

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, March 6

School Breakfast: Tiki egg bake.
School Lunch: Turkey gravy, mashed potatoes.
Groton Chamber Meeting, Noon at City Hall
Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, oriental blend vegetables, baked apples, whole wheat bread.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Soup Supper, 6 p.m. (Sunday school host); Lenten worship, 7 p.m.; Luther League, 6:15 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.; Lent Service, 7 p.m.
United Methodist: Communion coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; Lent Bible Study, 7 p.m.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

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

*"The vision must be followed
by the venture. It is not
enough to stare up the steps--
we must step up the stairs."*
VANCE HAVNER



Thursday, March 7

School Breakfast: Surfboard pop tarts.
School Lunch: Taco salads.
State GBB Tournament at Brookings
Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, frosted brownies, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, March 8

End of Third Quarter
School. Breakfast: Ito eats egg wraps.
School Lunch: Mac and cheese, California blend vegetables.
State GBB Tournament at Brookings
Senior Menu: Potato soup, ham salad croissant, tomato spoon salad, Mandarin oranges.

Saturday, March 9

State GBB Tournament at Brookings
Thrift Store open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

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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1440

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Super Tuesday Results

Voters in 15 states and the US territory of American Samoa headed to the polls yesterday on what is known as Super Tuesday, the single biggest day of primary voting in the presidential election cycle.

President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump won almost every race, continuing on their trajectory toward becoming the 2024 presidential nominees. As of this writing, Biden has secured roughly 79% of the 1,968 Democratic delegates needed to pass the threshold, and Trump has secured roughly 87% of the 1,215 Republican delegates needed, per projections. See live updates here.

Meanwhile, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley won Vermont's GOP primary, while businessman Jason Palmer won American Samoa's Democratic caucus. Separately, seven states included an "uncommitted" option or similar, following a movement in Michigan to protest Biden's response to the Israel-Hamas war.

In other races, Rep. Adam Schiff (D, CA-30) and former baseball player Steve Garvey (R) emerged from California's "top-two" primary, beating out Rep. Katie Porter (D, CA-47) as leading candidates to replace the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D). In North Carolina, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson (R) and state Attorney General Josh Stein (D) will face off to replace Gov. Roy Cooper (D), who is term-limited.

The Dartmouth men's basketball team voted to unionize yesterday, the latest step in challenging the long-standing amateur model of college sports. The 13-2 vote means the players will be allowed to negotiate on issues like compensation and working conditions, including practice hours. Dartmouth has until March 12 to file an objection to the union.

The price of bitcoin, the world's largest cryptocurrency by market value, reached an all-time high of \$69,210 yesterday before retreating. The digital asset has risen nearly 200% year-over-year after sinking as low as \$13K in November 2022 amid the collapse of the cryptocurrency exchange FTX. Observers attribute the surge to new investor-friendly exchange-traded funds of the coin as well as to a much-anticipated halving event next month that will lead to an expected drop in the bitcoin supply.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Team USA takes on Canada tonight (10:15 pm ET, Paramount+) in the women's CONCACAF Gold Cup semifinals. Two-time tennis Grand Slam champion Simona Halep wins appeal on doping ban, can return to play for first time since 2022.

Director Roman Polanski's defamation trial began yesterday in France; Polanski is accused of defamation by a British actress who accused Polanski of sexual assault. TV producer Nigel Lythgoe denies Paula Abdul's allegations of sexual assault.

Japanese architect Riken Yamamoto wins prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize.

Science & Technology

Meta platforms—including Facebook, Instagram, and Threads—suffer hourslong outage, affecting hundreds of thousands worldwide; no cause publicly identified, government officials say cyberattack unlikely.

Scientists vote down proposal to formally recognize the Anthropocene as a distinct geologic epoch defined by humankind's impact on Earth; reports suggest disagreement over when period would have begun.

Oldest known sex chromosome in animals discovered; study suggests the genetic feature developed in ancient octopuses roughly 380 million years ago (More)

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Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -1.0%, Dow -1.0%, Nasdaq -1.7%); Apple shares drag broader market down after report finds iPhone sales in China fell 24% in first six weeks of the year.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau caps credit card late fees to \$8 per month, down from an average of \$32 per month for a missed or late payment; policy expected to go into effect later this spring.

Target shares rise 12% after beating revenue and earnings estimates despite drop in quarterly sales; company plans to open up 300 new stores over next decade, introduce new paid membership program.

Politics & World Affairs

Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) will not seek reelection, clearing field for a race likely between Rep. Ruben Gallego (D, AZ-3) and Kari Lake (R). Sen. John Barrasso (WY) to run for GOP whip as Sen. John Thune (SD), the current whip, and Sen. John Cornyn (TX) run for GOP leader. Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) faces new charges over allegations of acting as a foreign agent to Egypt.

Liberty University fined \$14M by Education Department for failing to disclose sexual assault crimes on campus in largest fine of its kind.

The International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants for three Russian officials for their alleged role in the war in Ukraine in second round of warrants. Haiti gangs attempt to seize the main airport in the country's capital.

158 +/- ACRE LAND AUCTION

WEST HANSON TWP., BROWN CO., SD

We will offer at Public Auction the following land located from Groton SD, (Intersection of Hwy 12 & Hwy 37) 8 miles south on Hwy 37 & 3 miles west on 141st St. Watch for auction signs on:

THURSDAY, MARCH 14th, 2024 SALE TIME: 11:00 A.M.

Auctioneer's Note: This auction presents the opportunity to purchase 158 +/- acres of productive tillable land located in West Hanson Twp., Brown Co., SD. The farm is free for possession for the 2024 crop year. This auction will be held live on-site w/online bidding available.

This 158 +/- acres of land, according to FSA information, has 156.85 +/- cropland acres and is made up of predominately Class II soils with a Surety AgriData soil productivity index of 76.8. Per FSA information, this farm has a soybean base of 78.6 acres and a PLC yield of 25 bu., and a wheat base of 78.6 acres and a PLC yield of 35 bu. There is approximately 40 +/- acres that are planted to winter wheat and this crop will go to the new buyer(s).

Legal Description: SE ¼ of Sec. 28, T-122-N, R-61-W, West Hanson Twp., Brown Co., SD

For additional information, terms, drone video, aerial, soil & plat maps and FSA-156EZ, please visit www.burlagepeterson.com, or contact Auctioneers.

MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND THIS AUCTION AND COME PREPARED TO BUY!

TERMS: Visit burlagepeterson.com for full sale terms. Possession for 2024.

Gary and Sharon Van Riper Charitable Remainder Annuity Trust – Owners
First Bank & Trust – Trustee

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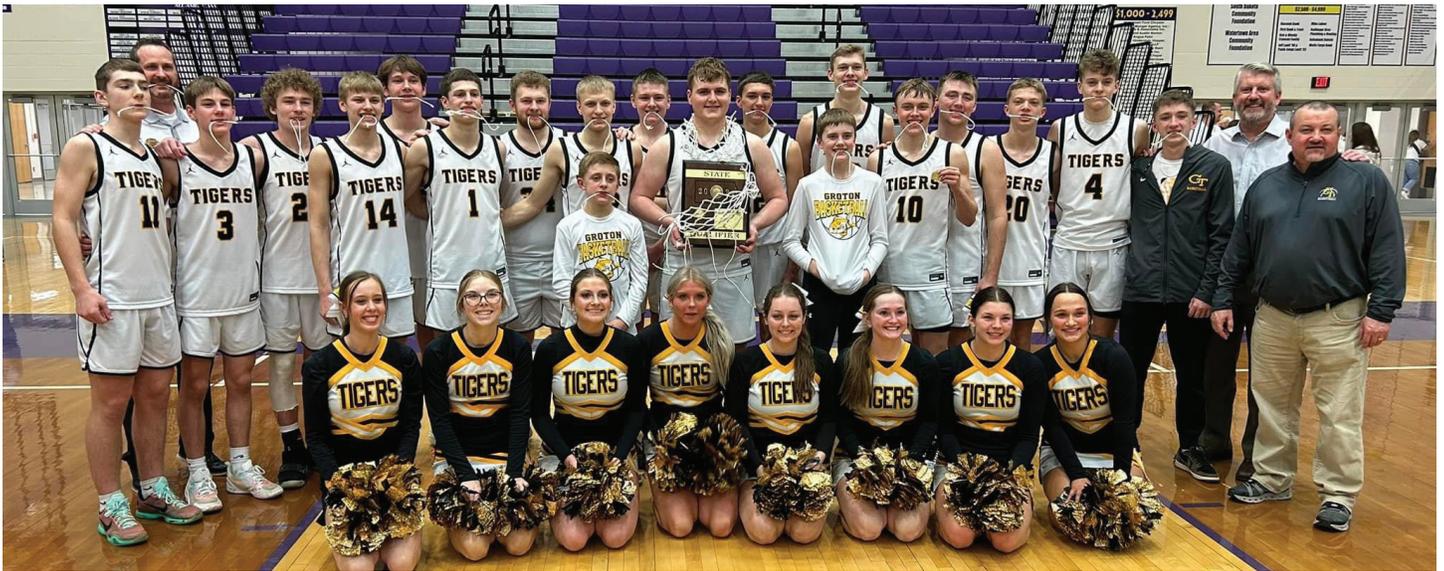


Photo from Robyn Warrington's facebook page

Groton Area advances to the State A

Groton Area's boys basketball dream of going to the state tournament became a reality Tuesday night as the Tigers defeated Dell Rapids in the SoDak16 held at the Watertown Civic Center, 69-55.

Dell Rapids would eventually succumb to the Tiger defense in the second second quarter. The game was tied twice in the first quarter with three lead changes before the Quarrriors would have a 16-15 lead after the first quarter. Groton Area regained the lead to start the second quarter, 17-16, and then never trailed after that. Groton Area lead, 33-25, at half time and 52-39 after three quarters of play.

Dell Rapids tried to fight back in the fourth quarter, closing to within eight, 59-51, but Jacob Zak would sink a three-pointer and followed up with a two-pointer as Zak powered in nine points in the fourth quarter.

Ryder Johnson led the Tigers with 20 points, six rebounds, one assist and two steals. Lane Tietz had 16 points, four rebounds, three assists and two steals. Keegen Tracy had 14 points, two rebounds, three assists and three steals. Jacob Zak had 10 points, five rebounds, seven assists and one steal. Colby Dunker had five points and one steal. Logan Ringgenberg had two points, one rebound and one steal. Teylor Diegel had two points, three rebounds, one assist and two steals.

Groton Area made 22 of 34 two-pointers for 65 percent, four of 10 in three-pointers for 40 percent, 13 of 18 free throws for 72 percent, had 21 rebounds, 12 turnovers, 15 assists, 12 steals and 16 team fouls.

Jack Henry led Dell Rapids with 23 points followed by Tad Tjaden with 10, Rhett Kloth, Cole Ruesink and Treys Eastman each had six points and Lincoln Fersdahl added four points.

Dell Rapids made 35 of 42 field goals for 61 percent, three of seven free throws for 43 percent, had 19 rebounds, 17 assists, 15 turnovers, five steals and two blocks.

Groton Area, now on a nine-game winning streak, goes to 19-4 on the season. Dell Rapids finishes its season 17-6.

Groton Area will now advance to the State A Tournament in Rapid City March 14-16. The Tigers will have a chance to avenge its first game loss to Hamlin as the Northeast Conference champion and runner-up will battle at 6 p.m. mountain time in the first round.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM with a record viewership of 800 viewers, edging out the volleyball SoDak16 game by 40 viewers. The event was sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Dan Richardt from Groton Ford, Farmers Union Coop, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Chiropractic Clinic, Groton Ford, Hanlon Brothers, John Sieh Agency, Krueger Brothers, Lori's Pharmacy, Professional Management Services, Rix Famrs/R&M Farms, S & S Lumber, Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, Sun & Sea Travel, The MeatHouse, Witte Exteriors LLC. Paul Kosel did the play-by-play and Jeslyn Kosel ran the camera.

South Dakota to Adopt Landowner Bill of Rights

Package of bills near finish line to protect landowners during CO2 pipeline proceedings

House Majority Leader, Rep. Will Mortenson, will.mortenson@sdlegislature.gov

Senate Majority Leader, Sen. Casey Crabtree, casey.crabtree@sdlegislature.gov

PIERRE—Today, Republican Majority Leaders announced the nation's first Landowner Bill of Rights related to carbon dioxide pipeline projects, making South Dakota a leader in landowner protections throughout the nation.

At the beginning of the 2024 Legislative Session, House Majority Leader Will Mortenson and Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree set out to protect landowners and address issues that have emerged in recent years related to interstate utility projects. Together, the Majority Leaders worked on proposals that focused on a project development process that promotes respect, fairness, and certainty for everyone involved.

"These bills are 100 percent pro-farmer and 100 percent pro-landowner," said Rep. Mortenson, R-District 24. "This package has landowner protections, real benefits to landowners and real benefits to counties. Those were my requirements and they have been met. We're keeping local input, while keeping South Dakota open for business."

"When South Dakota farmers succeed, all of South Dakota succeeds, and that cuts both ways. When South Dakota farmers have limited access to national and global markets, our whole state suffers," said Sen. Crabtree, R-District 8. "These bills reflect the values of South Dakota and set the path for the future of farming in South Dakota. We entered session with an opportunity to help farmers, and we followed through. This package of bills sets the new standard for other states to follow to secure their economic future and provide a blanket of strong protections to landowners."

"It took us two years for us all to come together because we were so far apart on utility certainty and landowner protections," said Rep. Oren Lesmeister, D-District 28A and House Minority Leader. "We've come together as South Dakotans to do what's best for all of South Dakota, but especially farmers, ranchers and landowners."

South Dakota lawmakers are set to approve substantial protections for landowners. To do business in South Dakota, CO2 utility projects will be required to:

Construct a minimum depth of 48 inches—a full foot beyond federal requirements.

Assume lifetime drain tile damage repair policy.

Assume pipeline leak liability protection.

Indemnify landowners from any damage caused by the pipeline.

File an agricultural impact mitigation plan with the Public Utilities Commission.

File a dispersion analysis report with the PUC.

Require land agents to have a tie to South Dakota.

Provide landowner with survey results.

Only mortgage pipeline infrastructure—not an easement holder's property.

Limit easement duration to 99 years.

Construct CO2 pipeline within 5 years of easement enactment.

Abandon easements if the CO2 pipeline is out of service for 5 years.

Pipeline easements must be written.

Follow survey and access rights.

Provide an access payment to the landowner for survey and siting.

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SB 201 collects financial payments from CO2 pipeline operators at the county level per linear foot of the pipeline. The surcharge will provide \$0.50 to pipeline landowner property tax relief and \$0.50 to county general discretion for each linear foot. This is an estimated influx of \$3.6 million annually to South Dakota counties for tax relief.

HB 1185 establishes a clear and fair process for landowners to be informed and compensated for access by companies for surveying and siting. It also establishes a process to challenge requests for access. HB 1185 also sets a \$500 payment for survey access to the landowner.

HB 1186 sets easement standards for CO2 pipeline planning projects in South Dakota. Easements will be required to be written, expire in 99 years and be abandoned if the pipeline is out of use for five years or more or if the operator fails to file for permitting within five years.

Together, these bills continue the South Dakota tradition of being good neighbors and right-sizing the issues that have emerged related to pipelines to forge a path forward that respects landowners, creates fairness for landowners and developers, and provides certainty for all parties during the phases of easements, constructions and operations.

SB 201, HB 1185 and HB 1186 are supported by agriculture, landowner, and economic development groups representing tens of thousands of family farms and landowners.

"By looking out for the landowner, the Legislature is requiring developers to accept these terms and be good neighbors in South Dakota," added Crabtree. "The Legislature's focus is on South Dakota. This package is the result of listening to landowners, farmers and our constituents and then doing the right thing for our state."

"I'm excited for the Legislature to cross the finish line with these landowner protections," added Mortenson. "Doing nothing this session benefits no one – especially farmers. I'm glad we are seizing our opportunity to help farmers, help counties, and ensure projects in our state get built in a South Dakota way."

SB 201, HB 1185 and HB 1185 will be heard in conference committee on Wednesday, March 6. The proposed amendments for consideration are posted online at sdlegislature.gov.

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Groton Area Opt Out Meetings Set

The Groton Area Board of Education has been studying the financial health of the District and considering the option of seeking an opt-out of the property tax limitations since September 2023. On January 30, 2024, a resolution was adopted approving an opt-out of up to \$1,250,000 annually for a period of ten years.

Through the referral process, this decision will be determined by a vote of the people on April 9, 2024.

The Groton Area School District will be hosting three public meetings in advance of the April 9 election.

Columbia Community Center - Monday, 3/11/24 at 6:00 PM

Bristol Community Center - Tuesday, 3/19/24 at 6:00 PM

Groton Community Center - Monday, 3/25/24 at 6:00 PM

Anyone interest in learning more about the issues facing our district is encouraged to attend. The District has established a website containing the data used in developing its plans and recommendations.

Area high school students to compete at 41st science fair

Aberdeen, S.D. – This year will be the 41st Northern South Dakota Science and Mathematics Fair, sponsored by Northern State University, 3M of Aberdeen and the Aberdeen Area Community Foundation. The science fair will be held March 21, and the projects will be available for public viewing from 1 to 7 p.m. in the Barnett Center gym.

Forty judges from Aberdeen and surrounding areas will spend the morning judging projects and interviewing students. The science fair awards ceremony, open to the public and free of charge, will begin at 6 p.m. in Johnson Fine Arts Center Room 181.

Twelve schools from the surrounding area and about 180 students in grades 6-12 will participate in the fair this year. The students are from Brown, Campbell, Day, Edmunds, Faulk, Hyde, Marshall, McPherson, Roberts, Spink and Walworth counties.

The top two senior high individuals and top senior high team (consisting of two students) will receive an all-expense paid trip to Los Angeles, CA, May 11-17 to attend the International Science and Engineering Fair. The students will compete there for several large cash awards and other prizes, such as free college tuition.

Junior and senior high science bowls, held in conjunction with the fair, will begin at 1:30 p.m. in the Johnson Fine Arts Center. The public is invited to attend.

The science fair is under the direction of Dr. Jodie Ramsay, professor of biology, and Jessica Furney, secretary of the science and math department.

Chairing the senior science bowl is Megan Howard, Northern master teacher at the E-Learning Center. The Northern Honors Program will be responsible for organizing the junior science bowl.

Name Released in Moody County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 123, 7 miles south of Brookings, SD

When: 4:09 p.m. Friday, March 1, 2024

Driver 1: Lee Andrew Clark, II, 56-year-old male from Brookings, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2020 Ford Expedition

Seatbelt Use: No

Moody County, S.D.- A 56-year-old man died Friday afternoon in a single vehicle crash in Moody County.

Preliminary crash information indicates Lee A. Clark, II was the driver of a 2020 Ford Expedition traveling north on Interstate 29 when for unknown reasons the vehicle left the road entering the center median where it crashed before coming to a stop in the Big Sioux River. Law enforcement and bystanders on-scene pulled the driver from the vehicle to a nearby sand bar, where EMTs declared Clark deceased.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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February 26 - March 3, 2024

Welcome back to another edition of the Weekly Round[s] Up! The Senate is back in session in Washington after a two-week in-state work period around Presidents' Day. During my time back in South Dakota, I was able to visit Pierre, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Yankton and Winner. I hosted four Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin ceremonies, where I presented these pins to 211 Vietnam era veterans from across the state. I also visited with several South Dakota groups, including the Winner Rotary Club, South Dakota Bankers Association and the South Dakota State Legislature caucuses. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:



South Dakotans I met with: South Dakota leaders with Missouri River Energy Services; members of the American Legion Department of South Dakota; members of the South Dakota National Guard Enlisted Association; South Dakota members of the American Institute of Architects; Dr. Edward Duke and Dr. Mel Ustad with SDEPSCoR; the South Dakota Civil Air Patrol; and Dr. Julie Thorstenson, Executive Director of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society.

Visited with South Dakotans from: Brookings, Chester, Crooks, Fort Pierre, Garretson, Lantry, Madison, Milbank, Pierre, Piedmont, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, Spearfish, Vermillion and Watertown.

Other meetings: General Jacqueline Van Ovost, Commander of U.S. Transportation Command; General Anthony Cotton, Commander of U.S. Strategic Command; and General C.Q. Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I spoke to several groups about advancements in artificial intelligence this week, including Wellmark Blue Cross & Blue Shield's Board of Directors and Executive Leadership, a FinTech Symposium and an AI event hosted by Axios. I also had Senate Bible Study, where we studied Jude 3.

Votes taken: 19 – most notable was our vote on the latest continuing resolution to keep the government open and funded past the previous deadlines of March 1 and March 8. The new staggered deadlines for government funding are March 8 and March 22.

As you may remember from my previous Round[s] Ups, the appropriations process consists of 12 bills that each fund a different area of the federal government. Staggering the shutdown dates means that funding for six of these bills expires on one date, and funding for the other six expires on the other date. Think of it as having a homework assignment in two parts, with different due dates for each part. The key difference here is that I don't think any teacher would give you as many extensions as we give ourselves out here in Washington! This week, we are expected to vote on a bill that funds the first half of the assignment through the end of the fiscal year. This bill includes critical funding for water and transportation projects in South Dakota. In total, these projects, which I requested amount to over \$100 million that will directly benefit South Dakota.

Hearings: I attended four hearings this week: two in the Select Committee on Intelligence and two in the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC).

Classified briefings: I had three classified briefings this week all related to my work on SASC. One was a full committee briefing. The other two were related to my work on two different SASC subcommittees:

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the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee and the Strategic Forces Subcommittee.

Legislation introduced: This past week, I introduced the Timber Harvesting Restoration Act, legislation that would require the United States Forest Service to improve timber sales numbers in the Black Hills National Forest. You can read more about this legislation [here](#).

Tribal Law Enforcement: In the last two years, tribal leaders on the Great Plains have reported a significant increase in violent and drug-related crime. Law enforcement leaders in Indian Country directly attribute the recent uptick in crime to police personnel shortages. My colleague Senator John Thune and I sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office requesting information on tribal law enforcement funding and its correlation with surges in crime on reservations. You can read more about this letter [here](#).

My staff in South Dakota visited: Howard, Newell, Pierre, Platte, Spearfish and St. Onge.

Steps taken this past week: 52,054 steps or 26.07 miles



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Rapid City wants passenger rail, sends support to Federal Railroad Administration

Sioux Falls mayor: Idea is 'exciting to consider'; comment deadline is Friday for proposed SD routes

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 5, 2024 7:53 PM

Rapid City Council members plan to tell the Federal Railroad Administration that their city should be connected to Sioux Falls and Minneapolis by passenger rail.

Mayor Jason Salamun read a resolution saying as much out loud at Monday's city council meeting, after which the council voted unanimously to approve it.

"I can tell you I'll be happy to sign this resolution," Salamun said, according to a news release from the city.

A rail administration study identified a Rapid City route on its "proposed network of preferred routes," a series of maps built through stakeholder meetings across the U.S.

South Dakota is the only state in the contiguous U.S. to have never had service through Amtrak, the nation's taxpayer-subsidized passenger rail network. The proposed route through Rapid City, with a stop in Pierre, is one of two possible South Dakota options. The other is a line that would connect Sioux Falls with Kansas City.

Friday is the deadline for public comments on the proposal, which can be sent to contactus@fralongdistancestudy.org.

The Rapid City municipal government is the latest group to show its support for an east-west route: "... in the past three years, the Pennington County Commission, the Rapid City Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Grant County Economic Development Corporation, and the City of Sturgis, SD have expressed a strong support for long-distance passenger rail service through South Dakota," the resolution reads.

