: "I'm still in the reserve, I'm waiting to go to Ukraine now. Next job."

On Tuesday, a ceremony took place at the American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, overlooking Omaha Beach, which is home to the graves of 9,386 U.S. soldiers, most of whom lost their lives in the D-Day landings and ensuing operations. On the Walls of the Missing are inscribed 1,557 names. Some of those named have since been recovered and identified.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, speaking in front of more than 40 World War II veterans and a crowd of visitors, said "it is our duty to defend ... the principles for which the Allies fought ... We seek a world where civilians are safe from ravages of a war, (and) sovereignty and territorial integrity are respected."

He paid tribute to "brave young men and women from Ukraine who are learning how to fight for their lives and for their country."

"Today, I am more determined than ever to stand by them for as long as it takes," he said.

Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Gen. Mark Milley also took part in the American Cemetery commemoration.

The Normandy celebrations were a chance for Milley to linger with troops who consider him one of their own, as he winds down his own four-decade military career. The chairman held commands in both the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division, and the Normandy fields, towns and causeways are these divisions' hallowed ground.

"For me, being among soldiers is home," he said. Milley begins his 44th year of military service on June 10. He is scheduled to retire at the end of September as his term as chairman ends.

Hundreds of current soldiers from both units were there, some on leave with beers in hand, some jumping out of aircraft as their predecessors did 79 years before.

This was Milley's last Normandy visit as their top commander — and as he walked through Sainte-Mere-Eglise, known as the first town to be liberated from Nazi occupation, attended commemorative football games or spoke at ceremonies, it felt like the general stopped to talk to and give a commemorative coin to every last one of them.

An international ceremony was later scheduled at the nearby British Normandy Memorial in the presence of officials from Germany and the nine principal Allied nations: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. French Minister of Armed Forces Sébastien Lecornu and U.K. Defense Secretary Ben Wallace were expected to attend.

In a separate event, French President Emmanuel Macron attended a ceremony on Tuesday in the presence of 100-year-old Leon Gauthier, the last surviving member of the Kieffer commando — an elite French unit which was among the first waves to land in Normandy.

Many visitors came to the American Cemetery before Tuesday's ceremonies to pay tribute to those who sacrificed their lives.

Jean-Philippe Bertrand, a visitor from the southern French city of Marseille, walked through the countless

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lines of white crosses Monday.

"It's unimaginable to make such a sacrifice for my freedom, for my son's freedom," he said.

"You hear about it on the news and you see the pictures. But once you're here and you see the reality and the sacrifice that has been made for our beautiful country — I wanted to make the trip once in my life to thank all these people to whom we owe so much," he added.

German professor Andreas Fuchs, who is teaching French in Berlin, brought students ages 10 to 12 to Normandy via an exchange program.

"It's very important for children to have a moment in their lives to understand the liberation of Europe. And to know what peace has been for 80 years," he said.

Jeffrey Schaeffer, Nicolas Garriga and Thomas Padilla contributed to the story.

See Apple's pivotal product announcements through history

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

Apple has a long history of designing products that aren't the first to be introduced in a particular category but still redefine the market. With the company unveiling a headset equipped with virtual and augmented reality technology already available in other devices, here is a look back at some of Apple's other breakthrough products:

THE MACINTOSH COMPUTER, UNVEILED JANUARY 1984

Heralded by a now-most famous TV commercial, the Macintosh computer lived up to the revolutionary promise made by Apple co-founder Steve Jobs during its 1984 unveiling. Among other things, the Mac ushered in the era of the graphical user interface (known as "GUI" in tech parlance) and the navigational mouse. In many ways, it was the first realization of Jobs' vision to turn computers into "a bicycle of the mind."

THE IPOD, UNVEILED OCTOBER 2001

Although it wasn't the first of its kind, the iPod changed the way people thought about digital music players just like Jimi Hendrix changed the way thought about the guitar. The iPod was compact, stylish, initially capable of storing up to 1,000 songs (the capacity would extend far beyond that of the first model in 2001). It then spawned the iTunes story that provided a legal way to buy and download music at a time of rampant piracy. The device also signaled Apple might evolve into something more than a computer maker.

THE IPHONE, UNVEILED JANUARY 2007

It's difficult to overstate how much the iPhone has changed the world. In technical terms, it introduced the convenience of touchscreens at the time that a physical keyboard was still all the rage on the top-selling smartphone — the BlackBerry — when Jobs first took out what was all-in-one computer, camera and music player out of his pocket in 2007. A year later, Apple would open a store that would make it common to think there must be an app for just about anything, render the BlackBerry obsolete and make smartphones indispensable.