The city's resolution also notes that "little to no" public transportation is available in the area, that rail would make it easier to connect rural areas like the Pine Ridge Reservation to the rest of the state, and that rail "is 47 percent more energy efficient than traveling by car and 33 percent more energy efficient than domestic air travel."

A route's appearance on a study map is not a sure path to passenger rail. Materials from the study group meetings say cooperation and coordination with state and local stakeholders is key to decisions on any new or expanded routes. The South Dakota Department of Transportation would not make any officials with the agency available for an interview, but a spokesperson told South Dakota Searchlight via email late last year that the state has no plans to pursue passenger rail.

Cost and a perceived lack of community support are the state's main objections. Laying or upgrading tracks can cost billions of dollars. North Carolina got a \$1.9 billion grant in November for a passenger line less than 19 miles long. The 171-mile Central Valley segment in California could cost as much as \$35 billion.

Sioux Falls and Rapid City are about 350 miles apart.

"SD is a state with low population densities, and there is insufficient demand for passenger rail services," wrote Julie Stevenson of the Transportation Department. "Therefore, SD is hesitant to invest in a system that might not attract enough ridership to justify the costs."

Rapid City's support as South Dakota's second-largest population center has yet to be matched by Sioux Falls, with a population more than double the size.

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The Sioux Falls City Council has not discussed Amtrak during its public meetings. In a written statement sent Tuesday evening, however, Sioux Falls Mayor Paul TenHaken said he's intrigued by the idea of passenger rail.

"A South Dakota rail line is certainly exciting to consider," TenHaken wrote. "Funding a massive infrastructure project like this would be a heavy lift and I am not familiar with what demand would exist for this sort of investment. I look forward to monitoring the study progress to see if it develops further."

State Senate keeps sales tax reduction temporary

Lawmakers also act on petition signature withdrawals, 911 phone surcharge, other bills

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR AND JOHN HULT - MARCH 5, 2024 5:40 PM

The state Senate killed off a last-minute attempt Tuesday in the House to permanently lower South Dakota's sales tax to 4.2%, as lawmakers acted on several bills during the third-to-last day of the legislative session.

The Legislature and Gov. Kristi Noem lowered the sales tax from 4.5% to 4.2% last year, but that tax relief will sunset in 2027.

Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton, reminded the Senate that lawmakers had weeks ago tanked one tax cut bill that aimed to do what the House amended SB 137 to do on Monday.

"We addressed this bill once this session," Hunhoff said. "I would ask that we put it to bed."

SB 137 was defeated on a 29-5 vote.

Cash for long-term care

A bill born of last summer's long-term care study group is on its way to the governor's desk. Senate Bill 80 authorizes the Department of Health to issue grants to providers for technological upgrades. That could include tech like remote patient monitoring for elderly patients who choose to remain in their homes, to enhance services at adult day centers or to improve care at nursing homes or assisted living facilities.

The Senate version had \$3 million in grant funding. The House amended that figure down to \$2 million, and Senators agreed on a 31-3 vote.

SB 80 is funded with state dollars. A bill to put \$5 million in federal funds into grants for telemedicine expansion at nursing homes and assisted living facilities, SB 209, passed the House on Monday. It awaits a signature or veto from the governor.

Online porn age verification

The Senate revived a failed bill Monday that would mandate age verification for accessing pornographic websites and converted it into a mandate for a summer legislative study on the topic.

On Tuesday, the House did not concur with the amendment. Instead, the bill's prime House sponsor, Rep. Bethany Soye, R-Sioux Falls, successfully motioned to send the bill to a conference committee of lawmakers from the two chambers.

911 surcharges

A bill to increase funding for 911 call centers by raising phone customers' monthly surcharge from \$1.25 to \$2 per line is headed to the governor after the Senate and House approved a conference committee's version of the bill.

In 2023, the existing surcharge generated about \$12.47 million in revenue. With the proposed increase and assuming no change in the number of service lines, the projected revenue is approximately \$19.95 million. The surcharge has not been increased since 2012.

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Petition signature withdrawal

The House approved the Senate's amendments to a bill that would establish a process for people to retract their signatures from ballot-question petitions. It comes in response to a proposed ballot measure to restore abortion rights.

The bill includes an emergency clause for immediate enactment prior to the Nov. 5 general election.

Initiated measures and referendums need 17,508 signatures from registered voters to make statewide ballots, and initiated constitutional amendments need 35,017. Dakotans for Health, which is circulating the abortion-rights petitions, has said the petitions have more than 50,000 signatures so far.

Noem approves out-of-state vehicle title fee, signs other bills

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 5, 2024 12:23 PM

South Dakota is about to become a less attractive place for out-of-staters to title a vehicle.

Gov. Kristi Noem signed a bill into law this week that will add a \$100 fee to the process for anyone who does not have a South Dakota driver license or identification card, or an address in the state.

As of 2018, more than 58,000 vehicles with out-of-state addresses were registered in South Dakota. That's due to factors including the state's lower taxes and fees, and lack of vehicle emissions inspections.

The bill's prime sponsor in the House, Rep. Roger Chase, R-Huron, said during debates on the legislation that non-residents shouldn't have the privilege of paying the same low fees as residents.

Following is information on some other bills Noem said she signed so far this week, which is the last week of the legislative session other than a day reserved later in the month to consider any Noem vetoes.

Clemency applications

Senate Bill 9 changes how long inmates sentenced to life in prison have to wait between applications for clemency, such as a reduced sentence or parole. The bill says when such inmates are denied a clemency request, they have to wait four more years before applying again.

Medical marijuana

Senate Bill 42 will make several changes to medical cannabis laws, including adjustments to probation policies for dispensaries that run afoul of regulations. The biggest change would put the names of medical cannabis cardholders in the state's prescription drug monitoring program. Currently, anyone prescribed a narcotic is listed in that database, used by providers to check for doctor-shopping.

Forensic fees

SB 15 requires a convicted defendant to pay the digital forensic examination fees associated with their case, such as the cost to unlock and search their phone or computer for evidence.

Drones

SB 169 revises regulations regarding drones. With some exceptions for emergency operations, landing a drone on another person's property without permission, as well as operating a drone in an unsafe manner, will become a crime punishable by up to a year in jail. The bill also bars local governments from regulating the ownership of drones, restricting their altitude or airspace, or adjusting the qualifications for drone piloting.

'Sliming'

House Bill 1086 establishes an enhanced penalty for probationers intentionally causing contact with bodily fluids or human waste with a Unified Judicial System employee. It's already a felony to "slime" jailers and police with spit, urine or feces. The bill extends that penalty to employees of the court system, such as probation officers.

Election rules

HB 1182 revises provisions pertaining to the observation of the conduct of an election. It specifies that poll watchers for candidates, ballot question committees and political parties are allowed in the polling place during voting hours, though candidates themselves are only permitted to be there to cast their own ballot. It also requires that the polling place, both before and after ballot counting begins, be arranged in such a way that all poll watchers and observers "may plainly see and hear what is done within the polling place."

Pink hunters

HB 1228 provides that required hunting safety garments, which are worn for visibility to avoid accidents, may be fluorescent pink in addition to the traditional blaze orange.

'Obscene' books

HB 1197 requires school districts and public libraries to publish policies on restricting minors from accessing obscene materials. The bill expands an existing law addressing obscene material online to physical books. It does not enforce a specific policy for handling book concerns, but requires schools and libraries to publish policies on their website or annually in the local newspaper.

Biden to push for return of expanded child tax credit in State of the Union speech

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA AND ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 5, 2024 3:52 PM

WASHINGTON — Top White House economic officials said Tuesday that President Joe Biden will announce how his administration is tackling economic issues — from the housing crisis to restoring the expansion of the child tax credit — during this week's State of the Union address to Congress and the nation.

"Providing more breathing room to American families is really something that remains a top priority for the president," said Jon Donenberg, a deputy director of the National Economic Council, in a briefing at the White House with reporters from regional publications.

The speech is expected to be of great significance for Biden as he seeks reelection in November against the likely Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump.

Some policies Biden will address in his remarks Thursday night include his administration's efforts to crack down on "junk fees," help first-time homebuyers and protect renters from rent hikes, as well as pushing for several changes to the U.S. tax code.

Daniel Hornung, a deputy director of the National Economic Council, said that Biden will make the case to Republicans to bring back the expanded child tax credit.

"The president will push to restore that tax break to make sure that families across the country, families with children, have the breathing room they need," Hornung said.

Biden will use the State of the Union to push tax policies that promote "interests of working people and not billionaires or megacorporations," Hornung said.

The president will propose a multi-pronged plan that would include raising the corporate tax rate to 28%, a priority Biden discussed in last year's budget proposal.

Hornung said the president wants to reverse the "tax windfall" that corporations enjoyed following the Trump administration's 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that set the corporate rate at 21%.

Biden will again pitch a minimum tax on the richest 0.01% of Americans and call on Congress to ensure tax cuts for lower- and middle-income Americans by restoring all or part of the pandemic-era expansion of the child tax credit and premium tax credits for Affordable Care Act plans.

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Push in Congress on taxes

Biden's renewed urgency over the tax code comes as Trump's 2017 tax policies are winding down and must either be renewed or changed by the end of 2025. Biden is expected, in his speech, to criticize Republican proposals to extend some Trump-era tax breaks.

Congress has taken rare bipartisan, bicameral action this year to head off the looming tax code tempest. A proposal to temporarily expand the child tax credit and restore a handful of expired or expiring corporate tax incentives received sweeping support in the U.S. House in late January. The bill, which the White House has endorsed, is stalled in the U.S. Senate.

The 2021 expansion of the child tax credit lifted nearly 3 million children out of poverty, according to the U.S. Census.

That temporary pandemic-era expansion under the American Rescue Plan, now expired, increased benefits from up to \$2,000 to \$3,600 for qualifying children under age 6, and \$3,000 for other qualifying children under age 18.

Housing crunch

Several economic advisers noted that rental rates have continued to rise and that there is a "housing gap in this country," Domestic Policy Advisor Neera Tanden said.

"He has specific proposals that he'll speak to in terms of housing affordability and ensuring that we are addressing rent," Tanden said of the president's speech Thursday.

Rohit Chopra, the director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, said that the administration is also looking at ways to lower closing costs on buying a home because the White House's analysis has found that expense "drains people's down payment and pushes up their monthly mortgage payment."

He added that the White House is also looking for ways to make it easier for homeowners to refinance "now that (interest) rates have started to come down."

Hornung said that the White House is also exploring ways to "boost the supply of housing throughout the country," and find steps that the federal government can take to "help state (and) local governments reduce barriers" when it comes to expanding housing.

He said that in addition to getting more housing supply online, Biden will lay out how the administration is looking "to invest in the supply of affordable housing," and to block "practices that are driving up rents that are not just about supply and demand."

Biden to point to actions on junk fees

Chopra said that Biden will stress how his administration has gone after "junk fees," and will continue to do so, pointing to a finalized rule Tuesday that will cap most credit card fees to \$8.

"I think the impact is gonna be most felt by those who really are living paycheck to paycheck, those who are trying to pay off their debt," he said.

Chopra said that the administration launched an industry-wide study and found junk fees in hotels, ticket sales, airlines and the banking industry. He said it's a tactic that companies use to push up purchase prices to "charge for fake or worthless services."

"I think we've all been seeing these creep across the economy in our lives almost everywhere we go," he said.

Chopra said the White House found that one bank was charging customers a fake junk fee for a printed bank statement "that was neither printed nor mailed."

"We have already ordered them and others to refund the money," he said. "I think what we're seeing is people, perhaps those who have the least amount of time to bicker with customer service agents. They're no longer spending that time. They're actually seeing that money being kept for themselves."

Biden, Trump set for massive delegate hauls in 16 nominating contests

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 5, 2024 11:16 AM

WASHINGTON — Voters in more than a dozen states will cast their choice for U.S. president Tuesday in the largest single day of nominating contests on the 2024 election calendar.

President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, the clear Republican front-runner, are chasing more than one-third of their respective parties' delegates during the "Super Tuesday" races.

Contests will be held in Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Virginia, and the U.S. territory of American Samoa. Iowa Democrats will also announce unofficial results from their mail-in caucus.

A unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision Monday allowed Trump to remain on the primary ballot in Colorado, striking down an unprecedented decision by the state's highest court to remove the former president. The Colorado court ruled Trump's actions during the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol disqualified him from contention under a Civil War-era constitutional clause barring insurrectionists from holding future office.

While the delegate math doesn't add up for either Biden or Trump to clinch the Democratic or Republican nominations Tuesday night, the one-day wave of primaries and caucuses is expected to set up both men for presumptive-nominee status later this month.

Trump, who has won all but one primary contest so far, has picked up 273 delegates of the 1,215 needed to secure his party's nomination, according to the Associated Press delegate tracker.

Former South Carolina Gov. and United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, Trump's remaining GOP primary challenger, has gained 43 delegates, including all 19 of the party's District of Columbia delegates over the weekend.

A total of 854 of 2,429 Republican delegates are up for grabs this Super Tuesday, with many states awarding their entire delegate totals to the candidate who reaches the majority of the vote.

California and Texas carry Tuesday's two largest delegate counts at 169 and 150, respectively. Texas GOP rules state that another 11 delegates will be awarded at the party's convention in May.

Biden has so far clinched 206 of 3,934 Democrat party delegates. A possible 1,420, more than one-third of the delegate count, are available in Tuesday's races. Democrats award their delegates proportionally to candidates who receive at least 15% of each race's vote.

Biden's campaign has not faced a serious challenge, with only an "uncommitted" protest vote in Michigan's late February primary gaining enough support to garner two delegates.

Biden's Democratic primary challengers, author and activist Marianne Williamson and U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips of Minnesota, have yet to receive any delegates.

AP projects Trump could tie up his party's presumptive nomination by March 12, and Biden as early as March 19.

Democrat and Republican primary voters will head to the polls in Georgia, Mississippi and Washington on March 12, as will GOP voters in Hawaii. Democrats in Hawaii will vote a week earlier on March 6.

Both parties will hold presidential primary contests in Arizona, Illinois, Kansas and Ohio on March 19. Republicans will also vote that day in Florida. The Sunshine State is no longer holding a Democratic primary.

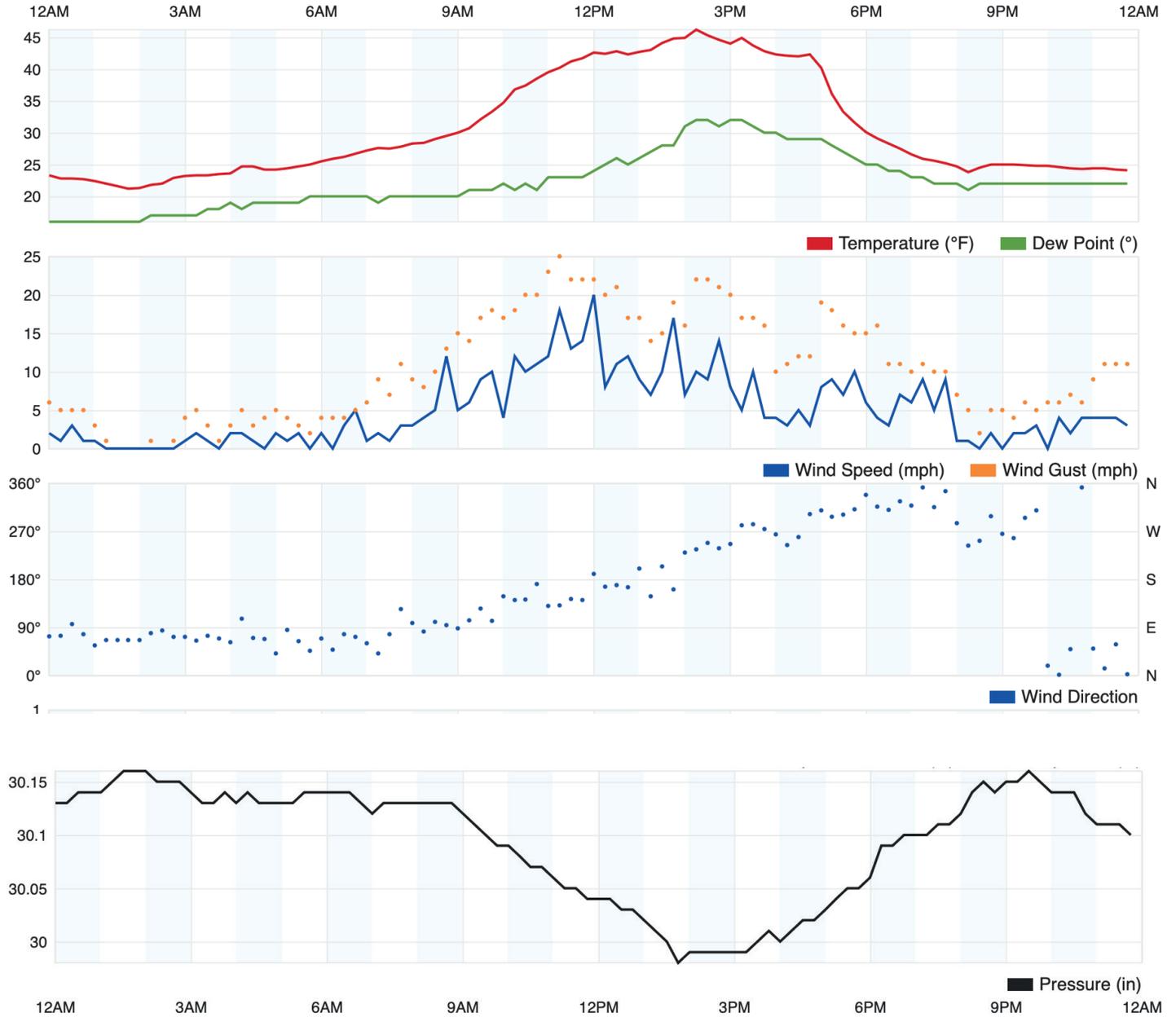
Candidates with a majority of delegates are officially nominated at each party's massive summer conventions. Republicans will meet July 15-18 in Milwaukee, after which Democrats will convene Aug. 19-22 in Chicago.

Barring any surprise circumstances, Biden and Trump are expected to receive their party's nominations.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wind Advisory

Today



Breezy.
Partly Sunny
then Chance
Rain

High: 53 °F

Tonight



Slight Chance
Rain then
Partly Cloudy

Low: 19 °F

Thursday



Partly Sunny

High: 36 °F

Thursday
Night



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 16 °F

Friday



Sunny

High: 40 °F

Today A chance of rain, mainly between 2pm and 5pm. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 53. Breezy, with an east southeast wind 9 to 14 mph becoming south 21 to 26 mph in the morning. Winds could gust as high as 45 mph. Chance of precipitation is 30%.

Tonight A slight chance of rain before 7pm. Partly cloudy, with a low around 19. Northwest wind 5 to 14 mph, with gusts as high as 22 mph. Chance of precipitation is 20%.

Thursday Partly sunny, with a high near 36. North wind 8 to 10 mph.

Thursday Night Mostly cloudy, with a low around 16. North wind around 10 mph.

Friday Sunny, with a high near 40. North wind 8 to 10 mph.

Friday Night Clear, with a low around 18. North wind around 7 mph.

Saturday Sunny, with a high near 47. North northwest wind 6 to 9 mph becoming east northeast in the afternoon.

Saturday Night Clear, with a low around 23. South southeast wind 7 to 10 mph.

Sunday Sunny, with a high near 55. South wind 10 to 13 mph.

Sunday Night Mostly clear, with a low around 29.

Monday Sunny, with a high near 64.

Monday Night Partly cloudy, with a low around 36.

Tuesday Mostly sunny, with a high near 61.

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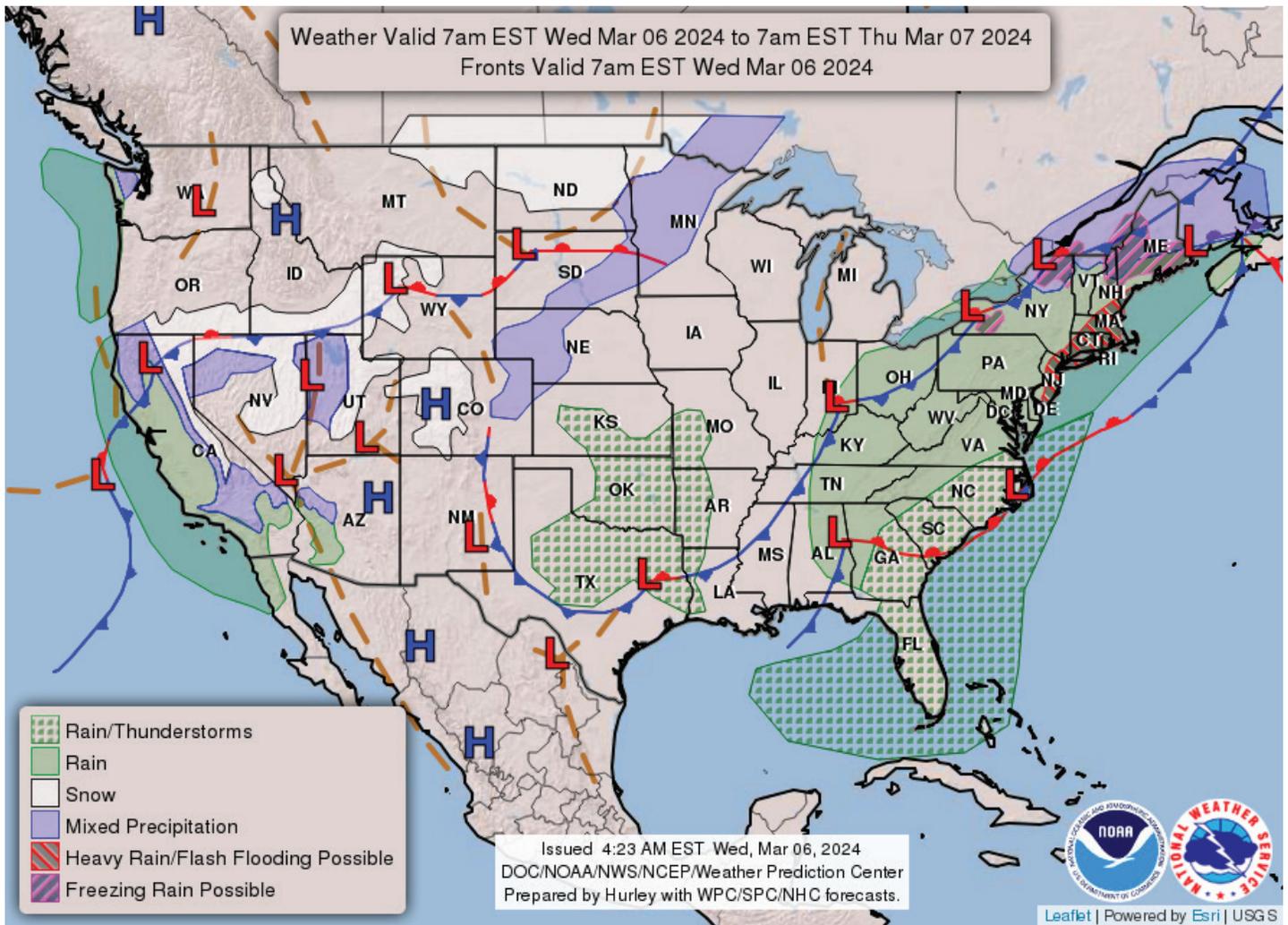
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 46 °F at 2:15 PM
Low Temp: 21 °F at 2:04 AM
Wind: 25 mph at 11:13 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 29 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 69 in 2000
Record Low: -16 in 1899
Average High: 36
Average Low: 15
Average Precip in March.: 0.14
Precip to date in March: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.31
Precip Year to Date: 0.07
Sunset Tonight: 6:28:20 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:56:43 am



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Today in Weather History

March 6, 1987: Twenty-eight cities in the north-central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Pickstown, South Dakota, was the hot spot in the nation with a reading of 83 degrees. The high of 71 at Saint Cloud, Minnesota, smashed their previous record by 21 degrees.

March 6, 2000: A grass fire of unknown origin was exacerbated by dry conditions and strong winds, burning 1500 acres of grassland northwest and north of Brandon in Minnehaha County. The fire threatened several homes, but no homes were damaged, although farmland and equipment burned. In a separate event the same day, a controlled burn went out of control, exacerbated by the conditions and strong winds. The fire caused one fatality and one injury. The damage was confined to grassland.

1875: Heavy snow fell in much of Arkansas, with the highest amounts in the central and west. Twelve inches of snow fell at Little Rock, which remains the highest calendar day snowfall on record in the capital city. 30 inches fell near Mena.

1908: A tropical storm developed about 500 miles northeast of San Juan, Puerto Rico, on March 6. The storm intensified to Category 2 strength near the Leeward Islands of Saint-Barthélemy and Saint Kitts. Since 1842, this was the only hurricane to develop in the Atlantic Ocean in March.

1962: The strongest nor'easter of this century struck the Mid-Atlantic Region on March 5-9, 1962. It is known as the "Ash Wednesday Storm" and caused over \$200 million (1962 dollars) in property damage and significant coastal erosion from North Carolina to Long Island, New York. It was estimated to have destroyed or significantly damaged 45,000 homes in New Jersey alone. The Red Cross recorded that the storm killed 40 people. It hit during "Spring Tide." When the sun and moon are in phase, they produce a higher-than-average astronomical tide. Water reached nine feet at Norfolk (flooding begins around five feet). Houses were toppled into the ocean, and boardwalks were broken and twisted. The islands of Chincoteague and Assateague, Maryland, were completely underwater. Ocean City, Maryland, sustained significant damage, mainly to the island's south end. Winds up to 70 mph built 40-foot waves at sea. Heavy snow fell in the Appalachian Mountains. Big Meadows, southeast of Luray, recorded Virginia's greatest 24-hour snowfall with 33 inches and the most significant single storm snowfall with 42 inches. (Luray, Virginia reported 33.5 inches on March 2-3, 1994, making this later snow their maximum 24-hour snowfall total.) Roads were blocked, and electrical service was out for several days. Washington and Baltimore fell into the mixed precipitation zone. The Ash Wednesday storm is noteworthy for producing devastating tidal flooding along the Atlantic Coast and record snows and the interior of Virginia. The extremely high tides and massive waves caused tremendous damage -worse than many hurricanes that have hit the region. Along the Atlantic Coast, tide ran for 2 to 6 ft above average with 20 to 40 ft waves crashing ashore. National Airport received only 4 inches of snow with a liquid equivalent of 1.33 inches. However, close-in suburbs, such as Silver Spring, Maryland, and Falls Church, Virginia, received 11 inches of snow. Outlying areas such as Rockville, Maryland, received 19 inches of snow, and Leesburg, Virginia, received 20 inches of snow. Other snow totals included 15 inches at Richmond; 23 inches at Culpeper; 26 inches at Charlottesville; 32 inches at Winchester; and 35 inches at Fort Royal, Virginia, and Big Meadows on the Skyline Drive top the list with 42 inches of snow.

2004: More snow fell on March 6, 2004, than ever recorded for a single day in March since the Korea Meteorological Administration began keeping records in 1904. According to news reports, the city of Daejeon (Taejon) in central South Korea received 19 inches of snow on Friday, with an additional 6 inches (15 centimeters) forecast for Saturday. As the storm moved away from the peninsula on March 7.

2010: At least seven funnel clouds were observed along the Orange County coast in southern California. Two were spotted near John Wayne Airport.

2014: The Great Lakes saw some of their worst ice covers in nearly four decades because of a frigid winter with months of below-freezing temperatures in large sections of the northern United States, the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration said. As of March 6, 2014, the federal agency said that 92.2 percent of the five lakes were under ice, breaking a record set in 1973 but still short of the 94.7 percent established in 1979.

2017: Early data from the GOES-East satellite warned forecasters from the NWS office in Dodge City, Kansas, about a wildfire before any 911 calls were made. As a result, they were able to start planning evacuations sooner and saving lives.

2017: A line of storms brought widespread wind damage and tornadoes to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and northern Missouri.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

MASTER MODEL

Melissa wanted to be a schoolteacher from her earliest memories. So, it was a dream come true when she enrolled in college and began to prepare for a life of teaching. She wanted to be the best teacher any pupil ever had.

She decided to write to Thomas Carlyle, a world-famous historian, and ask his advice. She wrote, "Tell me, sir, what is the secret of successful teaching?"

His reply was simple, "Be what you would have your pupils to be. All else is unblessed mockery!"

What a reminder for Christians. Though our words are important, our life – the way we act - is a much stronger lesson about who Christ is and what He can do. Our lives are often much more potent than anything we can ever say. Said Paul to Timothy, "Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity."

Timothy was a young pastor and under much scrutiny. Paul knew the pressure that he faced and wanted him to be an example to his church in everything that he said or did. Wisely, Paul advised him that only those disciples who lived lives imitating the life of Jesus would be worthy examples and effective teachers of the Good News.

And, if we read Paul's words carefully, we will notice that every aspect of our lives is listed: speech, behavior, love, faith, as well as pure thinking, and living.

Prayer: We often forget, Lord, that we are always Your model for the world to see. May our faith be strong, our thoughts pure, and our lives modeled after Your Son. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. 1 Timothy 4:12



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.05.24

2 49 50 61 70 14

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$687,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 24
DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.24

4 5 8 22 47 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 39 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.05.24

7 17 22 25 43 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 54 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.02.24

3 10 20 32 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 54 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.24

3 19 29 53 59 4

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 23 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
03.04.24

36 42 50 52 67 26

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$485,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 23 Mins 59
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL=

SDHSAA Playoffs=

Class A SODAK 16=

State Qualifier=

Dakota Valley 67, McLaughlin 32

Groton 69, Dell Rapids 55

Hamlin 90, Hanson 43

Pine Ridge 67, Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 29

Rapid City Christian 82, Milbank 66

Sioux Falls Christian 64, Sanborn Central-Woonsocket 29

Sioux Valley 68, Lakota Tech 57

Vermillion 68, Hot Springs 59, 2OT

Class B SODAK 16=

State Qualifier=

Castlewood 82, Centerville 51

DeSmet 61, Timber Lake 49

Gregory 62, Dell Rapids St Mary 46

Howard 45, Philip 28

Leola-Frederick High School 72, Potter County 56

Viborg-Hurley 73, Faith 58

Wessington Springs 54, Waverly-South Shore 35

White River 65, Highmore-Harrold 47

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Wyoming Sen. Barrasso will run for No. 2 spot in GOP leadership, narrowing race to replace McConnell

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso announced Tuesday that he will run for the No. 2 spot in the Senate Republican conference after Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell steps down from the top post at the end of the year, bowing out of the race for leader after two of his colleagues announced they would run.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn and South Dakota Sen. John Thune have announced they will campaign to replace McConnell, who said last week that he will step down from his leadership post but remain in the Senate after the November elections. It has long been speculated that Barrasso could run as well, making the contest a race among "the three Johns."

But Barrasso said in a brief statement that he has had time to reflect on how he might best serve, and, "after a lot of thought, I will ask my colleagues for their support and help to work for them as the Assistant Republican Leader."

Barrasso is No. 3 in leadership as the chairman of the Senate Republican conference. His wife, Bobbi Barrasso, died in January after a two-year struggle with brain cancer.

The Wyoming senator's announcement narrows the race between Cornyn and Thune, who are both popular with their GOP colleagues and have been loyal deputies to McConnell. Thune replaced Cornyn as

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McConnell's No. 2 in leadership five years ago after the Texas Republican was term-limited out of the post. The race will be held after the November election. Unlike in the House, where the entire body votes for speaker, Senate party leaders are elected behind closed doors by secret ballot.

There could be other candidates as well, possibly from the right flank of the party that has been critical of McConnell. Florida Sen. Rick Scott challenged McConnell in the last leadership election in 2022 at the urging of former President Donald Trump, who's now the front-runner for the GOP presidential nomination. McConnell easily defeated Scott, who had the backing of 10 of his GOP colleagues.

On Monday, Scott posted a photo on X of himself and Trump.

"Great to see President Trump tonight," Scott wrote. "We're going to continue working together to win big in 2024 and fix Washington."

While McConnell still enjoys support from a majority of his caucus, he has been at odds with Trump for years, particularly since the Jan. 6, 2021, attack of Trump's supporters at the Capitol. But his political team has been in talks with Trump's campaign about a possible endorsement, according to a person familiar with the situation who insisted on anonymity to discuss it.

Thune and Cornyn have also sparred with the former president, but they eventually endorsed him as it became clear that he is the likely GOP nominee for president this year.

"I'm going to need to be able to work with the president, and I think he's got a very good shot at being the next president," Thune told local news outlet Dakota News Now when he announced his run for leader on Monday.

US destroyer shoots down missile and drones launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A U.S. destroyer shot down drones and a missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels toward it in the Red Sea, officials said Wednesday, as the Indian navy released images of it fighting a fire aboard a container ship earlier targeted by the Houthis.

The assault Tuesday apparently targeted the USS Carney, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer that has been involved in the American campaign against the rebels, who have launched attacks over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Another suspected Houthi attack on shipping was reported Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Iran announced Wednesday it would confiscate a \$50 million cargo of Kuwaiti crude oil for American energy firm Chevron Corp. aboard a tanker it seized nearly a year earlier. It marks the latest twist in a yearslong shadow war playing out in the Mideast's waterways even before the Houthi attacks began.

The Houthi attack on the Carney on Tuesday involved bomb-carrying drones and one anti-ship ballistic missile, the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The U.S. later launched an airstrike destroying three anti-ship missiles and three bomb-carrying drone boats, the Central Command said.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, a Houthi military spokesperson, acknowledged the attack, but claimed its forces targeted two American warships, without elaborating.

The Houthis "will not stop until the aggression is stopped and the siege on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is lifted," Saree said.

Saree did not acknowledge the later U.S. airstrikes. The Houthis have not offered any assessment of the damage they've suffered in the American-led strikes that began in January, though they have said at least 22 of their fighters have been killed.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over the Israel-Hamas war. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo bound for Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, and an aid ship later bound for Houthi-controlled territory.

Despite more than a month and a half of U.S.-led airstrikes, Houthi rebels have remained capable of launching significant attacks. They include the attack last month on a cargo ship carrying fertilizer, the Rubymar, which sank on Saturday after drifting for several days, and the downing of an American drone

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worth tens of millions of dollars.

The Houthis have been hailing ships over the radio in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as well since launching their attacks. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center reported Wednesday that a new round of similar radio messages went out to a ship, and urged crews to report any suspicious activity.

A short time later, the UKMTO reported a suspected attack in the area. Private security firm Ambrey said an explosion was reported near the vessel apparently hailed in the radio call, but there were few other details immediately known.

Meanwhile, the Indian navy released a video of its sailors from the INS Kolkata fighting a fire aboard the MSC Sky II, which had been targeted by the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden on Monday. Smoke poured out of one container aboard the vessel, which also showed scorch marks from the impact of a Houthi missile.

The Mediterranean Shipping Co., a Switzerland-based company, said the missile struck the ship as it was traveling from Singapore to Djibouti.

"The missile caused a small fire that has been extinguished while no crew were injured," the company said.

Iran separately announced the seizure of the crude oil aboard the Advantage Sweet through an announcement carried by the judiciary's state-run Mizan news agency. At the time, Iranian commandos rappelled from a helicopter onto the vessel, which it alleged collided with another ship, without offering any evidence.

The court order for the seizure offered an entirely different reason for the confiscation. Mizan said it was part of a court order over U.S. sanctions it alleged barred the importation of a Swedish medicine used to treat patients suffering from epidermolysis bullosa, a rare genetic condition that causes blisters all over the body and eyes. It did not reconcile the different reasons for the seizure.

The Advantage Sweet had been in the Persian Gulf in late April, but its track showed no unusual behavior as it transited through the Strait of Hormuz, where a fifth of all traded oil passes. Iran has made allegations in other seizures that later fell apart as it became clear Tehran was trying to leverage the capture as a chip to negotiate with foreign nations.

Chevron, based in San Ramon, California, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ship seizures and explosions have roiled the region since 2019. The incidents began after then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, which saw Tehran drastically limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The U.S. Navy also has blamed Iran for a series of limpet mine attacks on vessels that damaged tankers in 2019, as well as for a fatal drone attack on an Israeli-linked oil tanker that killed two European crew members in 2021. Tehran denies carrying out the attacks.

Who is Jason Palmer? A previously unknown Democrat beats Biden in American Samoa's Democratic caucus

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden was sweeping every Democratic contest on Super Tuesday — except for American Samoa.

He fell short there to a previously unknown candidate named Jason Palmer. Out of 91 ballots cast in the territory's caucus, Palmer won 51 and Biden won 40, according to the local party.

"I found out that I had won because my phone started blowing up with friends and campaign staffers texting me," Palmer said in an interview late Tuesday.

Palmer, 52, said he never visited the territory before the caucus.

"I have been campaigning remotely, doing Zoom town halls, talking to people, listening to them about their concerns and what matters to them," he said.

The outcome will hardly derail Biden's march toward his party's nomination. Only six delegates were at stake in the U.S. territory, a tiny collection of islands in the South Pacific with fewer than 50,000 residents. Palmer and Biden each earned three delegates from the race.

On the day before the caucus, Palmer posted on X that "Washington D.C. is long overdue for a president

who will be an advocate for American Samoa." His account includes pictures of young people holding homemade campaign signs.

Palmer is a Baltimore resident who has worked for various businesses and nonprofits, often on issues involving technology and education. He said voters want "someone who is more of the 21st century than Joe Biden" to serve as president.

According to campaign finance records, Palmer has loaned his campaign more than \$500,000 of his own money.

"You can't take the money with you when you die," he said. "But you can change the world while you're here."

Residents of U.S. territories vote in primaries but do not have representation in the Electoral College.

American Samoa has been the site of quixotic victories before. During the 2020 Democratic primaries, billionaire Michael Bloomberg's only win came in the territory.

The Latest | As conditions worsen for Palestinians in Gaza, international pressure grows for a deal

By The Associated Press undefined

Nearly five months of fighting has left much of Gaza in ruins and created a worsening humanitarian catastrophe, with many, especially in the devastated northern region, scrambling for food to survive while pressure grows internationally for Israel and Hamas to reach a deal.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent weeks trying to broker an agreement in which Hamas would release up to 40 hostages in return for a six-week cease-fire, the release of some Palestinian prisoners and an major influx of aid to the isolated territory. But the talks have so far failed to achieve a breakthrough.

"We must get more aid into Gaza," U.S. President Joe Biden said Tuesday. "There's no excuse. None."

Aid groups have said it has become nearly impossible to deliver supplies within most of Gaza because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, the ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas-led militants stormed across the border on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Over 100 hostages were released in November in exchange for 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The overall Palestinian death toll is more than 30,700, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures, but says women and children make up around two-thirds of the total casualties. It says over 72,000 people have been wounded.

Currently:

- The hostage crisis poses a dilemma for Israel and offers a path to victory for Hamas.
- Biden's allies are increasing pressure on the White House to act to ease Gaza suffering.
- A Mideast Starbucks franchisee is firing 2,000 workers after being targeted in an Israel-Hamas war boycott.
- A U.S. destroyer shoots down a missile and drones launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels.
- Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

PALESTINIAN DEATH TOLL TOPS 30,700 IN THE LATEST COUNT FROM GAZA'S HEALTH MINISTRY

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Gaza's Health Ministry says the Palestinian death toll from the Israel-Hamas war has climbed to 30,717. It said Wednesday that 86 bodies were brought to local hospitals in the last 24 hours, in addition to 113 wounded people.

The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government and maintains detailed casualty records. Its figures from previous wars have largely matched those of the United Nations, independent experts and even Israeli counts.

The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its tallies, but says women and

children make up around two-thirds of those killed. It says the real toll is higher as there are bodies buried in the rubble from Israeli airstrikes and in areas that paramedics cannot access. It says over 72,000 people have been wounded in the war.

Israel says it has killed over 10,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.

The war began after Hamas launched a surprise attack into Israel on Oct. 7, in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostage. Israel's offensive has driven some 80% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million from their homes and pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation.

ISRAELI ALLIES' PATIENCE IS RUNNING THIN, BRITISH FOREIGN SECRETARY SAYS

LONDON — British Foreign Secretary David Cameron says he will warn a member of Israel's War Cabinet that allies' patience is running thin over the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Cameron is due to meet Wednesday with Benny Gantz, who is stopping in London on the way back from a trip to Washington. Cameron told members of Parliament's House of Lords on Tuesday that people in Gaza "are dying of hunger" and Israel must let in more humanitarian aid.

"We've had a whole set of things we've asked the Israelis to do, but I have to report to the House that the amount of aid they got in in February was about half what they got in January," he said. "So patience needs to run very thin and a whole series of warnings need to be given, starting I hope with a meeting I have with minister Gantz when he visits the U.K."

Gantz, a rival to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is visiting Washington and London without the Israeli prime minister's approval.

Hostage crisis poses dilemma for Israel and offers a path to victory for Hamas

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

Over the last five months, Israel has killed thousands of Hamas fighters, destroyed dozens of their tunnels and wreaked unprecedented destruction on the Gaza Strip.

But it still faces a dilemma that was clear from the start of the war and will ultimately determine its outcome: It can either try to annihilate Hamas, which would mean almost certain death for the estimated 100 hostages still held in Gaza, or it can cut a deal that would allow the militants to claim a historic victory.

Either outcome would be excruciating for Israelis. Either would likely seal an ignominious end for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's long political career. And either might be seen as acceptable by Hamas, which valorizes martyrdom.

Netanyahu, at least in public, denies there is any such dilemma. He has vowed to destroy Hamas and recover all the hostages, either through rescue missions or cease-fire agreements, saying victory could come "in a matter of weeks."

As long as the war rages, he can avoid early elections that polls strongly suggest would remove him from power. But it seems inevitable that at some point a choice will have to be made between the hostages and military victory.

Hamas, meanwhile, appears to be in no hurry to reach a temporary cease-fire ahead of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which begins next week, or to delay an expected Israeli operation in Rafah, the southern city where half of Gaza's population has sought refuge.

Hamas leader Yehya Sinwar, the alleged mastermind of the Oct. 7 attack against Israel, has reason to believe that as long as he holds the hostages, he can eventually end the war on his terms.

SINWAR'S BLOODY GAMBLE

In over two decades spent inside Israeli prisons, Sinwar reportedly learned fluent Hebrew and studied Israeli society, and he identified a chink in the armor of his militarily superior adversary.

He learned that Israel cannot tolerate its people, especially soldiers, being held captive, and will go to extraordinary lengths to bring them home. Sinwar himself was among over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners

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released in exchange for a single captive soldier in 2011.

For Sinwar, the mass killings on Oct. 7 might have been a horrific sideshow to the main operation, which was to drag large numbers of hostages into a vast labyrinth of tunnels beneath Gaza, where Israel would be unable to rescue them, and where they could serve as human shields for Hamas leaders.

Once that was accomplished, he had a powerful bargaining chip that could be traded for large numbers of Palestinian prisoners, including top leaders serving life sentences, and an end to the Israeli onslaught that Hamas had anticipated.

No amount of 2,000-pound bombs could overcome the strategy's brutal logic.

Israeli officials say the tunnels stretch for hundreds of kilometers (miles) and some are several stories underground, guarded by blast doors and booby traps. Even if Israel locates Hamas leaders, any operation would mean almost certain death for the hostages that likely surround them.

"The objectives are quite contradictory," said Amos Harel, a longtime military correspondent for Israel's Haaretz newspaper. "Of course, you can say it will take a year to defeat Hamas, and we're moving ahead on that, but the problem is that nobody can ensure that the hostages will remain alive."

He added that even if Israel somehow kills Sinwar and other top leaders, others would move up the ranks and replace them, as has happened in the past.

"Israel will have a really hard time winning this," Harel said.

Israel has successfully rescued three hostages since the start of the war, all of whom were aboveground. Israeli troops killed three hostages by mistake, and Hamas says several others were killed in airstrikes or failed rescue operations. More than 100 hostages were released in a cease-fire deal in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Netanyahu says military pressure will eventually bring about the release of the roughly 100 hostages, and the remains of 30 others, still held by Hamas.

But in candid remarks in January, Gadi Eisenkot, Israel's former top general and a member of Netanyahu's War Cabinet, said anyone suggesting the remaining hostages could be freed without a cease-fire deal was spreading "illusions."

It's hard to imagine Hamas releasing its most valuable human shields for a temporary cease-fire, only to see Israel resume its attempt to annihilate the group, and Hamas has rejected the idea of its leaders surrendering and going into exile.

For Sinwar, it's better to stay underground with the hostages and see if his bet pays off.

HOW DOES THIS END?

Netanyahu's government is under mounting pressure from families of the hostages, who fear time is running out, and the wider public, which views the return of captives as a sacred obligation.

President Joe Biden, Israel's most important ally, is at risk of losing re-election in November, in part because of Democratic divisions over the war. The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has sparked worldwide outrage. The war threatens to ignite other fronts across the Middle East.

There's a Hamas proposal on the table in which the hostages come back alive.

It calls for the phased release of all of the captives in return for Israel's gradual withdrawal from Gaza, a long-term cease-fire and reconstruction. Israel would also release hundreds of prisoners, including top Palestinian political leaders and militants convicted of killing civilians.

Hamas would almost certainly remain in control of Gaza and might even hold victory parades. With time, it could recruit new fighters, rebuild tunnels and replenish its arsenals.

It would be an extremely costly victory, with over 30,000 Palestinians killed and the total destruction of much of Gaza. Palestinians would have different opinions on whether it was all worth it.

A rare wartime poll last year found rising support for Hamas, with over 40% of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza backing the group.

That support would only grow if Hamas succeeds in lifting the longstanding blockade on Gaza, said Tahani Mustafa, senior Palestine analyst at the Crisis Group, an international think tank.

"If this is able to bring some serious concessions that can make life just marginally better, then I think not only will this bolster support for Hamas, but it could also bolster support for armed resistance more

broadly.”

Netanyahu has rejected Hamas’ proposal as “delusional,” but there is no sign the militant group is backing away from its core demands.

Israel can keep fighting – for weeks, months or years. The army can kill more fighters and demolish more tunnels, while carefully avoiding areas where it thinks the hostages are held.

But at some point, Netanyahu or his successor will likely have to make one of the most agonizing decisions in the country’s history, or it will be made for them.

Biden and Trump dominate Super Tuesday races and move closer to a November rematch

By WILL WEISSERT, BILL BARROW and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump, romped through more than a dozen states on Super Tuesday, all but cementing a November rematch and increasing pressure on the former president’s last major rival, Nikki Haley, to leave the Republican race.