THE IPAD, UNVEILED JANUARY 2010

The iPad created a middle ground between laptops and smartphone. The tablet provided people with a quicker, more convenient way to browse the web, check email, and read books than a laptop on a larger screen than smartphones — an advantage that became even more important as video streaming craze took off. The iPad's success also pressured Microsoft to start building in more touchscreen options and adding other tablet-like features for its Windows operating system that powers most laptop and desktop computers.

THE APPLE WATCH, UNVEILED SEPTEMBER 2014

The Apple Watch created a device that made it possible to wear something akin to a smartphone on your wrist because it included cellular capability. It also offered some of the same apps people use on their smartphones. Apple initially marketed its smartwatch almost like a fashion accessory before pivoting once it realized that its fitness and health tracking features were the tools that people seemed to find

most valuable.

AIRPODS, UNVEILED SEPTEMBER 2016

The AirPods helped popularize wireless headphones with an Apple chip that provided more reliable and stable connections with devices while making it easy to shift from one gadget to another. The product also served another key purpose for Apple: AirPods quickly muted the initial outrage of the company's decision to remove the headphone jack from iPhones in 2016 while creating another lucrative sales channel.

June is rhubarb picking time in the garden, so pucker up

By JESSICA DAMIANO Associated Press

Years ago, when my now-grown daughter Justine was a toddler, we visited a U-pick farm where she plucked plump, ripe strawberries from a field of sprawling plants. Some made it into the basket on that sunny June day; others went directly into her mouth.

That's when she learned that June is for strawberries. It's for roses, too, which makes sense when you consider that both plants are members of the Rosacea family.

And, as I learned at the farm that day, June is also for rhubarb, which I had never seen before.

Following the lead of other strawberry pickers waiting to pay for their loot, I added a bunch of rhubarb to my cart, wondering aloud what I would do with it. My fellow shoppers educated me about pies and jams, so I went home with a mission to prepare and learn how to grow the alien, red, celery-like stalks.

I've since learned that rhubarb is a popular June harvest in New England and some north-central and Midwestern states, where strawberry-rhubarb pie reigns supreme. It's not quite as uncommon in my New York home as it was all those years ago, but I would hardly call it a staple.

The good news is that for those who have difficulty finding it at the supermarket – or simply want to grow their own – adding rhubarb to the garden is a worthwhile endeavor, albeit one that requires patience.

Perennial in horticultural zones 3-8, rhubarb can be expected to return and produce for up to 10 years. Plant their crowns, which are bare-roots, in fall or in spring when the weather is still cool. They will spread, so give them room by setting them 3-4 feet apart in similarly spaced rows. Bury their buds, or "eyes," 2 inches below the soil line, ensuring they face upward in compost-enriched soil.

Keep plants well-watered and, when the weather warms up, apply 2 inches of mulch to retain moisture, discourage weeds and regulate soil temperature. Then apply a slow-release, balanced fertilizer with a 10-10-10 ratio of nutrients.

Do not harvest any stalks during rhubarb's first year in your garden. Doing so would imperil the plant's longevity. But remove flowers and their stems so the plant can channel its energy into root growth instead of seed production. Replenish mulch in late fall, after temperatures drop.

You can start harvesting – sparingly – in the plant's second year, removing no more than four stalks per plant when they are red (unless you're growing a pink or green variety) and between 12-18 inches long. Taking more would risk sapping the plant of energy, which would reduce future output, so practice restraint.

You may harvest freely during and after the third year, but never remove more than two-thirds of a single plant.

Rhubarb leaves are poisonous, so remove and discard them before slicing the stalks into 1-inch pieces for cooking.

I repeat: Do not eat the leaves.

Admittedly, I was skeptical after my first tasting of a raw, sour-bitter rhubarb stalk all those years ago. But, with my mouth still puckered and fingers crossed, I went ahead and added chunks of it to my strawberry pie filling. The pie was delicious, of course; its sweet berries offset and perfectly complemented by the acidic tang of the rhubarb. I was an instant – and astonished -- convert.

The vegetable, regarded as a fruit just as tomatoes are fruits commonly regarded as vegetables, isn't a one-trick pony, either. It works equally well in jams, relish, muffins and even simmered for 10 minutes, then blended with fruit into smoothies. Try roasting, stewing, sautéing and serving over ice cream, or adding it to apple sauce recipes. Just don't forget the sweetener.

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Got questions about spring gardening? Please send them to Jessica Damiano at jessica@jessicadamiano.com with "Gardening Question" in the subject line. She'll answer selected questions in a future AP gardening column. Damiano writes regular gardening columns for The AP. She publishes the award-winning Weekly Dirt Newsletter. You can sign up here for weekly gardening tips and advice.

For more AP gardening stories, go to <https://apnews.com/hub/gardening>.