Their victories from coast to coast, including the delegate-rich states of California and Texas, left little doubt about the trajectory of the race. Haley won Vermont, denying Trump a full sweep, but the former president carried other states that might have been favorable to her such as Virginia, Massachusetts and Maine, which have large swaths of moderate voters like those who have backed her in previous primaries.

The only contest Biden lost Tuesday was the Democratic caucus in American Samoa, a tiny U.S. territory in the South Pacific Ocean. Biden was defeated by previously unknown candidate Jason Palmer, 51 votes to 40.

Not enough states will have voted until later this month for Trump or Biden to formally become their parties’ presumptive nominees. But the primary’s biggest day made their rematch a near-certainty. Both the 81-year-old Biden and the 77-year-old Trump continue to dominate their parties despite facing questions about age and neither having broad popularity across the general electorate.

Haley watched the election results in private and had no campaign events scheduled going forward. Her campaign said in a statement that the results reflected there were many Republicans “who are expressing deep concerns about Donald Trump.”

“Unity is not achieved by simply claiming ‘we’re united,’” spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas said.

Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate, meanwhile, was packed for a victory party. Among those attending were staff and supporters, including the rapper Forgiano Blow and former North Carolina Rep. Madison Cawthorn. The crowd erupted as Fox News, playing on screens around the ballroom, announced that the former president had won North Carolina’s GOP primary.

“They call it Super Tuesday for a reason,” Trump told a raucous crowd. He went on to attack Biden over the U.S.-Mexico border and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. After beginning the night with victories in Virginia and North Carolina, he wrapped Super Tuesday by winning contests in Alaska and Utah.

Biden didn’t give a speech but instead issued a statement warning that Tuesday’s results had left Americans with a clear choice and touting his own accomplishments after beating Trump.

“If Donald Trump returns to the White House, all of this progress is at risk,” Biden said. “He is driven by grievance and grift, focused on his own revenge and retribution, not the American people.”

While much of the focus was on the presidential race, there were also important down-ballot contests. The governor’s race took shape in North Carolina, where Republican Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson and Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein will face off in a state that both parties are fiercely contesting ahead of November.

In California, Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff and Republican Steve Garvey, a former Los Angeles Dodgers baseball player, advanced to the general election race to fill the Senate seat long held by Dianne Feinstein.

Despite Biden’s and Trump’s domination of their parties, polls make it clear that the broader electorate does not want this year’s general election to be identical to the 2020 race. A new AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll finds a majority of Americans don’t think either Biden or Trump has the neces-

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sary mental acuity for the job.

"Both of them failed, in my opinion, to unify this country," said Brian Hadley, 66, of Raleigh, North Carolina.

The final days before Tuesday demonstrated the unique nature of this year's campaign. Rather than barnstorming the states holding primaries, Biden and Trump held rival events last week along the U.S.-Mexico border, each seeking to gain an advantage in the increasingly fraught immigration debate.

After the Supreme Court ruled 9-0 on Monday to restore Trump to primary ballots following attempts to ban him for his role in helping spark the Capitol riot, Trump pointed to the 91 criminal counts against him to accuse Biden of weaponizing the courts.

"Fight your fight yourself," Trump said. "Don't use prosecutors and judges to go after your opponent."

Biden delivers the State of the Union address Thursday, then will campaign in the key swing states of Pennsylvania and Georgia.

The president faces low approval ratings and polls suggesting that many Americans, even a majority of Democrats, don't want to see the 81-year-old running again. His easy Michigan primary win last week was spoiled slightly by an "uncommitted" campaign organized by activists who disapprove of the president's handling of Israel's war in Gaza.

Allies of the "uncommitted" movement pushed similar protest votes elsewhere, such as in Minnesota, which has a significant population of Muslims, including in its Somali American community. At least 45,000 voters in Minnesota selected "uncommitted," which won 19% with almost all votes counted. That exceeds the 13% of voters who selected "uncommitted" in Michigan.

"Joe Biden has not done enough to earn my vote and not done enough to stop the war, stop the massacre," said Sarah Alfaham of the Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington.

Biden also is the oldest president ever and Republicans key on any verbal slip he makes. His aides insist that skeptical voters will come around once it is clear that either Trump or Biden will be elected again in November.

Trump is now the same age Biden was during the 2020 campaign, and he has exacerbated questions about his own fitness with recent flubs, such as mistakenly suggesting he was running against Barack Obama, who left the White House in 2017.

"I would love to see the next generation move up and take leadership roles," said Democrat Susan Steele, 71, who voted Tuesday for Biden in Portland, Maine.

Trump has already vanquished more than a dozen major Republican challengers and now faces only Haley, his former U.N. ambassador. She had maintained strong fundraising and notched her first primary victory over the weekend in Washington, D.C., a Democrat-run city with few registered Republicans. Trump scoffed that Haley had been "crowned queen of the swamp."

"We can do better than two 80-year-old candidates for president," Haley said at a rally Monday in the Houston suburbs.

Trump's victories, however dominating, have shown vulnerabilities with influential voter blocs, especially in college towns like Hanover, New Hampshire, home to Dartmouth College, or Ann Arbor, where the University of Michigan is located, as well as areas with high concentrations of independents. That includes Minnesota, a state Trump did not carry in his otherwise overwhelming Super Tuesday performance in 2016.

Seth De Penning, a self-described conservative-leaning independent, voted Tuesday morning in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, for Haley, he said, because the GOP "needs a course correction." De Penning, 40, called his choice a vote of conscience and said he has never voted for Trump because of concerns about his temperament and character.

Super Tuesday takeaways: Biden and Trump momentum can't be slowed, Haley's hopes get even dimmer

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The picture of the presidential race has hardly been cloudy for some time, even if it is one that most voters say they don't want to see.

On not-so-Super Tuesday, there were few surprises. It became ever clearer President Joe Biden was on a glidepath to the Democratic nomination that only some kind of personal catastrophe could alter. And his predecessor, Donald Trump — if he can navigate the 91 criminal charges against him and avoid any other calamity — is headed to a third Republican nomination, and a rematch against the president.

Enthusiasm for Biden was not the story of the day, with some Democrats even voting "uncommitted" rather than for the incumbent. For Trump, there were cautionary signs even with his string of victories over his principal challenger, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley.

Here are some key takeaways from Super Tuesday:

HALEY'S VANISHING RATIONALE

Haley won her first state of the primary season, Vermont, but that was no cause to talk about momentum. She continued her long streak of losing big to Trump in Republican primaries in every region of the country. Her lone other victory had come in last week's Washington, D.C., primary.

Tuesday's defeats continued to erode the rationale for her insurgent challenge. She fell short even in states like Virginia, where the electorate, rich in college-educated suburban voters, played to her strength.

That doesn't mean her campaign has not been impactful. She has repeatedly said that Trump cannot win a general election, in large part because he will have trouble winning over the kind of Republicans who supported her. In a close election, even a small move of voters away from Trump could flip a state and alter the outcome.

She also delivered the kind of stark personal attacks on Trump that could show up in Democratic ads against him in the fall, slamming him for an \$83 million judgment against him for defaming a woman who sued him for sexual assault, and warning that he could transform the Republican National Committee into his own "legal slush fund."

AS VERMONT GOES, SO GOES VERMONT

Vermont was once a stronghold of old-guard Republicanism, exclusively electing GOP candidates to statewide office for more than a century. But the state that handed Haley her only win on Super Tuesday long ago ceded that reputation.

Now Vermont, which last swung for a Republican in a presidential contest in 1988, is perhaps better known for progressive Sen. Bernie Sanders, the jam band Phish and a crunchy strain of back-to-earth lifestyle.

So, while Vermont handed Haley her first statewide victory, the state itself is decidedly not in step with Trump and the modern Republican Party.

THE BIDEN-TRUMP MIRROR PRIMARY

What has been obvious for weeks, is now beyond reasonable dispute: Biden and Trump are the overwhelming favorites to face each other in November.

They could not be more different in outlook but they seemed to be mirror images of each other during the primary season.

Trump wanted a coronation, but Haley made him fight at least somewhat to win the nomination. She's held onto a stubborn chunk of voters, a possible indication that part of the GOP isn't as enthusiastic about Trump as expected.

Biden, on the other hand, faces a lack of Democratic enthusiasm on paper, but not in the primary. Polls show problems for him among some of his party's core demographics, including younger and Black voters. But Biden, who hasn't faced any significant challengers, has won his primaries by huge margins.

The only possible sign of trouble for him Tuesday was an unusually high number of Democrats voting "uncommitted" in Minnesota in protest of the president's handling of the war in Gaza.

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It may be that one or both of these two politicians is more hobbled than it appears — but nonetheless they are the only options.

HOUSE RACES, PRIMARY PRIMACY

Super Tuesday is so vast that there were primaries for more than one-quarter of all seats in the House of Representatives — 115 of 438. But only eight of those seats are likely to be competitive in November.

That astonishing statistic comes from Michael Li, a redistricting expert at the Brennan Institute for Justice in New York. That means that most House candidates who won primaries Tuesday are guaranteed seats in Congress, just for securing the votes of the most motivated members of their parties.

That's one of the greatest causes of polarization in the United States. The number of competitive seats in the House has been shrinking steadily for decades. It reflects both partisan gerrymandering and also citizens sorting themselves into increasingly partisan enclaves.

Texas is an example of gerrymandering's role. In 2018 and 2020 it was home to several competitive House races as Democrats began to gain ground in the long-red state. So Republicans who controlled the statehouse simply redrew the lines to protect Republicans, lumping large groups of Democrats together. That meant the Democrats had safe seats but fewer than they normally would have because they couldn't threaten any GOP incumbents.

Regardless of the cause, it means that much of the battle for the House actually ended Tuesday night.

N.C. GOVERNOR'S RACE COULD ECHO BIDEN V. TRUMP

North Carolina Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson easily won the state's Republican gubernatorial primary. His incendiary rhetoric — he's called Hillary Clinton a "heifer" and Michelle Obama a man — ensures a hotly contested general election in the crucial swing state that could spill over into the presidential race.

Robinson had no prior experience in public office before his 2020 election — and it shows.

He blasted the action hero movie "Black Panther" in 2018 as a "satanic Marxist production" made by a "secular Jew," using a Yiddish slur for black people. He faced calls to resign in 2021 after likening gay and transgender people to "filth."

His brash style earned plaudits from Trump, who on Sunday called Robinson "better than Martin Luther King" while offering his "complete and total endorsement."

But it is also likely to motivate Democrats in the state to turn out in November to support state Attorney General Josh Stein — while raising oodles of advertising dollars to use Robinson's own words against him.

BIDEN & IOWA: 4th TIME'S THE CHARM

On his fourth try, Joe Biden finally won Iowa.

For decades, Biden had been rejected by its voters, from his first abortive run in the 1988 cycle to 2020, when he finished a distant fourth. In 2008, he won less than 1% of the caucus vote.

This time, Iowa wasn't first and it was a primary, not a caucus, and Biden won easily.

His victory Tuesday came only after he was already an incumbent president — and after the state had been stripped of its prized leadoff role and voted along with the masses.

Democrat Adam Schiff and Republican Steve Garvey set to compete for California Senate seat

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Republican former baseball star Steve Garvey and Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff will compete in November for the U.S. Senate seat long held by the late Dianne Feinstein.

It's a rare opportunity for the GOP to compete in a marquee statewide race in this Democratic stronghold.

The matchup also means that California won't have a woman in the Senate for the first time in more than three decades.

Garvey celebrated with cheering supporters at a hotel in Palm Desert, his hometown, where he warned Schiff not to underestimate him despite the state's Democratic tilt. He said he would run a campaign that would appeal across party lines, focusing on inflation, the state's unchecked homeless crisis and rising crime rates in cities.

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"They say in the general election that we're going to strike out," Garvey said. "Know this: It ain't over 'til it's over."

Schiff's victory party was marred by raucous protesters who shouted "Free Palestine" and "Cease-fire now," forcing the congressman to attempt to speak over them as they continued bellowing. Schiff took several pauses, and he appeared to hurry his remarks.

Schiff, who has been outspoken in support of Israel's right to defend itself, changed directions Tuesday and endorsed the Biden administration's call for a Gaza cease-fire as part of a broader agreement that would include the release of hostages. "My position is the same as the administration," Schiff said. The chaotic scene was a reminder that even in a strongly Democratic state, he will have to carefully navigate the continuing Israel-Hamas war.

Garvey, a former baseball MVP who played for the Los Angeles Dodgers and San Diego Padres, was one of the top two vote-getters in Tuesday's election along with Schiff.

California puts all candidates, regardless of party, on the same primary ballot and the two who get the most votes advance to the general election. That means Republicans are sometimes shut out of high profile statewide races given the grip Democrats hold on the state. The GOP has failed to advance a candidate to the general election in two of California's last three U.S. Senate races.

Still, Democrats are expected to easily hold the Senate seat in November, a relief for the party as it seeks to defend a narrow majority. A Republican hasn't won a Senate race in California since 1988.

But the campaign nonetheless represents a new era in California politics, which was long dominated by Feinstein and a handful of other veteran politicians.

Garvey and Schiff also advanced to the November ballot in the race to fill the remainder of Feinstein's term, following the general election. Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom appointed Laphonza Butler, a long-time Democratic organizer, to serve out Feinstein's term, and Butler chose not to seek election to the seat. The winner of the November election would serve a truncated term through early January, when the full, six-year term would begin.

The race is California's first open U.S. Senate contest since 2016. Even before Feinstein announced in early 2023 she would not seek reelection, many of the state's ambitious Democrats were eagerly awaiting their shot at the coveted seat.

Garvey's candidacy, buoyed by name recognition among older voters in particular, threw an unexpected twist into the race. The dynamic between Schiff and U.S. Rep. Katie Porter grew increasingly tense in the campaign's closing weeks as both vied for a general election spot.

The first-time candidate Garvey notched his spot on the fall ballot by positioning himself as an outsider running against entrenched Washington insiders who he blamed for rising grocery and gas prices, out-of-reach housing costs and an unchecked homeless crisis in cities.

He owes a debt of thanks to Schiff and supportive super political action committees, which ran millions of dollars in advertising spotlighting Garvey's conservative credentials, which indirectly boosted his visibility among Republican and right-leaning voters.

He enters the fall campaign a long shot to fill the seat.

The state Republican Party has been in a decades-long tailspin in heavily Democratic California, where a GOP candidate hasn't won a U.S. Senate race since 1988 and registered Democrats outnumber Republican voters by a staggering 2-to-1 margin. Republicans didn't even have a candidate on the general election ballot in the 2016 and 2018 Senate races.

Garvey is hoping to follow a pathway cut by other famous athletes-turned-politicians that includes former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a one-time bodybuilder and actor who became the last Republican to hold the state's top job, Utah Rep. Burgess Owens, a former NFL player, and former professional basketball great Bill Bradley, who became a long-serving U.S. senator in New Jersey.

He calls himself a "conservative moderate" and argues he should not be buttonholed into conventional labels, such as former President Donald Trump's Make America Great Again political movement.

Garvey has twice voted for Trump, who lost California in landslides but remains popular among GOP

voters, but he has said he hasn't made up his mind about this year's presidential contest. He personally opposes abortion rights but does not support a nationwide abortion ban and will "always uphold the voice of the people," alluding to the state's longstanding tilt in favor of abortion rights.

He also had to overcome the resurfacing of tawdry details about his private life, including having two children with women he wasn't married to, that had undercut the clean-cut public persona he cultivated in his Dodger days.

How Putin's crackdown on dissent became the hallmark of the Russian leader's 24 years in power

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — When charismatic opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was gunned down on a bridge near the Kremlin in February 2015, more than 50,000 Muscovites expressed their shock and outrage the next day at the brazen assassination. Police stood aside as they rallied and chanted anti-government slogans.

Nine years later, stunned and angry Russians streamed into the streets on the night of Feb. 16, when they heard that popular opposition politician Alexei Navalny had died in prison. But this time, those laying flowers at impromptu memorials in major cities were met by riot police, who arrested and dragged hundreds of them away.

In those intervening years, Vladimir Putin's Russia evolved from a country that tolerated some dissent to one that ruthlessly suppresses it. Arrests, trials and long prison terms — once rare — are commonplace, especially after Moscow invaded Ukraine.

Alongside its political opponents, the Kremlin now also targets rights groups, independent media and other members of civil-society organizations, LGBTQ+ activists and certain religious affiliations.

"Russia is no longer an authoritarian state — it is a totalitarian state," said Oleg Orlov, co-chair of Memorial, the Russian human rights group that tracks political prisoners. "All these repressions are aimed at suppressing any independent expression about Russia's political system, about the actions of the authorities, or any independent civil activists."

A month after making that comment to The Associated Press, the 70-year-old Orlov became one of his group's own statistics: He was handcuffed and hauled out of a courtroom after being convicted of criticizing the military over Ukraine and sentenced to 2½ years in prison.

Memorial estimates there are nearly 680 political prisoners in Russia. Another group, OVD-Info, said in November that 1,141 people are behind bars on politically motivated charges, with over 400 others receiving other punishment and nearly 300 more under investigation.

THE USSR VANISHES BUT REPRESSION RETURNS

There was a time after the collapse of the Soviet Union when it seemed Russia had turned a page and widespread repression was a thing of the past, said Orlov, a human rights advocate since the 1980s.

While there were isolated cases in the 1990s under President Boris Yeltsin, Orlov said major crackdowns began slowly after Putin came to power in 2000.

Exiled oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who spent 10 years in prison after challenging Putin, told AP in a recent interview the Kremlin began stifling dissent even before his 2003 arrest. It purged independent TV channel NTV and went after other defiant oligarchs like Vladimir Gusinsky or Boris Berezovsky.

Asked if he thought back then whether the crackdown would reach today's scale of hundreds of political prisoners and prosecutions, Khodorkovsky said: "I rather thought he (Putin) would snap earlier."

When Nadya Tolokonnikova and her fellow members of Pussy Riot were arrested in 2012 for performing an anti-Putin song in a main Orthodox cathedral in Moscow, their two-year prison sentence came as a shock, she recalled in an interview.

"Back then, it seemed an incredibly (long prison) term. I couldn't even imagine that I would ever get out," she said.

A RISING INTOLERANCE FOR DISSENT

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When Putin regained the presidency in 2012 after evading term limits by serving four years as prime minister, he was greeted by mass protests. He saw these as Western-inspired and wanted to nip them in the bud, said Tatiana Stanovaya of Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

Many were arrested, and over a dozen received up to four years in prison after those protests. But mostly, Stanovaya said, authorities were "creating conditions in which the opposition could not thrive," rather than dismantling it.

A flurry of laws followed that tightened regulations on protests, gave broad powers to authorities to block websites and surveil users online. They slapped the restrictive label of "foreign agent" on groups to weed out what the Kremlin saw as harmful outside influence fueling dissent.

Navalny in 2013-14 was convicted twice of embezzlement and fraud, but received suspended sentences. His brother was imprisoned in what was seen as a move to pressure the opposition leader.

Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 from Ukraine created a surge of patriotism and boosted Putin's popularity, emboldening the Kremlin. Authorities restricted foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations and rights groups, outlawing some as "undesirable," and targeted online critics with prosecutions, fines and occasionally jail.

In the meantime, the tolerance for protests grew thinner. Demonstrations spearheaded by Navalny in 2016-17 brought hundreds of arrests; mass rallies in summer 2019 saw another handful of demonstrators convicted and imprisoned.

The Kremlin used the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as an excuse to ban protests. To this day, authorities often refuse to allow rallies, citing "coronavirus restrictions."

After Navalny's poisoning, recuperation in Germany and arrest upon his return to Russia in 2021, repressions intensified. His entire political infrastructure was outlawed as extremist, exposing his allies and supporters to prosecution.

Open Russia, an opposition group backed from abroad by Khodorkovsky, also had to shut down, and its leader, Andrei Pivovarov, was arrested.

Orlov's group Memorial was shut down by the Supreme Court in 2021, the year before it won the Nobel Peace Prize as the hopeful symbol of a post-Soviet Russia. He recalled the disbelief about the court's ruling.

"We couldn't imagine all these next stages of the spiral, that the war would erupt, and all those laws about discrediting the army will be adopted," he said.

WAR AND REPRESSIVE NEW LAWS

With the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia enacted those repressive new laws that stifled any anti-war protests and criticism of the military. The number of arrests, criminal cases and trials mushroomed.

Charges varied — from donating money to rights groups helping Ukraine to involvement with Navalny's now "extremist" group.

Kremlin critics were imprisoned, and their prominence didn't seem to matter. Navalny eventually got 19 years, while another opposition foe, Vladimir Kara-Murza, got the harshest sentence of 25 years for treason.

Among those also swept up was a St. Petersburg artist got seven years for replacing supermarket price tags with anti-war slogans; two Moscow poets got five and seven years for reciting antiwar verses in public; and a 72-year-old woman got 5½ years for two social media posts against the war.

Activists say prison sentences have gotten longer, compared with those before the war. Increasingly, authorities have appealed convictions that resulted in lighter punishment. In Orlov's case, prosecutors sought a retrial of his earlier conviction that initially drew only a fine; he later was sentenced to prison.

Another trend is an increase in trials in absentia, said Damir Gainutdinov, head of the Net Freedoms rights group. It counted 243 criminal cases on charges of "spreading false information" about the military, and 88 of them were against people outside Russia — including 20 who were convicted in absentia.

Independent news sites were largely blocked. Many moved their newsrooms abroad, like the independent TV channel Dozhd or Novaya Gazeta, with their work available to Russians via VPNs.

At the same time, the Kremlin expanded a decade-long crackdown against Russia's LGBTQ+ community in what officials said was a fight for "traditional values" espoused by the Russian Orthodox Church in the

face of the West's "degrading" influence. Last year, declared the LGBTQ+ "movement" extremist and banned gender transitioning.

Pressure on religious groups continued, too, with hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses being prosecuted across Russia since 2017, when the denomination was declared extremist.

The system of oppression is designed "to keep people in fear," said Nikolay Petrov, visiting researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

It doesn't always work. Last week, thousands of people defied scores of riot police to mourn Navalny at his funeral in southeastern Moscow, chanting "No to war!" and "Russia without Putin!" — slogans that normally would result in arrests.

This time, police uncharacteristically did not interfere.

The Latest | Former Trump presidential campaign adviser advances in Texas

By The Associated Press undefined

The Super Tuesday primaries are the largest voting day of the year in the United States aside from the November general election.

Voters in 16 states and one territory are choosing presidential nominees. Some states are also deciding who should run for governor, senator or district attorneys.

Party primaries, caucuses or presidential preference votes are being held in Alabama, Alaska, American Samoa, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Virginia.

Find AP's full coverage of Super Tuesday 2024 at <https://apnews.com/hub/election-2024>.

Here's the latest:

Former Trump presidential campaign adviser advances in Texas

ROCKWALL, Texas — Katrina Pierson, a former Trump presidential campaign adviser, has advanced to a Republican primary runoff in Texas for a legislative seat in the Dallas suburbs.

Pierson's opponent in the runoff — set for May 28 — for the Texas House seat is Rep. Justin Holland, who was one of dozens of Republicans who voted last year to impeach Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Trump ally.

It's not the first time Pierson has run for office in Texas. She lost a run for Congress in 2014 before becoming a spokesperson for Trump's presidential campaign.

Why are Adam Schiff and Steve Garvey advancing twice for the same California seat?

WASHINGTON — Democratic U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff and Republican former baseball player Steve Garvey are headed for a November election in California to decide who will fill the U.S. Senate seat held for three decades by the late Dianne Feinstein. But it's not just one term.

The candidates are competing to serve out the remainder of Feinstein's term between the November election and the January inauguration of a new senator. But they're also running for her full six-year term.

The strange scenario came about because California Gov. Gavin Newsom appointed someone to the seat after Feinstein's death. Election rules require a special election to fill the last bit of that term.

Jason Palmer talks about his surprising win in American Samoa

WASHINGTON — Jason Palmer said he knows he's a longshot for the Democratic presidential nomination. "When I started this race, I knew there was a 99% chance that Joe Biden would win," he told The Associated Press.

But the 52-year-old Baltimore investor still managed to win four delegates in American Samoa on Super Tuesday, denying President Joe Biden a victory there.

Palmer was attending an education conference in Washington when the results came in.

"I found out that I had won because my phone started blowing up with friends and campaign staffers texting me," he said.

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Haley's campaign is 'honored' by the Super Tuesday support
CHARLESTON, S.C. — Nikki Haley's national campaign spokesperson Olivia Perez-Cubas said in a statement Tuesday that the Republican candidate was honored to be the first GOP woman to win two presidential primary contests.

"Today, in state after state, there remains a large block of Republican primary voters who are expressing deep concerns about Donald Trump," Perez-Cubas said. "That is not the unity our party needs for success."

Despite her win in Vermont on Tuesday and her primary win in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, Trump was notching more victories.

2 Democrats advance to runoff in Alabama's redrawn 2nd District

WASHINGTON — Two Democrats advanced to a primary runoff election in Alabama's newly-drawn 2nd Congressional District.

Anthony Daniels and Shomari Figures emerged from the crowded field Tuesday. The district is closely watched by Democrats as a potential pickup opportunity in the U.S. House.

Because no candidate garnered more than 50% of the vote, the race now advances a runoff between Daniels and Figures, which is set for April 16.

The new district was created after a federal court ordered Alabama redraw its congressional map to better represent Black voters, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court. The redrawn district includes parts of Montgomery and Mobile, as well as much of the region's "Black Belt," where a majority of the state's Black population resides.

Trump and Biden head toward 2024 rematch

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and his predecessor Donald Trump have all but cemented a November rematch, and it's increasing the pressure on Nikki Haley — Trump's last major rival — to exit the Republican race.

Biden and Trump each won Texas, Alabama, California, Colorado, Maine, Oklahoma, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Minnesota and Massachusetts. Biden also won the Democratic contests in Utah, Vermont and Iowa.

Haley won Vermont, but Trump carried other states that might have been favorable to her, such as Virginia and Maine. Those states have large swaths of moderate voters like those who have backed her in previous primaries.

Not enough states will have voted until later this month for Trump or Biden to formally become their parties' presumptive nominees.

Israel-Hamas war has some Democrats voting 'uncommitted' in protest of Biden

LITTLETON, Colo. — President Joe Biden still faces a protest vote as some people are casting their ballots on Tuesday for "uncommitted" because of his support of Israel.

U.S. Air Force veteran Keira Havens, 40, said she backed "uncommitted" over Biden's response to the conflict.

"This is the only tool I have to put pressure on them right now, I'm going to use it," Havens said.

Marcus Casillas, 29, said the argument from other Democrats to vote for Biden because former President Donald Trump would be less supportive of Palestinians isn't convincing.

"I firmly believe that in order for me to vote for someone, they need to earn the vote," Casillas said. "I want to have belief in what I'm doing when I make that choice."

Nikki Haley gets surprise win in Vermont's Republican presidential primary

WASHINGTON — Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley scored a surprise victory on Super Tuesday, upsetting Donald Trump to win Vermont.

However, that victory will do little to dent Trump's primary dominance. The former president won 11 other states on Super Tuesday.

Haley is the last major rival to Trump standing in a once-crowded primary field. She increasingly has stepped up her attacks on the former president, arguing he will lose in November to President Joe Biden if he clinches the party's nomination.

On the Democratic side, Biden also ran up the score with wins all around the country against only token

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primary opposition — all but cementing the long-expected November rematch between him and Trump.

Trump offers little celebration in victory speech at Mar-a-Lago

In a speech Tuesday evening at a victory party in Mar-a-Lago, former President Donald Trump condemned Joe Biden's handling of the economy, foreign policy and especially the U.S.-Mexico border.

But he offered little in the way of prescriptions during his 20-minute speech and instead ticked through moments in his administration, several of them more than five years ago.

"We're going to make America great again, greater than ever before," he said.

Biden's Super Tuesday focus is on Trump

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is choosing not to revel in his Super Tuesday nomination wins, instead releasing a statement telling Americans it is time to defend democracy.

"My message to the country is this," Biden said in a written statement from his campaign. "Every generation of Americans will face a moment when it has to defend democracy. Stand up for our personal freedom. Stand up for the right to vote and our civil rights. To every Democrat, Republican, and independent who believes in a free and fair America: This is our moment. This is our fight. Together, we will win."

Biden is casting Republican Donald Trump as someone willing to reverse his policies on taxes and improved affordability for prescription drugs. But, mostly, the written statement was an admonition to voters about Trump's time in office and that the former president cares about "revenge and retribution, not the American people."

Haley's campaign pushed to the brink after Super Tuesday trouncing

NEW YORK — Nikki Haley has suffered a string of significant losses Tuesday, and it's prompting allies to believe the end of her 2024 presidential campaign may be near.

Haley didn't make any public statements as officials counted ballots coast-to-coast late into the night. Privately, her team expected Republican rival Donald Trump to win almost every one of the evening's contests, despite their best efforts to stop him. Haley spent the night huddled with staff watching returns near her South Carolina home.

Trump is expected to win the necessary 1,215 delegates to become the GOP's presumptive nominee later this month.

Trump is getting primary wins, but criminal cases still loom large

WASHINGTON — The criminal charges against former President Donald Trump have done nothing to hurt his appeal with most Republican voters.

Trump is collecting wins that put him closer to the GOP nomination and a likely 2020 rematch against President Joe Biden. But he's still got an array of looming court cases, including one based on accusations he mishandled classified material and another on his false claims about winning the 2020 election. Jury selection in his New York hush-money trial will begin March 25.

AP VoteCast found that 74% of South Carolina primary voters said the criminal charges are a political attempt to undermine Trump. Still, a third of Republican voters in that state also said they think he did something illegal in at least one of the cases against him.

North Carolina governor nominees play up their differences in victory speeches

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Democratic and Republican nominees for North Carolina governor are playing up their differences in Tuesday speeches to supporters.

Josh Stein is the Democrat and the state's current attorney general. Mark Robinson, the state's Republican lieutenant governor, is a former factory worker who has the endorsement of Republican presidential frontrunner Donald Trump.

"Today we took an important first step, but we must be clear-eyed about the stakes of this election," Stein said in a victory speech to supporters in Raleigh. "We're at a crossroads," he said. He told supporters Robinson's vision for the state was "bleak and divisive."

Robinson described himself as an underdog.

"The differences could not be more clear," Robinson said at a Greensboro victory party. "I'm sure the people of North Carolina will make the right choice."

Utah voters planning for a GOP caucus with polite discourse and food

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BOUNTIFUL, Utah — As voters in other states across the Mountain West line up at the polls on Tuesday, Utah Republicans are doing things differently.

Thousands of voters are flooding into Millcreek Junior High School, one of 2,300 neighborhood caucus locations around the state where residents will debate the candidates as a group before casting votes in a preference poll. Voters are bringing plates of food to eat during the coming debates.

"We want to have good, strong political discourse tonight," said Lisa Fifield, the Bountiful, Utah, caucus director.

Utah's 40 delegates will be distributed proportionally between the candidates unless one receives over 50% of the vote, which would earn them all of the state's delegates.

Biden loses in American Samoa, a US territory in the South Pacific

WASHINGTON — Jason Palmer defeated President Joe Biden in American Samoa, a tiny U.S. territory in the South Pacific.

According to the local Democratic Party, Palmer won 51 votes and Biden won 40. There were only six delegates up for grabs there in a contest that requires nearly 2,000, but it's still a notable setback for an incumbent president. Palmer is a Baltimore-based investor.

This isn't the first time that American Samoa has turned up surprising results in a primary. During the 2020 Democratic race, it was the only contest won by billionaire Michael Bloomberg, the former New York City mayor.

Only elected challenger to Biden laughs off losses in states' Democratic primaries Tuesday

WASHINGTON — Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips, the only elected Democrat to challenge President Joe Biden in their party's primary, isn't coming close to winning anywhere on Tuesday — but he's trying not to let it get him down.

"Congratulations to Joe Biden, Uncommitted, Marianne Williamson, and Nikki Haley for demonstrating more appeal to Democratic Party loyalists than me," Phillips posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Phillips has remained in the race despite providing only token opposition to Biden and no real chance of challenging him nationally. His home state of Minnesota is among those holding a Democratic primary on Super Tuesday — but he isn't expected to win there, either.

Europe's Digital Markets Act is forcing tech giants to make changes. Here's what that will look like

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Europeans scrolling their phones and computers this week will get new choices for default browsers and search engines, where to download iPhone apps and how their personal online data is used.

They're part of changes required under the Digital Markets Act, a set of European Union regulations that six tech companies classed as "gatekeepers" — Amazon, Apple, Google parent Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft and TikTok owner ByteDance — will have to start following by midnight Wednesday.

The DMA is the latest in a series of regulations that Europe has passed as a global leader in reining in the dominance of large tech companies. Tech giants have responded by changing some of their long-held ways of doing business — such as Apple allowing people to install smartphone apps outside of its App Store.

The new rules have broad but vague goals of making digital markets "fairer" and "more contestable." They are kicking in as efforts around the world to crack down on the tech industry are picking up pace.

Here's a look at how the Digital Markets Act will work:

WHAT COMPANIES HAVE TO FOLLOW THE RULES?

Some 22 services, from operating systems to messenger apps and social media platforms, will be in the DMA's crosshairs.

They include Google services like Maps, YouTube, the Chrome browser and Android operating system, plus Amazon's Marketplace and Apple's Safari Browser and iOS.

Meta's Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp are included as well as Microsoft's Windows and LinkedIn.

The companies face the threat of hefty fines worth up to 20% of their annual global revenue for re-

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peated violations — which could amount to billions of dollars — or even a breakup of their businesses for “systematic infringements.”

WHAT EFFECT WILL THE RULES HAVE GLOBALLY?

The Digital Markets Act is a fresh milestone for the 27-nation European Union in its longstanding role as a worldwide trendsetter in clamping down on the tech industry.

The bloc has previously hit Google with whopping fines in antitrust cases, rolled out tough rules to clean up social media and is bringing in world-first artificial intelligence regulations.

Now, places like Japan, Britain, Mexico, South Korea, Australia, Brazil and India are drawing up their own versions of DMA-like rules aimed at preventing tech companies from dominating digital markets.

“We’re seeing copycats around the world already,” said Bill Echikson, senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, a Washington-based think tank. The DMA “will become the defacto standard” for digital regulation in the democratic world, he said.

Officials will be looking to Brussels for guidance, said Zach Meyers, assistant director at the Center for European Reform, a think tank in London.

“If it works, many Western countries will probably try to follow the DMA to avoid fragmentation and the risk of taking a different approach that fails,” he said.

HOW WILL DOWNLOADING APPS CHANGE?

In one of the biggest changes, Apple has said it will let European iPhone users download apps outside its App Store, which comes installed on its mobile devices.

The company has long resisted such a move, with a big chunk of its revenue coming from the 30% fee it charges for payments — such as for Disney+ subscriptions — made through iOS apps. Apple has warned that “sideloading” apps will come with added security risks.

Now, Apple is cutting those fees it collects from app developers in Europe that opt to stay within the company’s payment-processing system. But it’s adding a 50-euro cent fee for each iOS app installed through third-party app stores, which critics say will deter the many existing free apps — whose developers currently don’t pay any fee — from jumping ship.

“Why would they possibly opt into a world where they have to pay a 50 cent per-user fee?” said Avery Gardiner, Spotify’s global director of competition policy. “So those alternative app stores will never get traction, because they’ll be missing this huge chunk of apps that would need to be there in order for customers to find the store attractive.”

“That is utterly at odds with the very purpose of the DMA,” Gardiner added.

Brussels will be closely scrutinizing whether tech companies are complying.

EU competition chief Margrethe Vestager said this week that after 10 years on the job, “I have seen quite a number of antitrust cases and quite a lot of creativity built into how to work around the rules that we have.”

HOW WILL PEOPLE GET MORE OPTIONS ONLINE?

Consumers won’t be forced into default choices for key services.

Android users can pick which search engine to use by default, while iPhone users will get to choose which browser will be their go-to. Europeans will see choice screens on their devices. Microsoft, meanwhile, will stop forcing people to use its Edge browser.

The idea is to stop people from being nudged into using Apple’s Safari browser or Google’s Search app. But smaller players still worry that they might end up worse off than before.

Users might just stick with what they recognize because they don’t know anything about the other options, said Christian Kroll, CEO of Berlin-based search engine Ecosia.

Ecosia has been pushing for Apple and Google to include more information about rival services in the choice screens.

“If people don’t know what the alternatives are, it’s rather unlikely that many of them will select an alternative,” Kroll said. “I’m a big fan of the DMA. I am not sure yet if it will have the results that we’re hoping for.”

HOW WILL INTERNET SEARCHES CHANGE?

Some Google search results will show up differently, because the DMA bans companies from giving preference to their own services.

So, for example, searches for hotels will now display an extra "carousel" of booking sites like Expedia. Meanwhile, the Google Flights button on the search result display will be removed and the site will be listed among the blue links on search result pages.

Users also will have options to stop being profiled for targeted advertising based on their online activity.

Google users are getting the choice to stop data from being shared across the company's services to help better target them with ads.

Meta is allowing users to separate their Facebook and Instagram accounts so their personal information can't be combined for ad targeting.

The DMA also requires messaging systems to be able to work with each other. Meta, which owns the only two chat apps that fall under the rules, is expected to come up with a proposal on how Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp users can exchange text messages, videos and images.

Getting food delivered in New York is simple. For the workers who do it, getting paid is not

By CEDAR ATTANASIO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New Yorkers place over 100 million food delivery orders each year via a very simple process: press a few buttons on an app and it's in their hands in about 30 minutes.

For the delivery workers, the process is anything but simple. And it has only become more complex since the city instituted a new wage formula designed to guarantee they make at least \$18 an hour. Some of the biggest app platforms, who opposed the change, responded by limiting workers' hours, making it more difficult for customers to tip, and changing how pay is calculated from week to week.

That's left workers like Greiber Pineda scrambling to navigate opaque changes.

Pineda initially earned so much from Uber Eats under the new wage system that when a snowstorm hit New York City in January, he was motivated to work 11 1/2 hours straight, shuttling 37 meals on his moped "through the cold, the snow, everything." A few days later, the app changed its pay system — sending him around \$200 instead of the \$300 he expected.

"When we got paid we were up in the air, like 'What happened here?'" Pineda, of Brooklyn, said in Spanish.

Frustrated, Pineda now spends more time on side hustles. On a recent weekday morning, he sold coffee and arepas to fellow delivery workers from Venezuela and Colombia outside a Chick-fil-A across the road from Brooklyn's Barclays Center arena. Nearby, two workers from Guinea changed the oil on a scooter while others from Latin America, China and Turkmenistan picked up orders for apps like Uber Eats, Grubhub and DoorDash. The city estimates that, like Pineda, 39% of delivery workers speak English "less than well."

A few months ago, none of these workers were earning an hourly wage. Like most food delivery drivers across the U.S., they instead logged into the apps when they wanted and earned money by accepting individual delivery jobs. Some jobs made financial sense. Others might not even cover the cost of gas, but many workers said "yes" as often as possible to earn priority access to premium orders or other perks on the gamified apps.

That's no longer the case in New York, which became the first major city to institute a wage floor for app-based food delivery workers on Dec. 4. Seattle followed in January with a similar law that extends to nearly all app-mediated work.

Before the change, New York City surveyed its estimated 122,000 delivery workers, finding they earned \$14 an hour on average. Half of that came from tips and around \$2 went to equipment and maintenance, mostly for e-bikes and mopeds.

Exposed to deadly traffic and violent attacks, they were working a dangerous job, but weren't even making the city's minimum wage, which rose from \$15 to \$16 this year.

"This is one of the ways, one of the few ways that an immigrant can get by, at least in this city, which is pricey," said Pineda.

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While some workers say they're earning less under the new rules, labor organizers and the app companies say average earnings have increased. But the apps are still cutting costs and have the advantage of seeing their workers' data as they figure out how to do that.

"Delivery companies are still undermining or trying to undermine the minimum pay victory by being less transparent," said Ligia Gullalpa, executive director of the Workers Justice Project.

None of the major app companies operating in New York City responded to a request for detailed pay statistics. They defended reducing worker hours as key to reducing downtime, in line with the law's incentives.

"Seattle & New York City failed to think about the negative impacts of their actions," Uber Eats spokesperson Josh Gold said in an email, adding that he believes there are better options to protect worker flexibility, such as a California law that recategorized gig workers as independent contractors.

DoorDash spokesperson Eli Scheinholtz in a statement called the laws in both cities "extreme," adding that "the end result has been the same: higher fees for consumers, fewer orders for merchants, and less work for Dashers."

When the law took effect in New York, both apps announced that customers in the city could no longer add a tip during checkout — instead making it available only after a driver had been assigned in DoorDash's case, or after the food was delivered for Uber Eats. Apps also tacked on additional fees for New York City customers, starting around \$2. Fees to restaurants are capped at 23% of the purchase price.

New York City's rule allows apps to either pay around \$30 an hour on average for the "active time" workers spend delivering orders, or \$18 an hour on average for the entire time they are logged in, including "passive time" spent waiting for a job. The apps don't have to pay workers who don't do any deliveries. Companies can also decide retroactively which of the two calculations they'll use, so delivery workers never know exactly what they're being paid for until up to a week later.

The switch is likely how Pineda ended up with lower pay after the January storm according to pay stubs and notices shared with The Associated Press by him and others.

Seattle's system only counts active time, paid at a minimum of 44 cents per minute, plus 74 cents per mile. In New York City, there's no mileage paid.

"People depend on you to bring them their food," said Daniel Mendoza, a delivery worker who gets coffee and breakfast from Pineda, and is also from Venezuela. "We make magic."

Mendoza said in February that the new system had been more lucrative for him.

But on March 4, DoorDash made the same switch that Uber Eats did that had so angered Pineda. It's impossible to say if Mendoza's pay will go up or down, but it will become less predictable.

In a statement, DoorDash said that the payment method it had used since December was unsustainable and that workers like Mendoza "can also qualify for additional weekly pay adjustments."

GrubHub spokesperson Najj Kamal said in a statement that delivery workers are earning more overall in both New York and Seattle, and the company is committed to complying with the new pay standards.

Meanwhile, Pineda continues to make money the old-fashioned way. As he served the delivery workers near the Chick-fil-A recently, a worker from the fast-food chain poked his head out of the door, and yelled, asking what kind of arepas he had. Beef, Pineda's girlfriend shouted back.

"I'll take two," he said, waiting for her to deliver them to him — in exchange for some paper money.

Gaza cease-fire talks fail to achieve a breakthrough with Ramadan just days away, Egypt says

By SAMY MAGDY, TIA GOLDENBERG and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Three days of negotiations with Hamas over a cease-fire in Gaza and the release of Israeli hostages failed to achieve a breakthrough Tuesday, Egyptian officials said, less than a week before the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the informal deadline for a deal.

The nearly five months of fighting left much of Gaza in ruins and created a worsening humanitarian

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catastrophe, with many, especially in the devastated northern region, scrambling for food to survive.

"We must get more aid into Gaza," U.S. President Joe Biden said Tuesday. "There's no excuse. None."

Aid groups have said it has become nearly impossible to deliver supplies within most of Gaza because of the difficulty of coordinating with the Israeli military, the ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of public order.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent weeks trying to broker an agreement in which Hamas would release up to 40 hostages in return for a six-week cease-fire, the release of some Palestinian prisoners and an major influx of aid to the isolated territory.

Two Egyptian officials said that the latest round of discussions ended on Tuesday. They said Hamas presented a proposal that mediators would discuss with Israel in the coming days. One of the officials said that mediators would meet Wednesday with the Hamas delegation, which didn't leave Cairo.

Hamas has refused to release all of the estimated 100 hostages it holds, and the remains of around 30 more, unless Israel ends its offensive, withdraws from Gaza and releases a large number of Palestinian prisoners, including senior militants serving life sentences.

U.S. officials have said that they are skeptical that Hamas actually wants a deal, because the group has balked at a number of what the U.S. and others believe are legitimate requests, including giving the names of hostages to be released.

"It is on Hamas to make decisions about whether it is prepared to engage," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday.

"We have an opportunity for an immediate cease-fire that can bring hostages home, that can dramatically increase the amount of humanitarian aid getting in to Palestinians who so desperately need it, and can set the conditions for an enduring resolution," Blinken said.

Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said Tuesday that his group demands a permanent cease-fire, rather than a six-week pause, and a "complete withdrawal" of Israeli forces.

"The security and safety of our people will be achieved only by a permanent cease-fire, the end of the aggression and the withdrawal from every inch of the Gaza Strip," Hamdan told reporters in Beirut.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has publicly rejected Hamas' demands and repeatedly vowed to continue the war until Hamas is dismantled and all the hostages are returned. Israel didn't send a delegation to the latest round of talks.

Israel was still waiting for Hamas to hand over a list of hostages who are alive as well as the hostage-to-prisoner ratio it seeks in any release deal, an Israeli official said. It wasn't clear if that information was included in the latest proposal.

The Israeli and Egyptian officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to brief the media on the negotiations.

When asked whether Hamas has a list of the surviving hostages, Hamdan said that the matter wasn't relevant to the talks and accused Israel of using it as an excuse to avoid engaging in the negotiations.

Benny Gantz, a member of Netanyahu's War Cabinet and his main political rival, met with senior U.S. officials in Washington on a visit that drew a rebuke from the prime minister, the latest sign of a growing rift within Israel's leadership.

Mediators had hoped to broker an agreement before Ramadan, the month of dawn-to-dusk fasting that often sees heightened Israeli-Palestinian tensions linked to access to a major holy site in Jerusalem. Ramadan is expected to begin around March 10, depending on the sighting of the moon.

"The negotiations are sensitive. I can't say there is optimism or pessimism, but we haven't yet reached a point at which we can achieve a cease-fire," Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said Monday.

The war began with a Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages. More than 100 of them were released during a week-long cease-fire in November.

The attack sparked an Israeli invasion of the enclave of 2.3 million people that Gaza's Health Ministry says has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians. Aid groups say the fighting has displaced most of the ter-

ritory's population and pushed a quarter of the population to the brink of famine.

The U.N. children's agency said Monday that at least 10 children have reportedly died in isolated northern Gaza because of dehydration and malnutrition.

"There are likely more children fighting for their lives somewhere in one of Gaza's few remaining hospitals, and likely even more children in the north unable to obtain care at all," Adele Khodr, the UNICEF regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said in a statement.

"These tragic and horrific deaths are man-made, predictable and entirely preventable," she added.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Sunday that 15 children have starved to death at the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza and another six were at risk of dying from malnutrition and dehydration. It wasn't clear if the children had underlying medical conditions that increased their vulnerability.

Northern Gaza, the first target of Israel's offensive, has suffered mass devastation. The World Food Program recently suspended aid shipments to the north, citing a security breakdown. An attempt by the Israeli military to bring in aid ended in tragedy last week when more than 100 Palestinians were fatally shot by Israeli forces or trampled to death in a melee.