Today in History: June 7, court rejects contraceptive ban

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, June 7, the 158th day of 2023. There are 207 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 7, 1965, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, struck down, 7-2, a Connecticut law used to prosecute a Planned Parenthood clinic in New Haven for providing contraceptives to married couples.

On this date:

In 1712, Pennsylvania's colonial assembly voted to ban the further importation of enslaved people.

In 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia offered a resolution to the Continental Congress stating "That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

In 1848, French painter and sculptor Paul Gauguin was born in Paris.

In 1892, Homer Plessy, a "Creole of color," was arrested for refusing to leave a whites-only car of the East Louisiana Railroad. (Ruling on his case, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal" racial segregation, a concept it renounced in 1954.)

In 1929, the sovereign state of Vatican City came into existence as copies of the Lateran Treaty were exchanged in Rome.

In 1942, the Battle of Midway ended in a decisive victory for American naval forces over Imperial Japan, marking a turning point in the Pacific War.

In 1967, author-critic Dorothy Parker, famed for her caustic wit, died in New York at age 73.

In 1981, Israeli military planes destroyed a nuclear power plant in Iraq, a facility the Israelis charged could have been used to make nuclear weapons.

In 1993, Ground was broken for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

In 1998, in a crime that shocked the nation, James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old Black man, was hooked by a chain to a pickup truck and dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas. (Two white men were later sentenced to death for the crime.)

In 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (AH'-boo MOO'-sahb ahl-zahr-KOW'-ee), the founder of al-Qaida in Iraq, was killed by a U.S. airstrike on his safe house.

In 2016, Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump claimed their parties' presidential nominations following contests in New Jersey, California, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Ten years ago: President Barack Obama vigorously defended the government's just-disclosed collection of massive amounts of information from phone and Internet records as a necessary defense against terrorism, and assured Americans, "Nobody is listening to your telephone calls." Obama opened a two-day summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Rancho Mirage, California. A gunman went on a chaotic rampage, killing his father and brother and three other people before being fatally shot by police at Santa Monica College in California. Former French Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, 84, died in suburban Paris. Death row inmate Richard Ramirez, 53, the serial killer known as California's "Night Stalker," died in a hospital.

Five years ago: The Trump administration said in a court filing that it would no longer defend key parts of the Affordable Care Act, including provisions that guarantee access to health insurance regardless of any medical conditions; it was a rare departure from the Justice Department's practice of defending federal

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laws in court. In advance of a summit with North Korea's Kim Jong Un, President Donald Trump declared that "attitude" is more important than preparation." A government report found that suicide rates inched up in nearly every U.S. state from 1999 through 2016. The Washington Capitals claimed their first NHL title with a 4-3 victory over the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final in Las Vegas.

One year ago: Russia claimed to have nearly taken full control of one of the two provinces that make up Ukraine's Donbas, bringing the Kremlin closer to its goal of capturing the eastern industrial heartland of coal mines and factories. Actor Matthew McConaughey called on Congress to "reach a higher ground" and pass gun control legislation two weeks after 19 students and two teachers were killed in a shooting in his hometown of Uvalde. Federal investigators said Goodyear knew that some of its recreational vehicle tires could fail and cause severe crashes, yet it failed to recall them for as long as 20 years. Jim Seals, who teamed with fellow musician "Dash" Crofts on such 1970s soft-rock hits as "Summer Breeze," died at age 80.

Today's Birthdays: Movie director James Ivory is 95. Actor Virginia McKenna is 92. Singer Tom Jones is 83. Poet Nikki Giovanni is 80. Former talk show host Jenny Jones is 77. Americana singer-songwriter Willie Nile is 75. Actor Anne Twomey is 72. Actor Liam Neeson is 71. Actor Colleen Camp is 70. Author Louise Erdrich (UR'-drihk) is 69. Actor William Forsythe is 68. Record producer L.A. Reid is 67. Latin pop singer Juan Luis Guerra is 66. Former Vice President Mike Pence is 64. Rock singer-musician Gordon Gano (The Violent Femmes) is 60. Rock musician Eric Kretz (Stone Temple Pilots) is 57. Rock musician Dave Navarro is 56. Actor Helen Baxendale is 53. Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., is 51. Actor Karl Urban is 51. TV personality Bear Grylls is 49. Rock musician Eric Johnson (The Shins) is 47. Actor Adrienne Frantz is 45. Actor-comedian Bill Hader is 45. Actor Anna Torv is 44. Actor Larisa Oleynik (oh-LAY'-nihk) is 42. Former tennis player Anna Kournikova is 42. Actor Michael Cera is 35. Actor Shelley Buckner is 34. Rapper Iggy Azalea is 33. Actor-model Emily Ratajkowski is 32. Rapper Fetty Wap is 32.