The United States and Jordan airdropped 36,800 meals over northern Gaza on Tuesday, the second U.S. airdrop since Saturday.

Up to 300,000 Palestinians are believed to remain in northern Gaza after Israel ordered the evacuation of the entire region, including Gaza City, in October. Many have been reduced to eating animal fodder to survive. The U.N. says that one in six children under age 2 in the north suffer from acute malnutrition.

Israel is still carrying out strikes in all parts of Gaza. Gaza's Health Ministry said that 97 people had been killed over the last 24 hours, bringing the overall Palestinian death toll to 30,631. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its figures, but says women and children make up around two-thirds of the total casualties.

King Charles' diagnosis throws UK's long cancer treatment waiting times into sharp relief

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — For Anna Gittins, three months would have spelled the difference between life and death.

The elementary school principal from Hereford in western England was shocked when she found out she had advanced colorectal cancer in 2022. But when she contacted her local hospital, she was told no one would be able to see her for three months "due to high demand and low capacity of senior doctors."

"I've just been diagnosed with stage 4 bowel cancer, metastasized to my liver. I don't have three months to wait," she said, using another term for colorectal cancer. She was just 46.

Gittins had access to private health care and has since undergone surgery and chemotherapy. "I consider myself so lucky, but there are so many people who will die needlessly when more prompt treatment would help them," she said. "And that's not fair. Not in a country like ours."

Gittins is among thousands of people with cancer let down by Britain's National Health Service, a once-revered institution now widely seen to be in acute crisis due to years of underfunding and staff shortages.

Waiting times to diagnose and treat cancer across the U.K. have worsened in recent years and are near record highs — and experts say too many cancers are diagnosed too late. Experts warn the burden of cancer will grow as the country's population ages.

Palace officials' recent announcement that King Charles III has been diagnosed with cancer has highlighted the issue. Officials didn't say what form of cancer Charles has, only that it was discovered during a recent corrective procedure for an enlarged prostate.

The 76-year-old monarch's decision to openly share his cancer diagnosis was widely praised, and experts said it was a powerful reminder that cancer affects 1 in 2 people in the U.K. The news triggered a "King Charles effect" — immediately boosting visits to cancer information and support websites nationwide.

But many couldn't help compare the swift treatment Charles received, days after he was diagnosed, with how ordinary Britons fare at public hospitals.

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Public health officials aim for 75% of patients with suspected cancer to receive a diagnosis within four weeks of a doctor's urgent referral. They also say 85% of cancer patients should wait less than two months for their first cancer treatment.

But the last time all such waiting time targets were met in England was in 2015, experts say, and the delays are even worse in poorer parts of the country like Northern Ireland.

One in three patients in the U.K. are waiting more than two months to start treatment after an urgent referral for cancer assessment, according to the independent think tank Nuffield Trust. In total, 225,000 people have waited too long since 2020, Radiotherapy U.K. says.

Survival for common cancers in the U.K. consistently lags behind countries with similar universal health care systems and per capita spending on public health, a recent report by the charity Cancer Research U.K. found.

Apart from longer waits, people with cancer in the U.K. also received less chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment than countries such as Canada, Australia, Denmark and Norway, another study by the charity said.

"It's quite worrying that we treat less in the U.K. than in comparable countries. For lung cancer, for example, 28% of patients get chemo in the U.K. In Norway it's 45%," said Naser Turabi, director of evidence and implementation at Cancer Research U.K.

Turabi pointed to lack of investment in both equipment and specialist staff in the past 15 years, resulting in the U.K. ranking near the bottom among 36 developed countries for its number of CT and MRI scanners.

"We know we have an aging population, but there's no specific commitment from the government to meet the demand that we know is coming," he said. "We can't even provide online bookings for screening appointments. The digital infrastructure is 20 years out of date."

Kathy McAllister, a cancer survivor, is so frustrated with the NHS inefficiencies that she has retrained as a cancer awareness campaigner.

The former marketing director from Belfast, Northern Ireland, said she waited at least two months to start treatment after she was diagnosed with late-stage colorectal cancer in 2019. She added that she only managed to secure a follow-up scan after treatment because she persisted in chasing it down with hospital bosses.

"It's just a wait at every stage," said McAllister, 53. "You expect cancer should be such a priority, that once you see a doctor they're going to put arms around you, you're going to be looked after, but you're not. You're just another number because they're so overwhelmed."

Cancer care isn't the only part of the NHS that's in crisis. Millions struggle to book appointments with their general practitioners or dentists, hospital emergency departments are regularly overwhelmed, and record numbers of people are stuck on waiting lists for routine treatments.

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation, but the NHS — a huge institution employing more than 1 million people — has long struggled to cope as public funding shrinks and life expectancy grows. Many blame the crisis on the austerity policies of successive Conservative governments, which have cut budgets in health, social welfare and education during 14 years in power.

Asked about the delays in cancer care, NHS England said more people than ever are being diagnosed at an early stage of cancer and more treatment options are available. Over the past year, nearly 3 million people received potentially lifesaving cancer checks, compared to 1.6 million a decade ago, it said in a statement.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who has made cutting waiting times a key priority, has blamed an unprecedented series of doctors' and nurses' strikes for the lack of progress.

Tens of thousands of doctors have walked off their jobs multiple times since late 2022 to protest deteriorating conditions and demand better pay, which unions say does not keep pace with surging inflation. Last month junior doctors staged a strike for six days, the longest such disruption in NHS history.

McAllister, the cancer survivor, wants cancer care to be a focal point ahead of Britain's general election, expected to take place this year. She's calling on the government to draw up a cancer plan and devote as much focus and urgency to cancer as they did to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's just shocking every time cancer waiting times come out they get almost ignored. We've become

a bit numb to those statistics," she said. "We need people to stand up and say, 'It isn't good enough.'"

MH370 disappeared a decade ago. Here's what we know about one of aviation's biggest mysteries

By EILEEN NG Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — A decade ago on March 8, a Malaysia Airlines flight vanished without a trace, becoming one of aviation's biggest mysteries.

Investigators still do not know exactly what happened to the plane and its 239 passengers. But Malaysia's government said Sunday it may renew the hunt for MH370 after an American marine robotics company that tried to find the plane in 2018 proposed a fresh search.

A massive multinational search in the southern Indian Ocean, where the jet is believed to have crashed, found nothing. Apart from some small fragments that later washed ashore, no bodies or wreckage have ever been found.

Here's what we know about the deadly aviation tragedy.

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT MH370'S DISAPPEARANCE?

The Boeing 777 plane disappeared from air control radar 39 minutes after leaving Kuala Lumpur en route to Beijing on March 8, 2014.

The pilot sent a last radio call to Kuala Lumpur before leaving Malaysia — "Good Night Malaysian Three Seven Zero" — but failed to check in with air traffic controllers in Ho Chi Minh City when the plane crossed into Vietnam's airspace.

Minutes later, the plane's transponder — a communication system that transmits the plane's location to air traffic control — shut down. Military radar saw the plane turn around to travel over the Andaman Sea before it vanished, and satellite data showed it continued to fly for hours, possibly until it ran out of fuel. The plane is believed to have crashed in a remote part of the southern Indian Ocean.

Theories about what happened on board range from hijacking to a loss of oxygen in the cabin to power failure. But there was no distress call, no ransom demand, nor bad weather or evidence of technical failures. Malaysian safety investigators cleared all on board in a 2018 report, but didn't rule out "unlawful interference."

Malaysia's government has said that someone intentionally severed communications with the ground and diverted the plane.

WHO WAS ON THE PLANE?

The plane carried 227 passengers, including five young children, as well as 12 crew members. Most of those aboard were from China, but there were also people from other countries, including the United States, Indonesia, France and Russia.

The passengers included two young Iranian men using stolen passports to seek a new life in Europe; a group of Chinese calligraphy artists returning from an exhibition of their work; 20 employees of U.S. tech firm Freescale Semiconductor; a stunt double for actor Jet Li; families with young children; and a Malaysian couple on a long-delayed honeymoon. Many families lost multiple members in the tragedy.

WHAT EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO FIND THE PLANE?

Dozens of ships and aircraft from various countries began the search between Malaysia and Vietnam in the South China Sea, before moving to the Andaman Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Australia, alongside Malaysia and China, then led the largest and most expensive underwater search ever undertaken, covering some 120,000 square kilometers (46,000 square miles) of seabed off western Australia, using aircraft, vessels equipped to pick up sonar signals, and robotic submarines.

Search vessels detected ultrasonic signals that might have been from the plane's black box and shipwrecks believed to be 19th century merchant vessels, but never found the plane. In July 2015, a fragment later confirmed to be a flaperon from Flight 370 was found on France's Reunion Island in the western Indian Ocean, the first hard evidence that MH370 ended its flight in the Indian Ocean. Several more pieces of debris were later found washed ashore on the east coast of Africa. The search was suspended in January 2017.

U.S. marine robotics company Ocean Infinity picked up the search in January 2018 under a “no find, no fee” contract with Malaysia, focusing on an area north of the earlier search identified by a debris drift study. But it ended a few months later without success.

WHY IS THE SEARCH SO HARD?

One reason why such an extensive search fail to turn up clues is that no one knows exactly where to look. The Indian Ocean is the world’s third largest, and the search was conducted in a difficult area, where searchers encountered bad weather and average depths of around 4 kilometers (2.5 miles).

It’s not common for planes to disappear in the deep sea, but when they do remains can be very hard to locate. Over the past 50 years, dozens of planes have vanished, according to the Aviation Safety Network.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Malaysia’s government has consistently said it will only resume the hunt if there is credible new evidence. It is now considering an Ocean Infinity proposal for a fresh search with new technology, although it is unclear if the company has new evidence of the plane’s location.

Many families who lost people in the disappearance remain steadfast in their quest for answers. They argue the mystery must be resolved, not just for personal closure but also to prevent future disasters.

The disaster has also helped to bolster aviation safety. Starting in 2025, the International Civil Aviation Organization will mandate that jets carry a device that will broadcast their position every minute if they encounter trouble, to allow authorities to locate the plane if a disaster occurs. The devices will be triggered automatically and can’t be manually turned off. But the rule applies only to new jets — not the thousands of older planes still in service.

Haitian PM arrives in Puerto Rico after long absence as he struggles to get home to quell violence

By EVENS SANON, JOSHUA GOODMAN and DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti’s prime minister landed in Puerto Rico on Tuesday, answering a key question on the minds of all Haitians ever since armed gangs plunged the long-suffering Caribbean nation into near anarchy: Where in the world is he?

The embattled Ariel Henry, who assumed power following the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, has been notably absent since the country’s latest and most serious outbreak of violence started last week. Henry has stayed silent as he crisscrosses the world, from South America to Africa, with no announced date of return.

Meanwhile, armed groups have seized on the power void, exchanging gunfire with police at Haiti’s main international airport on Monday and instigating a mass escape from the country’s two biggest prisons.

Even a decree declaring a state of emergency and curfew to restore order lacked Henry’s imprint. It was signed by his finance minister, who is serving as acting prime minister.

“It’s the million-dollar question,” said Jake Johnston, a research associate at the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research. “The fact that he hasn’t even opened his mouth since the violence began has stoked all sorts of speculation.”

By Tuesday afternoon, the mystery seemed to ease after officials said Henry landed in Puerto Rico. He arrived late in the afternoon to San Juan on a chartered flight that originated in New Jersey. Tracking data showed the flight was heading toward Dominican Republic, which shares with Haiti the island of Hispaniola, but circled mid-flight before diverting to Puerto Rico.

Hours before he arrived in Puerto Rico, the Dominican government announced that it was immediately suspending all air traffic with Haiti.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Chérizier, a former elite police officer who leads a federation of gangs that has claimed responsibility for the attacks, repeated Tuesday his goal of blocking Henry’s return and forcing his resignation.

“Our goal is to break the system,” Chérizier, who fashions himself a Robin Hood crusader and goes by the name of Barbecue, told journalists at an impromptu news conference in a slum in the Haitian capital

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of Port-au-Prince. The gang leader was surrounded by men in ski masks carrying heavy assault rifles.

"We are fighting against Ariel with the last drop of our blood," he said.

Gangs opened fired on police late Monday outside the Toussaint Louverture International Airport in Port-au-Prince, where Henry would likely land should he return home.

An armored truck could be seen on the tarmac shooting at gangs trying to enter the airport as scores of employees and other workers fled from whizzing bullets. The airport was closed when the attack occurred, with no planes operating and no passengers on site. It remained closed Tuesday.

Schools and banks were also closed Tuesday, and public transport ground to a standstill.

"Haiti is now under the control of the gangs. The government isn't present," said Michel St-Louis, 40, standing in front of a burned-down police station in the capital. "I'm hoping they can keep Henry out so whoever takes power can restore order."

While Haiti's problems run deep and defy any quick fix, Henry himself is increasingly unpopular. His inability to govern effectively has stoked calls for him to step aside that the gangs are also embracing, if only to advance their own criminal interests, Johnston said.

Henry was last seen Friday in Kenya on a mission to salvage a multinational security force the east African nation was set to lead under the auspices of the United Nations. He left Haiti more than a week ago to attend a meeting of Caribbean leaders in Guyana, where a deadline was announced — by others, not Henry — to delay repeatedly postponed elections yet again. The balloting was pushed back to mid-2025.

That announcement is what appears to have triggered the latest explosion of violence. It began with a direct challenge from Chérizier, who said he would target government ministers in an effort to prevent Henry's return and force his resignation.

He appeared to make good on that threat over the next few days as gangs launched attacks on the central bank, the airport, even the national soccer stadium. The culmination of the coordinated offensive came over the weekend when a jailbreak at the National Penitentiary and another prison released onto the streets of the capital more than 5,000 inmates, many of whom had been serving time for murder, kidnapping and other violent crimes.

The prime minister's office did not respond to repeated requests for comment, nor has it said when Henry expects to return.

A soft-spoken neurosurgeon, Henry positions himself as a transitional figure and peacemaker who has the backing of the U.S. government — long Haiti's dominant foreign ally and the key to any stabilization effort.

But the Biden administration's support has not translated into popularity at home, where Henry is reviled. Since he took power more than two years ago, the economy has been in free fall, food prices have skyrocketed and gang violence has surged.

Last year, more than 8,400 people were reported killed, injured or kidnapped, more than double the number reported in 2022. The U.N. estimates that nearly half of Haiti's 11 million people need humanitarian assistance, but this year's humanitarian appeal for \$674 million has received just \$17 million — about 2.5% of what's needed.

Additionally, Henry has been unable to bring Haiti's disparate political actors into an agreement on general elections, which have not been held since 2015.

The recent surge in violence has renewed pressure on the U.S. and other foreign powers to quickly deploy a security force to prevent further bloodshed. The Biden administration has pledged funding and logistical support for any multinational force but has steadfastly refused to commit U.S. troops.

Dan Foote, who as the Biden envoy opposed calls for any American boots on the ground in Haiti, said a U.S.-led military intervention can no longer be avoided.

"It's an absolute necessity now," Foote said in an interview. "We've let this slide from worse to worst, all the while abdicating our responsibility to others. But nobody can argue that Haiti isn't a failed state when the penitentiary gets emptied out."

Kirby gave no indication the Biden administration was reconsidering its refusal to deploy troops.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said he was unaware of any discussion of a "formal U.N. peacekeeping mission" separate from the multinational security force the U.N. Security Council endorsed last year.

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That force would involve 1,000 mostly Kenyan police officers instead of U.N. blue helmet peacekeepers. While elections remain the best way to stabilize the country once the security is restored, the U.S. will have to abandon its support for Henry for an intervention to succeed, he said. "Any elections administered by Henry won't be accepted by the Haitian people," he said. "If not for our backing, Haitians would've thrown Henry out long ago."

Economic plans, Taiwan and other things to know from the opening of China's legislature

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China's Premier Li Qiang promoted an image of confidence as he announced modest economic growth goals for the world's second largest economy, at one of the country's most important political gatherings.

Li addressed a few thousand delegates of the country's rubber-stamp legislature, the National People's Congress, which met in Beijing.

It's a time when the government reviews the work of the past year, and crucially reveals targets and goals for the coming year, especially in its approach to its economy, military budget and Chinese society. Here are some key takeaways from Li's address Tuesday.

STABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

The government's overall approach to the economy will not change, as the goals by the government for 2024 signal that they want to stabilize growth. Li announced that the GDP growth target was 5% this year — a modest target that is still going to be difficult. China is grappling with an economic slowdown and a real estate market in crisis after a crackdown on excess borrowing led to a liquidity crisis among developers.

"This year's targets are virtually the same as last year, reflecting policy stasis in Beijing as the central leadership delays any significant economic policy decisions until the Third Plenum later in the year," said Neil Thomas, a fellow on Chinese Politics at the Asia Society.

TOUGHER LANGUAGE ON TAIWAN

Li's report had stronger language on Taiwan, a self-ruled island that China considers its own.

Missing from this year's report was the word "peace." Last year, the premier had called for "advanc(ing) the process of China's peaceful reunification." This year, Li said they will "be firm in advancing the cause of China's reunification."

Overall, the language this year was tougher, said Arthur Zhin-Sheng Wang, a professor at Taiwan's Central Police University who's an expert on cross-Straits relations.

Dropping the word "peace" combined with the phrase "resolutely opposing Taiwan independence," is what signals a stronger stance, Wang said. Last year, the work report had more language about promoting the prosperity of both sides as well, while this year only had a brief nod.

Taiwan held presidential elections in January and elected Lai Ching-te to be its next president, giving the Democratic Progressive Party a third term. The party's platform maintains that Taiwan is already independent of China.

Taiwan and China have been ruled separately since 1949, when the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek retreated to the island after losing a civil war on the mainland to Mao Zedong's communist forces.

DEFENSE SPENDING RISING 7.2%

The government announced an increase of 7.2% in the military budget, the world's second-highest behind the United States at 1.6 trillion yuan (\$222 billion). China's defense budget has more than doubled since 2015, but in recent years it has dialed down the increase in defense spending as economic growth slowed.

MIGRANT WORKERS

China's rural and urban populations have long been divided by the hukou, a registration and identification system through which social benefits are allocated, such as health insurance and schools. Cities and urban areas generally have better social benefits than rural ones.

For the first time in recent years, the government's work report mentioned that it would want to make

it easier for migrant workers with rural hukou registrations to be able to change their hukous to urban ones. While hukou reform has long been discussed, the mention in the government report signals that it could be higher on the agenda of the central authorities.

CONFIDENCE

In spite of the slowing economy, and U.S. export controls on several tech-related industries, such as semi-conductors, Li struck a note of confidence in his report.

"The Chinese people have the courage, wisdom, to overcome any difficulties or obstacles," he said. "China's development will surely endure storms and plough through the waves, (and) the future is promising."

Meta attorneys ask judge to dismiss shareholder suit alleging failure to address human trafficking

By RANDALL CHASE AP Business Writer

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP) — Attorneys for Meta Platforms and several of its current and former leaders, including founder Mark Zuckerberg, are asking a Delaware judge to dismiss a shareholder lawsuit alleging the company has deliberately failed to protect users of its social media platforms from human trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

The lawsuit, filed last year by several investment funds, claims that Meta's directors and senior executives have long known about rampant human trafficking and child sexual exploitation on Facebook and Instagram, but have failed to address the predatory behavior.

"For years, Meta's directors and senior executives have known that pedophiles and human and sex traffickers have been using Facebook and Instagram to facilitate their noxious activities," plaintiffs' attorney Christine Mackintosh told Vice Chancellor J. Travis Laster during a hearing Tuesday. "But despite this, Meta's directors utterly failed to implement board level oversight and controls to ferret out these heinous activities and to stop them from proliferating on Meta's platforms."

David Ross, an attorney for Meta, argued that the lawsuit should be dismissed because the alleged conduct of the company's leaders has not resulted in Meta suffering "corporate trauma" as required by Delaware law. The company also argues that the lawsuit's claims are based on speculation that it might face future harm or loss.

The plaintiffs contend, however, Meta has already suffered harm, including sharp drops in its share price and market capitalization amid media reports about trafficking and child sex abuse involving its platforms. They also point to "massive legal defense costs" in related litigation and allege that Meta also has suffered "reputational harm."

Meta also argues that the lawsuit must be dismissed because the plaintiffs failed to demand that the board take action before filing their lawsuit. Such a demand is typically required before a shareholder can file a "derivative complaint" on behalf of a corporation over alleged harm to the company caused by its officers or directors.

The plaintiffs say the demand requirement should be excused as "futile" because board directors are defendants who face a substantial likelihood of liability, and many are beholden to Zuckerberg instead of being independent.

Mackintosh said Meta directors have ignored several red flags, including lawsuits, media reports, shareholder resolutions, and increasing scrutiny by lawmakers and regulators of online activity, that should have alerted the board to act. Documents provided by the company in response to the lawsuit, she added, suggest little if any board discussions regarding human trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

In a statement, Meta spokesman Andy Stone said the company has spent "over a decade fighting these terrible abuses both on and off our platforms and supporting law enforcement in arresting and prosecuting the criminals behind it."

Under Delaware law, corporate directors can be held liable for failing to exercise proper oversight to ensure legal compliance with relevant statutes. Laster noted, however, that there has been debate in legal circles on whether Delaware's law regarding director oversight can be applied to business risks, not just

legal compliance.

"If we were going to have a business risk that actually could trigger this, it seems like not dealing with a massive child porn problem might be a good one," said Laster, who said he will rule at a later date.

Venezuela sets its presidential election for July 28 as the opposition candidate remains barred

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JORGE RUEDA Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's highly anticipated presidential election will take place July 28 — the birthday of the country's late fiery leader Hugo Chávez — officials announced Tuesday, plowing ahead with a tight campaign season that deepens doubts over the participation of the opposition's leading candidate as well as of international observers.

President Nicolás Maduro is widely expected to run for reelection. His government initially negotiated details of the election with a faction of the opposition backed by the United States government, but differences between the sides have grown over the past two months.

The date announced by National Electoral Council President Elvis Amoroso did, however, meet at least one opposition demand that the election be held in the second half of the year.

When that broad timeframe was agreed upon by Maduro and his adversaries in October, the intervening months were meant to allow campaigns to mobilize, officials to update voter rolls, and international electoral observers to plan and deploy a mission.

Crucially, the October agreement, signed in the Caribbean island of Barbados and focused on conditions meant to level the playing field for the 2024 election, also called on both sides to "promote the authorization of all presidential candidates and political parties" to participate in the election as long as they comply with the law.

But in January, the country's top court ratified an administrative decision banning Maduro's strongest adversary this year, Maria Corina Machado, from running for office.

Amoroso, under his previous capacity as the country's comptroller, signed the announcement of Machado's ban from office last summer. He did not address her candidacy during his nationally televised announcement Tuesday, just four days after lawmakers proposed to the ruling party-loyal National Electoral Council more than 20 possible options, ranging from as soon as mid-April to as late as December.

Last month, the opposition's chief negotiator, Gerardo Blyde, said the group favored a December vote.

David Smilde, an expert on Venezuelan politics at Tulane University, said Maduro's government seeks to thread the needle with the July 28 date, fulfilling enough the Barbados agreement to keep it alive "while pushing on the opposition to try to get it to split or abstain."

"An ideal outcome for Chavismo would be for the opposition to split or abstain, allowing Maduro to win on a relatively clean Election Day," he said, referring to the political movement started by Chávez, Maduro's mentor and predecessor. "And with less than five months, this also puts international observation in a tight spot."

International electoral observers typically need several months to prepare for an election.

Amoroso said campaigning will be allowed from July 4-25.

The Unitary Platform and Maduro's government agreed in October during talks in Barbados that the election should be held in the second half of the year while not specifying which month. The agreement earned Maduro relief from some economic sanctions imposed by the U.S.

Machado has insisted throughout her campaign that voters, not ruling-party loyalists, are the rightful decision-makers of her candidacy. On Tuesday, she asked supporters gathered for a rally in western Venezuela for "calm and firmness" in the coming days, but she did not offer any explanations on how she intends to overcome the ban against her.

Machado won an independently run primary held last year by the Unitary Platform, the U.S.-backed opposition faction. She won more than 90% of the vote, with more than 2 million voters turning out for the primary including in strongholds of Maduro's ruling party.

Tuesday was the 11th anniversary of Chávez death. Smylde said the ruling party will use his birthday to mobilize voters.

While the opposition's candidate remains in doubt, Maduro will be seeking six more years in office. His entire decade-long presidency has been marked by political, social and economic crisis. Under his watch, millions of Venezuelans have fallen into poverty and more than 7.4 million have migrated.

Benigno Alarcón, political science professor at the Andrés Bello Catholic University of Caracas, said the tight schedule "promises to be full of big questions" but the ruling party is betting on the criticism to eventually subside and not bring major consequences like in the last election cycle, which led to crippling economic sanctions and the recognition of an opposition leader as the country's legitimate leader.

"Evidently, the government's main concern is to get the opposition candidate who was elected in the primary, María Corina Machado, out of the way and reduce any time to continue the debate on her qualification or anything else," he said. "That is basically what is behind this decision."

Arizona's Democratic governor vetoes border bill approved by Republican-led Legislature

PHOENIX (AP) — An Arizona bill that would have made it a crime for noncitizens to enter the state through Mexico at any location other than a port of entry has been vetoed by Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs.

The Republican-controlled Legislature approved the measure late last month along party lines. Arizona has emerged as a popular illegal border crossing point, and the bill would have let local law enforcement arrest non-U.S. citizens who enter Arizona from anywhere but a lawful entrance point. A violation would be a top-tier misdemeanor – or a low-level felony for a second offense.

In a letter to Arizona Senate President Warren Petersen on Monday, Hobbs said the measure raised constitutional concerns and was expected to lead to costly litigation.

"This bill does not secure our border, will be harmful for communities and businesses in our state, and burdensome for law enforcement personnel and the state judicial system," Hobbs wrote.

The move comes as Republicans in several states, most notably Texas, trumpet tough immigration policies in the lead-up to this year's presidential election.

The bill's sponsor, Republican Sen. Janae Shamp, said in a statement that the veto "is a prime example of the chaos Hobbs is unleashing in our state while perpetuating this open border crisis as Biden's accomplice."

Federal law already prohibits the unauthorized entry of migrants into the United States. However, Republicans in Arizona and Texas say that the U.S. government is not doing enough and they need additional state powers.

This isn't the first time Republican lawmakers in Arizona have tried to criminalize migrants who aren't authorized to be in the country.

When passing its landmark 2010 immigration bill, the Arizona Legislature considered expanding the state's trespassing law to criminalize the presence of immigrants and imposed criminal penalties.

But the trespassing language was removed and replaced with a requirement that officers, while enforcing other laws, question people's immigration status if they're believed to be in the country illegally.

The questioning requirement was ultimately upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court despite the racial profiling concerns of critics, but courts barred enforcement of other sections of the law.

The law touched off a national furor with supporters calling for similar legislation for their own states and detractors calling for an economic boycott of Arizona.

Several other Arizona immigration laws have been thrown out by courts over the years.

Another proposal at the Legislature this year would bypass any possible veto by Hobbs by sending the measure straight to voters to decide as a ballot measure.

The proposal would require municipalities and counties that receive state money for welfare programs to use a federal employment verification database to check whether recipients are in the U.S. legally — and if so, the recipients are to be removed from the program.

It also would make it a low-level felony for employers, who are already required by an earlier Arizona

law to use the database when hiring new employees, to refuse to carry out their legal duty to use the database when they know an employee is not in the country legally.

The proposal has already cleared the state House. The Arizona Senate hasn't yet taken any action on the proposal.

Trump lawyers want him back on witness stand in E. Jean Carroll case

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's lawyers said Tuesday that the ex-president deserves a new trial and a fresh chance to tell a jury why he berated writer E. Jean Carroll for her sex abuse claims against him after she revealed them five years ago.

The lawyers made the assertion as they renewed challenges to the \$83.3 million awarded to Carroll in January by a Manhattan jury.

The award raised to \$88.3 million what Trump owes Carroll after another jury last May awarded \$5 million to the longtime advice columnist after concluding that Trump sexually abused her in spring 1996 in the dressing room of a luxury department store in midtown Manhattan and then defamed her with comments in October 2022.

Judge Lewis A. Kaplan had ordered the January jury to accept the findings of the earlier jury and only decide how much Trump owed Carroll for two statements he issued in 2019 after excerpts from Carroll's memoir were published by a magazine. Carroll testified that the comments ruined her career and left her fearing for her life after she received threats from strangers online.

Trump did not attend the May trial but was a regular fixture at this year's trial, shaking his head repeatedly and grumbling loudly enough from his seat at the defense table that a prosecutor complained that jurors could hear him.

Kaplan, who threatened to ban him from the courtroom, severely limited testimony from the Republican frontrunner for president. Trump's complaints about Carroll, 80, continued during the trial from the campaign trail, providing fresh exhibits for Carroll's lawyers to show jurors.

"This Court's erroneous decision to dramatically limit the scope of President Trump's testimony almost certainly influenced the jury's verdict, and thus a new trial is warranted," the lawyers wrote.

Trump's lawyers argued that Trump deserves to explain why he spoke as he did about Carroll.

The lawyers wrote that Trump had a range of compelling reasons to publicly deny Carroll's claims.

"Indeed, it is virtually unthinkable that President Trump's 'sole' and 'one and only' motive for making the challenged statements was that he simply wanted to harm Plaintiff — as opposed to wanting to defend his reputation, protect his family, and defend his Presidency," they said.

In 2019, Trump derided Carroll, saying she was "totally lying" to sell a memoir and that he'd never met her, though a 1987 photo showed them and their then-spouses at a social event. He said the photo captured a moment when he was standing in a line. He also has called Carroll a "whack job" and said that she wasn't "his type," a reference that Carroll testified was meant to suggest she was too ugly to rape.

A lawyer for Carroll did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona says she won't seek reelection, avoiding a 3-way race

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona announced on Tuesday that she won't run for a second term after her estrangement from the Democratic Party left her politically homeless and without a clear path to reelection.

Sinema's announcement comes after Senate Republicans blocked a bipartisan bill to help secure the U.S.-Mexico border and deliver military aid to Ukraine and Israel — a deal that Sinema spent months

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negotiating. She had hoped it would be a signature achievement addressing one of Washington's most intractable challenges as well as a powerful endorsement for her increasingly lonely view that cross-party dealmaking remains possible.

But in the end, Sinema's border-security ambitions, and her career in Congress, were swallowed by the partisanship that has paralyzed Congress.

"I love Arizona and I am so proud of what we've delivered," she said in a video posted to social media. "Because I choose civility, understanding, listening, working together to get stuff done, I will leave the Senate at the end of this year."

Sinema's decision avoids a three-way contest in one of the most closely watched 2024 Senate races. That hard-to-forecast scenario had spawned fierce debate among political operatives about whether one major party would benefit in the quest for the Senate majority. Most analysts agreed Sinema had faced significant, likely insurmountable hurdles if she had decided to run.

The first openly bisexual person elected to the Senate, Sinema had raised money for a potential reelection campaign and significantly stepped up her public appearances in Arizona throughout 2023, though her activities slowed as her announcement neared. During her five years in office, she built a formidable campaign bank account pegged at \$10.6 million at the end of last year, but her quarterly fundraising was outpaced by Democrat Ruben Gallego and Republican Kari Lake.

Sinema was a Democrat for most of her political career until she left the party in December 2022, saying she did not fit into the two-party system. She had alienated many colleagues and her party's base by blocking progressive priorities, often siding with business interests. In an era of party loyalty, she went out of her way to build relationships with Republicans.

When Sinema became an independent, Democrats feared she would split the left-of-center vote and allow a Republican to win the seat.

Republicans have a favorable map this year in the battle for control of the Senate. Democrats will be forced to defend 23 seats, including Sinema's and two others held by independents who usually vote with Democrats, compared with 10 seats for Republicans.

Sinema tried to build her Senate career in the mold of John McCain, the Arizona Republican whose willingness to buck the GOP infuriated his party's base but endeared him to the state's more moderate voters.

But she ended up hewing closer to the path of Jeff Flake, a former Arizona Republican senator who stood against then-President Donald Trump and became a pariah in his party. Like Sinema, Flake declined to run for a second term after it became clear he could not survive a primary.

Flake endorsed Democrat Joe Biden in 2020 against Trump and was rewarded with an appointment by the president as ambassador to Turkey.

Sinema did not say what the future holds for her. But in her video message announcing her departure, she blamed the current political climate, saying "Americans still choose to retreat farther to their partisan corners."

"It's all or nothing," she said. "The only political victories that matter these days are symbolic, attacking your opponents on cable news or social media."

Her 2018 election marked the first time in a generation that Democrats had won a Senate seat from Arizona. It was the start of a period of ascendance for a Democrats in a state long dominated by the GOP.

In the Senate, she has been at the center of many of the biggest bipartisan congressional deals of Biden's presidency, from an infrastructure package and a new gun law to protection for same-sex marriages.

She worked with members of both parties and she tried to find compromises, often preferring to hang out on the Republican side of the Senate floor to talk to GOP lawmakers. And she became known for diving into the details of policy, keeping spreadsheets and notebooks filled with detail during negotiations.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican who often sat at the negotiating table with Sinema, said she will miss her in the Senate. "I like people who are willing to reach across the aisle and get things done," Collins said.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York, who has at times had a strained relationship

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with Sinema, said the Arizona senator “blazed a trail of accomplishments in the Senate.”

Sinema has been a reliable vote for Democrats on most nominations and legislation. But with the party hamstrung by razor-thin majorities, she refused to give her blessing to some of the progressive movement’s top priorities.

Her support for maintaining the Senate’s filibuster rule, which requires 60 of 100 votes to pass most legislation instead of a simple majority, has been a particular source of frustration for progressives, who say it gives Republicans a veto despite the Democratic majority. Sinema says it forces the bipartisan compromise that most voters crave.

She single-handedly thwarted her party’s longtime goal of raising taxes on wealthy investors. The year before, she received nearly \$1 million from private equity professionals, hedge fund managers and venture capitalists whose taxes would have increased under the plan.

At times, she’s seemed to take delight in serving as a roadblock.

She curtsied while casting a vote against raising the minimum wage. A few weeks later, with backlash to that vote still fresh, she posted to Instagram a photo of herself at brunch wearing a ring that said “f--- off.”

Progressives dialed up the pressure. Activists followed her into a bathroom seeking answers to their questions. Critics disrupted a wedding where she was a guest. The Rev. Jesse Jackson was among demonstrators arrested in a protest outside her Phoenix office.

Long before she faced reelection, donors threatened to walk away, and several groups began collecting money to support an eventual challenger.

In 2022, before she became an independent, leaders of the Arizona Democratic Party censured Sinema, a symbolic move that carried no practical impact but was emblematic of the rupture of her relationship with the party.

Sinema’s political career began as an anti-war activist. A self-described “Prada socialist,” she ran unsuccessfully for local office as a member of the Green Party. She was later elected to the Arizona Legislature as a Democrat and became a prolific spokesperson against Republican bills. Witty, pithy and accessible, she was on speed dial for journalists covering the Legislature.

But she came to believe that she could be more effective building bridges with the Republican majority than publicly excoriating them, she wrote in her 2009 book, “Unite and Conquer.” It was the start of her move toward the center and the persona that has formed her national brand.

Momentum builds in major homelessness case before U.S. Supreme Court

By CLAIRE RUSH Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Momentum is building in a case regarding homeless encampments that will be argued before the U.S. Supreme Court next month and could have major implications for cities as homelessness nationwide has reached record highs.

Dozens of briefs have been filed in recent days, including from the Department of Justice, members of Congress and state attorneys general. They joined the growing number of western state and local officials who have submitted briefs urging the justices to overturn a controversial lower court decision they say has prevented them from addressing homeless encampments.

In 2018, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals — whose jurisdiction includes nine Western states — ruled it was unconstitutional to punish people who are “involuntarily homeless” for sleeping outside if there are not enough shelter beds. Its *Martin v. Boise* decision found that doing so would violate the cruel and unusual punishment clause of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Social justice advocates have long supported the decision based on the belief that homelessness shouldn’t be criminalized, although rights groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union have yet to file briefs in the case. Many officials in the West, on the other hand, say the decision has prevented them from managing a surge in encampments on sidewalks, in parks and other public places.

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The U.S. experienced a dramatic 12% increase in homelessness last year to its highest reported level, a federal report found, as soaring rents and a decline in coronavirus pandemic assistance combined to put housing out of reach for more Americans. About 653,000 people were homeless in the January 2023 count, the most since the country began using the yearly point-in-time survey in 2007.

More than half the people experiencing homelessness in the country were in four states: California and Washington, which are both under the 9th Circuit's jurisdiction, along with New York and Florida. About 28% of the nation's homeless are estimated to be in California alone, according to the federal report from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The case before the Supreme Court was brought by Grants Pass, a small city nestled in the mountains of southern Oregon that has been barred by court orders — citing *Martin v. Boise* — from enforcing local ordinances that prohibit sleeping and camping in parks and on public property. In its petition, Grants Pass said it and other cities “find themselves hamstrung in responding to public encampments.”

The case has galvanized city, county and state officials from across the West, including Democrats and Republicans, and increasingly national officials.

In a brief submitted Monday in support of neither party, the Department of Justice said the 9th Circuit was correct in finding that ordinances punishing people for sleeping outside where there isn't enough shelter space were unconstitutional, but “erred” in having the decision apply to all homeless people “without requiring a more particularized inquiry into the circumstances of the individuals to whom those ordinances may be applied.”

“The court declined to decide what showing is required to establish that an individual is involuntarily homeless. That was error,” DOJ officials, including Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar and Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Kristen Clarke, wrote in the filing.

The DOJ asked the justices to throw out the 9th Circuit decision and send it back to lower courts for review.

Also on Monday, six members of the U.S. House of Representatives — including Rep. Cliff Bentz, whose Oregon district includes Grants Pass, and five congressmen representing California — filed a brief supporting the petition. The lawmakers wrote that the 9th Circuit's ruling “makes it practically impossible” for municipalities to combat crime that can occur near encampments.

A coalition of 24 Republican attorneys general led by Montana and Idaho also recently backed Grants Pass' petition.

“The Ninth Circuit cannot solve homelessness, and it should not try. It is States and localities that have the local knowledge needed to address the problem, and it is States and localities that ultimately bear the costs of homelessness and of homeless policy,” they wrote.

While the ACLU has not submitted a brief, its Northern California chapter expressed concern about the case after the high court announced it would hear it in January, saying it could “reopen a definition of cruel and unusual punishment that protects Americans, housed and unhoused, from unconstitutional treatment in the criminal legal system.”

The justices are scheduled to hear oral arguments April 22.

Liberty University will pay \$14 million, the largest fine ever levied under the federal Clery Act

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

Liberty University has agreed to pay an unprecedented \$14 million fine for the Christian school's failure to disclose information about crimes on its campus and for its treatment of sexual assault survivors, the U.S. Department of Education announced Tuesday.

The fine is by far the largest ever levied under the Clery Act, a law that requires colleges and universities that receive federal funding to collect data on campus crime and notify students of threats. Schools must disseminate an annual security report that includes crime reports and information on efforts to improve campus safety.

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Liberty has marketed itself for years as having one of the nation's safest campuses, with more than 15,000 students enrolled at the school in Lynchburg, Virginia. But its police department had a single officer with minimal oversight for investigating crimes during most of the time period reviewed by federal investigators, 2016 to 2023.

The U.S. Department of Education said it identified numerous cases that resulted in the misclassification or underreporting of crimes. And there were several incidents that the university determined to be unfounded, without evidence the initial report was false.

"This was especially common with respect to sexually based offenses, including rape and fondling cases," according to the department's Final Program Review Determination.

Federal investigators cited a case in which a woman reported being raped, with the attacker telling her he had a knife, the final program review stated.

Liberty's investigator "unfounded this case based on a claim that the 'victim indicates that she consented to the sexual act,'" the final program review stated. "In point of fact, the victim's own statement merely indicated that she 'gave in' in an attempt to get away from the perpetrator."

That episode was ultimately counted in the crime statistics, the final program review stated, after Liberty's Clery compliance officer realized the case was "mishandled at several points in the process."

Many victims of sexual crimes feared reporting because of concerns of reprisal, the final program review stated. Several were punished for violating the student code of conduct known as "The Liberty Way," while their assailants were left unpunished.

"Consequently, victims of sexual assault often felt dissuaded by Liberty administration's reputation for punishing sexual assault survivors rather than helping them," the final program review said. "Such fears created a culture of silence where sexual assaults commonly went unreported."

The university said in a statement Tuesday that it is "fully committed to maintaining the safety and security of students and staff without exception."

The school said it would continue to cooperate with the U.S. Department of Education. And it noted that it has made more than \$10 million in significant improvements since 2022 toward complying with the Clery Act and other laws, including in educational programming, new leadership and staffing.

Liberty also acknowledged past problems, including "incorrect statistical reports as well as necessary timely warnings and emergency notifications that were not sent." But the university also said the U.S. Department of Education used methods and calculations that were "drastically different from their historic treatment of other universities."

"Liberty disagrees with this approach and maintains that we have repeatedly endured selective and unfair treatment by the department," the school said.

But Dustin Wahl, co-founder of Save71, an alumni-led organization that advocates for changes, said Liberty is trying to shift the blame.

"Liberty should be apologizing to the students who have been harmed over the years and demonstrating a commitment to change," he said. "Not because they are being dragged along by the government, but because they genuinely want to be transparent and fix the problems."

Before Tuesday, the largest Clery Act fine in history was \$4.5 million against Michigan State in 2019, according to a February report from the Congressional Research Service. Federal investigators said Michigan State failed to adequately respond to sexual assault complaints against Larry Nassar, a campus sports doctor who molested elite gymnasts and other female athletes.

In 2016, Pennsylvania State University was hit with a then-record fine of \$2.4 million in the wake of child sexual-abuse complaints against former assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky.

The \$14 million fine against Liberty University appears to be a small fraction of its total operating revenues, which were \$1.2 billion without donor restrictions in fiscal year 2022, according to an annual report. The school's net assets were \$3.5 billion.

But Clery Act violations are "bigger than just the fines," said Abigail Boyer, associate executive director at the Pennsylvania-based Clery Center, which provides training and assistance to campuses.

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"Hand in hand with the fines is institutions navigating how they're now being perceived publicly as a campus that may or may not be focusing on the safety and well being of students," Boyer told The Associated Press.

Liberty has become one of the world's largest Christian schools since its 1971 co-founding by religious broadcaster Jerry Falwell Sr. In 2022, the school said it hit a record of 115,000 students pursuing degrees online, beyond the more than 15,000 on campus.

The Clery Act investigation became public knowledge in 2022 in the wake of litigation over its handling of sex assault cases.

Lawsuits by former students and employees have accused the school of botching sexual assault reports or failing to investigate allegations of rape. The litigation was filed under under Title IX, the federal law that protects against sex discrimination in education and often overlaps with Clery.

Liberty settled a civil lawsuit filed by 12 women in 2022 after they accused the school of fostering an unsafe environment and mishandling cases of sexual assault and harassment.

The lawsuit said the university had a "tacit policy" of weighting investigations in favor of accused male students, and it said the university retaliated against women who did make such reports.

The terms of that lawsuit's settlement were not disclosed. But at the time, Liberty outlined a number of changes it undertook to improve campus security and review how it responds to incidents of sexual harassment or violence.

Tuesday's announcement comes three years after Liberty's acrimonious split with former president Jerry Falwell Jr., whose exit followed his posting of a provocative photo of himself online as well as revelations of his wife's extramarital affair. Falwell and the university have since filed lawsuits against each other over his departure.

Best cameo? Best hat? Ahead of the Oscars, AP hands out its own awards

By LINDSEY BAHR and JAKE COYLE AP Film Writers

The Academy Awards honor many things in movies but not some of the most important. Ahead of Sunday's Oscars, AP Film Writers Lindsey Bahr and Jake Coyle make selections for their own awards — some more offbeat than others.

BEST ACTUALLY SUPPORTING PERFORMANCE: Cory Michael Smith, 'May December'

Sometimes the best truly supporting performances are the ones that will never, ever get the "awards push," like the brilliant Cory Michael Smith as Georgie Atherton in "May December." With his subtly manic energy, sad smile and that awful bleached hair, his is that kind of undeniable presence who steals both scenes he's in and also completely upends everything we've come to understand so far. But this is how awards season works and something that only our awards strategist friends can justify. — L.B.

BEST HAIRSTYLE: Gwen's upside-down ponytail, 'Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse'

There are, no doubt, more elegantly styled heads of hair among this year's Oscar nominees. But no 'do could match the gravity-assisted beauty of the ponytail that hangs suspended in the air when Gwen (Hailee Steinfeld) and Miles (Shameik Moore) sit together, clung to the underside of cornice, gazing out at an upturned New York in "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse." For a topsy-turvy, canon-breaking film series, Gwen's upside-down ponytail points the way. — J.C.

BEST DUO ACT: Jeffrey Wright and John Ortiz, 'American Fiction'

As great as the whole ensemble is in Cord Jefferson's incisive drama, the movie is never better than when Wright and Ortiz are matched together. When Wright's frustrated novelist Monk Ellison meets with his agent Arthur (Ortiz), "American Fiction" sparkles with the comic interplay of two character-actor greats. Give these guys a sitcom and I'd watch six seasons. — J.C.

BEST CAMEO: Margot Robbie, 'Asteroid City'

Wes Anderson's "Asteroid City" got a raw deal this year with zero nominations (maybe he'll win his first Oscar for his Henry Sugar short). One performance in a sea of great ones that really made an impact was a true cameo that's saved for the very end: Margot Robbie as the actor whose scene as Jason Schwartz-

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man's dead wife was cut for time. She gets only a few minutes, to remind her would've-been co-star of their would've-been lines, dressed in Elizabethan garb a balcony away. It is an emotional gut punch of the best kind, brief and perfect. — L.B.

BEST FACE: Willem Dafoe, 'Poor Things'

Willem Dafoe's face is already a work of art, but "Poor Things" turns it into a Munch-esque masterpiece. His scarred Dr. Godwin Baxter, whose deformities come from experiments performed on him, is like a fusion of mad scientist and wounded victim. He's Frankenstein and Frankenstein's monster, in one. — J.C.

BEST STUNTS: 'Mission: Impossible: Dead Reckoning — Part One'

It remains wild that the film academy still doesn't recognize stunts, but we can here. "Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning" isn't the underdog in this category but that doesn't make what they did any less impressive. The obvious "best" is the cliff jump, which most of us know by now that Tom Cruise did himself. But I'm also partial to the Rome car chase in which Cruise and Hayley Atwell try to escape capture in a creaky, vintage Fiat 500 while handcuffed together. — L.B.

BEST USE OF EARTH WIND AND FIRE'S 'SEPTEMBER': 'Robot Dreams'

"September" has probably been heard in a hundred movies and at a billion weddings, but the best animated feature nominee "Robot Dreams" uses the disco classic to perfection. In a movie that is strikingly grown-up about a relationship between a dog and robot, all of the joy and nostalgia of "September" has never been more moving. It sends you out of the theater humming "The bell was ringin', oh, oh / Our souls were singin'." — J.C.

MOST STYLISH: 'Priscilla'

This is perhaps a silly superlative to give to a movie that was easily one of the strongest adaptations of the year, taking what was essentially a young woman's diary entries and making something evocative and profound without the use of first-person narration. The thoughtful style of Sofia Coppola's film helps make this point, transporting audiences into this intoxicating and dreamlike wonderland of the most beautiful clothes and glamorous settings with the biggest star of the time, and guiding us along with Priscilla to the realization that it is also a nightmare. — L.B.

BEST SCENE: The Trinity Test, 'Oppenheimer'

I don't love everything about Christopher Nolan's epic but I think the Trinity Test scene is a sequence that will be taught to film students for generations. It's not just the explosion itself, which was accomplished with old-school moviemaking techniques like forced perspective (doing something small but making it seem big). It's the rumbling tremors of the moments that follow, when Oppenheimer, after hearing that the bomb has been dropped on Hiroshima, is greeted by a flag-waving gymnasium audience. Oppenheimer's face is horrified, reckoning with what he's wrought. The crowd turns grotesque and ashen. A girl (played by Nolan's daughter) shrieks. Here is the real thunder of "Oppenheimer." — J.C.

BEST DREAM BALLET: 'Barbie'

Last year had so much great dancing, from the sweaty club scenes in "Passages," to the wedding line dance in "The Iron Claw," Jeff's silly moves in "Bottoms," Bella Baxter's broken doll euphoria in "Poor Things," "M3GAN's" boogie and, of course, the end of "Saltburn." But the trophy goes to Greta Gerwig's euphoric "I'm Just Ken" dream ballet, a sequence she fought to keep in that is also the best in the film. — L.B.

BEST FIGHT: Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Tobias Menzies, 'You Hurt My Feelings'

Sure, you could pick more violent encounters. But is there possibly anything more ferociously rock 'em-sock 'em than an author overhearing her husband say he doesn't like her latest book? In Nicole Holofcener's "You Hurt My Feelings," it's the opening salvo in a painfully, hysterically acute examination of honesty in relationships. Not, I repeat not, a date movie. — J.C.

BEST USE OF A PREEXISTING SONG: 'Silver Joy' by Damien Jurado, 'The Holdovers'

I think the original song category needs an overhaul. For years, movies have helped introduce me to songs that exist that I might have missed, that become immediate favorites because of the emotional association with a movie. Selecting the right existing song is such an art and one last year stood out over all the rest: Damien Jurado's "Silver Joy" in "The Holdovers." — L.B.

BEST HAT: Michael Fassbender's bucket hat, 'The Killer'

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Meticulous movie hitmen have long worn stylish hats. Think of the fedora of the protagonist of "Le Samourai." The assassin of David Fincher's "The Killer," though, wears a bucket hat. It's just as much a silhouette, but he looks more like a dopey tourist than a stone-cold killer. That's much the point for a movie about murder in increasingly anonymous times. — J.C.

BEST ONE-SCENE PERFORMANCE: Audra McDonald, 'Origin'

In Ava DuVernay's too-overlooked "Origin," much of the film's sense of humanity comes from the rich presences of the actors who float in and out of the movie. Not just the stellar lead, Aunjanue Ellis-Taylor, but a number of performers — including Jon Bernthal, Emily Yancy and Nick Offerman — add to the nuance of "Origin." That's especially true of Audra McDonald, who turns up for just one scene that may be the most potent of the film. McDonald plays a woman named Miss Hale, and her story of how she got that name is a delicate powerhouse. — J.C.

MOST ROMANTIC: 'The Taste of Things'

There are not many truly romantic films made for big audiences these days. Sure there's the odd rom-com here and there, but sweeping, luscious, capital R romances are few and far between and rarely celebrated at awards season (yes, I'm still thinking about Joe Wright's "Cyrano"). This season, that title went to "The Taste of Things," which doesn't have an ounce of cynicism, just pure love. — L.B.

BEST NFL PLAYER PERFORMANCE: Marshawn Lynch, 'Bottoms'

With exactly zero apologies to "80 for Brady" (Jets fan here), no former footballer made more of a big-screen impression than Marshawn Lynch, the former elite running back known as "Beast Mode." In Emma Seligman's raunchy lesbian teen comedy "Bottoms," Lynch turns up as a high school teacher and is quite funny acting opposite Rachel Sennott and Ayo Edebiri. The role also has poignance. Lynch has said he did it to help make up for how he handled his sister, Marreesha Sapp-Lynch, coming out in high school. — J.C.

BEST DOG NOT NAMED SNOOP: Chaplin, 'Fallen Leaves'

Snoop, the all-seeing dog in the best picture nominee "Anatomy of a Fall," has really hogged the pooch spotlight. Messi, the dog who plays Snoop, has been all over the place, including the film academy luncheon. But it's time his reign of terror came to end. In Aki Kaurismäki's "Fallen Leaves," my favorite film of 2023, a pair of loners find nourishing points of connection in a cruel and grim world: the movies, karaoke and a dog named Chaplin. The dog, named Alma in real life, is Kaurismäki's own mutt, and deserves a few bones thrown her way, too. — J.C.

Bitcoin briefly hits an all-time high, less than two years after FTX scandal clobbered crypto

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Bitcoin has hit an all-time high less than two years after the collapse of the crypto exchange FTX severely damaged faith in digital currencies and sent prices plunging.

The world's largest cryptocurrency jumped 4% this week and briefly surpassed \$68,800 Tuesday, according to CoinMarketCap. That's just above bitcoin's previous record set in November 2021.

The volatile asset soon fell some, standing at just under \$62,000 as of 3 p.m. ET, but the price is still up more than 175% from one year ago.

Gains in recent months have been fueled by the anticipation, and eventual U.S. approval, of bitcoin exchange traded funds earlier this year, which provided access to a much broader class of investors. The price for bitcoin has surged about 60% since the approval of bitcoin ETFs in January, an easy way to invest in assets or a group of assets — like gold, junk bonds or bitcoins — without having to directly buy the assets themselves.

Also driving prices is what is known as bitcoin "halving" which is anticipated in April. Halvings trim the rate at which new coins are mined and created, thus lowering the supply.

Here's what you need to know.

EARLY SUCCESS OF BITCOIN SPOT ETFS

In January, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission approved the first spot bitcoin ETFs from as-

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set managers including Blackrock, Invesco and Fidelity. These newly approved ETFs hold actual bitcoin — unlike previous bitcoin-related ETFs that were invested in contracts related to future price bets, but not on the cryptocurrency itself.

While regulators have pointed to persisting risks and maintained reluctance around January's decision, the greenlight marked a major win the crypto industry.

Institutional demand for bitcoin show "no signs of slowing down," H.C. Wainwright's Mike Colonnese and Dylan Scales wrote Tuesday — adding that bitcoin's popularity "is likely to accelerate in the coming months as more wealth management platforms make spot (bitcoin) ETFs accessible to their clients."

Using data from crypto platform BitMEX, Colonnese and Scales estimated that the 10 bitcoin ETFs averaged \$302 million in net daily inflows for the month of February. Last week alone, these spot ETFs booked record inflows of \$1.7 billion — bringing total net inflows to \$7.5 billion since their Jan. 11 launch.

HALVING ON THE HORIZON

Increased demand is also aligning with bitcoin's next halving event, which is expected at the end of April.

Bitcoin halving, which occurs every four years, is when the reward for bitcoin mining is cut in half. This reduces how fast new coins are created — making supply scarcer.

While analysts say that constrained supply in a time of high demand can push bitcoin's price higher over time, others point to significant volatility that has resulted before and after halving events — and the possibility of sizable declines.

"Past history may not be a reliable guide to predict how the upcoming halving of bitcoin will influence its value," Rajeev Bamra, senior vice president of digital finance at Moody's Investors Service, noted. "Various external factors, market sentiment shifts, and regulatory developments can influence the trajectory of Bitcoin's price."

A HISTORY OF VOLATILITY

Bitcoin has a history of drastic swings in value — which can come suddenly and happen over the weekend or overnight in trading that continues at all hours, every day.

Bitcoin rocketed from just over \$5,000 at the start of the pandemic to its November 2021 peak of nearly \$69,000, in a period marked by a surge in demand for technology products. Prices crashed during an aggressive series of Federal Reserve rate hikes intended to cool inflation, slow money flows and make risky investments potentially riskier. Then came the 2022 collapse of FTX, which significantly undermined confidence in crypto.

At the start of last year, a single bitcoin could be had for less than \$17,000. Investors, however, began returning in large numbers as inflation started to cool. And 2023's collapse of prominent tech-focused banks actually led more investors to turn to crypto as they bailed out of positions in Silicon Valley start-ups and other risky bets.

Despite the recent excitement around bitcoin, experts still maintain that crypto is a risky bet with wildly unpredictable fluctuations in value. In short, investors can lose money as quickly as they make it.

"It's essential to exercise caution and acknowledge that the road ahead for the digital finance ecosystem, particularly the crypto markets, is expected to navigate through a period marked by volatility," Bamra noted — pointing the importance of "cautious optimism."

MLB The Show 24 unveils female player mode 'Women Pave Their Way'

By The Associated Press undefined

MLB The Show 24 has unveiled a female player mode for this year's video game.

A trailer released Tuesday showcases "Road to the Show: Women Pave Their Way" for the game scheduled to be released March 19.

"For the first time ever, you can create and play as a female ballplayer, with a unique Road to the Show story that evolves with the player over the course of your career," the video game's website reads. "This path will include all existing features of Road to the Show with the addition of a unique-to-women storyline following a lifelong friendship as it develops in professional baseball."

The trailer features a nod to Kelsie Whitmore, the first female player in an MLB partnered league. Whit-

more is a pitcher and outfielder for the Staten Island FerryHawks in the Atlantic League.

"To me, this project is a great opportunity for the world to be informed of women who play baseball and that taking their skills to the next level is possible," Whitmore said in a statement on the website. "My hopes for this project is to educate others that women/girls do play baseball and that they are capable of competing in this game at every level."

Mollie Braley, the game's narrative designer, said in a statement that Whitmore and others were involved in the story mode's development.

"This feature was inspired by the stories of women in baseball," Braley said. "Throughout history, women have been making waves in the sport. These include legends such as Toni Stone, who was one of the first women ever to play professional baseball."

Biden administration would cap credit card late fees at \$8, part of campaign against junk fees

By KEN SWEET and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration announced a rule Tuesday to cap all credit card late fees, the latest effort in the White House push to end what it has called junk fees and a move that regulators say will save Americans up to \$10 billion a year.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's new regulations will set a ceiling of \$8 for most credit card late fees or require banks to show why they should charge more than \$8 for such a fee.

The rule would bring the average credit card late fee down from \$32. The bureau estimates banks brought in roughly \$14 billion in credit card late fees a year.

President Joe Biden highlighted the proposal along with other efforts to reduce costs to Americans at a meeting of his competition council on Tuesday. The Democratic president also said he's forming a new strike force to crack down on illegal and unfair pricing on things like groceries, prescription drugs, health care, housing and financial services.

Biden said at the start of the council meeting that the current late fees are generating five times more money than what it costs credit card companies to collect late payments.

"They're padding their profit margins and charging hardworking Americans more," Biden said. "It's a lot of money."

The president also noted that companies are effectively raising prices by putting fewer potato chips in the bags sold at grocery stores. Even the "Sesame Street" character Cookie Monster has noticed so-called "shrinkflation" by saying on social media that he's paying more for fewer cookies, Biden said.

The strike force will be led by the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission, according to a White House statement.

The Biden administration has portrayed the White House Competition Council as a way to save people money and promote greater competition within the U.S. economy.

The White House Council of Economic Advisers produced an analysis indicating that the Biden administration's efforts overall will eliminate \$20 billion in annual junk fees. The analysis found that consumers pay about \$90 billion a year in junk fees, including for concerts, apartment rentals and auto dealers.

The effort appears to have done little to help Biden politically ahead of this year's presidential election. Just 34% of U.S. adults approve of Biden's economic leadership, according to a new survey by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Sen. Tim Scott, R-South Carolina, criticized the CFPB cap on credit card late fees, saying that consumers would ultimately face greater costs through higher interest rates and less access to credit.

"It will decrease the availability of credit card products for those who need it most, raise rates for many borrowers who carry a balance but pay on time, and increase the likelihood of late payments across the board," Scott said.

Rob Nichols, the CEO of the American Bankers Association, said the CFPB "relied on flawed assumptions and a mischaracterization of the important role late fees play in promoting responsible consumer behavior."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce said it will file a lawsuit to try to prevent the federal agency from capping late fees at \$8.

"The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has exceeded its authority," said Neil Bradley, the chamber's executive vice president and chief policy officer. "The agency's final credit card late fee rule punishes Americans who pay their credit card bills on time by forcing them to pay for those who don't."

Americans held more than \$1.05 trillion on their credit cards in the third quarter of 2023, a record, and a figure certain to grow once the fourth-quarter data is released by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. next month. Those balances are now carrying interest on them, which is the highest it has been since the Federal Reserve started tracking the data back in the mid-1990s.

Further, more Americans are falling behind on their credit card debts as well. Delinquency rates at the major credit card issuers such as American Express, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Capital One and Discover have been trending upward for several quarters. Some analysts have become concerned Americans, particularly poorer households hurt by inflation, might be taking on too much debt.

"Overall, the consumer is credit healthy. However, the reality is that there are starting to be some significant signs of stress," said Silvio Tavares, president and CEO of VantageScore, one of the country's two major credit scoring systems, in an interview last month.

The growth of the credit card industry is partly why Capital One announced it would buy Discover Financial last month for \$35 billion. The two companies, which are two of the largest credit card issuers, are also two companies whose customers regularly carry a balance on their accounts.

This is not the first time policymakers have weighed in on credit card fees. Congress in 2010 passed the CARD Act, which banned credit card companies from charging excessive penalty fees and established clearer disclosures and consumer protections.

The Federal Reserve issued a rule in 2010 that capped the first credit card late fee at \$25, and \$35 for subsequent late payments, and tied that fee to inflation. The CFPB, which took over the regulation of the credit card industry from the Fed after it was established, is proposing going further than the Fed.

The bureau's proposal is similar in structure to what the bureau announced in January when it proposed capping overdraft fees to as little as \$3. In that proposed regulation, banks would be required to either accept the bureau's benchmark or show regulators why they should charge more, a method that few bank industry executives expect to use.

Biden has made the elimination of junk fees one of the cornerstones of his administration's economic agenda heading into the 2024 election. Fees that banks charge customers have been at the center of that campaign, and the White House directed government regulators last year to do whatever is in their power to further curtail the practice.

In another move being highlighted by the White House, the Agriculture Department said it has finalized a rule to stop what it deems to be deceptive contracts by meat processors and to ban retaliation against small farmers and ranchers that work together in associations.

Alabama lawmakers advance legislation to protect IVF providers, with final approval still ahead

By KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama lawmakers facing public pressure to restart in vitro fertilization services in the state advanced legislation Tuesday to shield providers from the fallout of a court ruling that equated frozen embryos to children.

Committees in the state Senate and House approved identical bills that would protect providers from lawsuits and criminal prosecution for the "damage or death of an embryo" during IVF services. The state's three major IVF providers paused services after the Alabama Supreme Court's ruling last month because of the sweeping liability concerns it raised.

"The problem we are trying to solve right now is to get those families back on track to be moving forward as they try to have children," said Rep. Terri Collins, sponsor of one of the bills. Lawmakers are aiming to

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give final approval Wednesday and send the legislation to Gov. Kay Ivey to be signed into law.

Lawmakers have fast-tracked the immunity legislation as a proposed solution to get clinics back open as they weigh whether additional action is needed.

The court ruled that three couples who had frozen embryos destroyed in an accident at a storage facility could pursue wrongful death lawsuits for their "extrauterine children." The ruling, treating an embryo the same as a child or gestating fetus under the wrongful death statute, raised concerns about civil liabilities for clinics.

The court decision caused an immediate backlash as groups across the country raised concerns about a ruling recognizing embryos as children. Patients in Alabama shared stories of upcoming embryo transfers being abruptly canceled and their paths to parenthood put in doubt.

Beth and Joshua Davis-Dillard watched as the Senate committee voted. The couple transferred frozen embryos left over from when they had their twins to Alabama after moving from New York.

"We've been working up to getting ready to trying again. We still have embryos from our prior cycle, which we did in New York. We transferred them here. We can't use them. We're on hold," Beth Davis-Dillard said. "I'm 44, so time is limited. We don't have unlimited time to wait. We really want to give it a try and see if we can have another baby."

Beth David-Dillard said she feels "very helpless and very frustrated" and in a "little bit of disbelief." She said that before they transferred the embryos to Alabama, the couple briefly discussed whether the state's strict abortion ban or political climate could be a problem but presumed it would ultimately be fine.

"It just feels like our rights are being restricted," she said.

The legislative proposals state that "no action, suit, or criminal prosecution for the damage to or death of an embryo shall be brought or maintained against any individual or entity when providing or receiving services related to in vitro fertilization."

Civil lawsuits could be pursued against manufacturers of IVF-related goods, such as the nutrient-rich solutions used to grow embryos, but damages would be capped and criminal prosecution would be forbidden. Doctors have expressed concern that without some protections for manufacturers they will not be able to get the products they need to provide IVF.

Dr. Michael C. Allemand with Alabama Fertility said the legislative proposal would allow the clinic to resume IVF services by returning "us to a normal state of affairs in terms of what the liability issues are."

He said the past weeks have been difficult on patients and staff as procedures have been postponed.

"There's been some truly heart-wrenching conversations that have taken place," Allemand said.

The American Society for Reproductive Medicine, a group representing IVF providers across the country, said the legislation does not go far enough. Sean Tipton, a spokesman for the organization, said Monday that the legislation does not correct the fundamental problem, which he said is the court ruling "conflating fertilized eggs with children."

House Democrats proposed legislation that would put in state law or the state Constitution that a human embryo outside a uterus can not be considered an unborn child or human being under state law. Democrats argued that was the most direct way to deal with the issue. Republicans have not brought the proposals up for a vote.

State Republicans are reckoning with an IVF crisis they partly helped create with anti-abortion language added to the Alabama Constitution in 2018. The amendment, which was approved by 59% of voters, says it is state policy to recognize the "rights of unborn children."

The phrase became the basis of the court's ruling. At the time, supporters said it would allow the state to ban abortion if Roe v Wade were overturned, but opponents argued it could establish "personhood" for fertilized eggs.

Collins said she doesn't think lawmakers got it wrong with the amendment but the wording was broad enough that it had ramifications they didn't anticipate.

Collins, who sponsored the state's stringent abortion ban, said she thought any law exempting embryos from legal protections might be found unconstitutional under the 2018 amendment. Changing the constitution, she said, is a longer conversation.

"It's very divisive. Everybody has very strong opinions on when life begins," she said.

Republicans are also trying to navigate tricky political waters — torn between widespread popularity and support for IVF — and conflicts within their own party. Some Republicans have unsuccessfully sought to add Louisiana-style language to ban clinics from destroying unused or unwanted embryos.

Ukraine claims it has sunk another Russian warship in the Black Sea using high-tech sea drones

By ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine claimed Tuesday it has sunk another Russian warship in the Black Sea using high-tech sea drones as Kyiv's forces take aim at targets well behind the war's front line. Russian authorities did not confirm the claim.

The Ukrainian military intelligence agency said a special operations unit destroyed the large patrol ship Sergey Kotov overnight. The ship, which Ukraine said was commissioned in 2021 and was hit near the Kerch Strait, reportedly can carry cruise missiles and around 60 crew.

The sinking of such a modern ship would be a significant loss and embarrassing blow for Moscow, even though there are dozens of other vessels in its Black Sea fleet.

Kyiv officials say some 20% of Russian missile attacks on Ukraine are launched from the Black Sea, and successful Ukrainian attacks have dented Moscow's capability.

Patrol ships such as the Sergey Kotov are part of Russia's countermeasures against drone attacks, according to an article published last month by the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a U.S. think tank. The vessels use radar and a helicopter to detect and destroy drones using grenade launchers and heavy machine guns, it said.

Kyiv's forces are struggling to keep the better-provisioned Russian army at bay at some points along the largely static 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line, but are also taking aim at targets far beyond it.

In the Black Sea, Ukrainian successes against enemy warships have pushed the Russian fleet away from the coast, allowing Ukraine to set up a grain export corridor.

The Ukraine defense ministry posted on X, formerly Twitter, a video of what it said was the nighttime attack on the Sergey Kotov using Magura V5 uncrewed vessels that are designed and built in Ukraine and laden with explosives. Seven Russian crew members were killed and six were injured, while 52 were rescued, the military intelligence agency said.

The Ukrainian claims could not immediately be independently verified. Disinformation has been a feature of the fighting that broke out after Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor in February 2022.

The private security firm Ambrey said the attack took place at the port of Feodosia, in Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014. Ambrey said it has seen footage taken by a crew member on a merchant vessel in the port, showing the Sergey Kotov firing at the drones.

The ship was hit at least twice, with the second strike resulting in a large blast, Ambrey reported.

Last month, Ukraine claimed it twice sank Russian warships using drones. On Feb. 1, it claimed to have sunk the Russian missile-armed corvette Ivanovets, and on Feb. 14 it said it destroyed the Caesar Kunikov landing ship. Russian officials did not confirm those claims.

Almost two years ago, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, the Moskva guided-missile cruiser, sank after it was heavily damaged in a missile attack.

Also Tuesday, the Russian military scrambled a Su-27 fighter jet to escort a French E-3F military surveillance plane, accompanied by two Rafale fighter jets, in international air space over the Black Sea.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Su-27 was scrambled to "prevent a violation of the state border of the Russian Federation," adding that the French planes turned away from the Russian border after the Russian jet approached.

Moscow has repeatedly accused NATO allies of gathering intelligence information to assist Ukrainian strikes on Russian forces.

In November, the Russian military threatened to shoot down a French surveillance aircraft patrolling in

international airspace. French officials said the Russian military issued the warning in a radio exchange with one of the French early warning and control aircraft as it flew over international waters in the Black Sea.

Biden's closest allies are stepping up pressure on White House to do more to ease suffering in Gaza

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More of President Joe Biden's top Senate allies are demanding that the U.S. act directly to ease Palestinian civilian suffering in Gaza and are joining calls to cut military aid if Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to change course.

What had been dissent from independent Sen. Bernie Sanders and a small group of progressive Democrats has swelled in response to the soaring death toll in Gaza. Now even Biden's closest confidant in Congress, Chris Coons, says it is time to get tougher with Netanyahu's government on how it conducts the war.

Israel continues to enjoy bipartisan support in Congress, and the prospect of military aid being reduced is uncertain despite the clout that these more mainstream Democrats wield. But tensions could be evident Thursday as Biden speaks to Congress about the conflict in his State of the Union address.

The war in Gaza isn't the only Mideast issue creating dissent within the party. Some Democrats are pursuing legislation to compel the administration to seek Congress' permission to continue military strikes against the Houthis in Yemen, setting up a possible showdown over the authority to wage war. The Houthis are attacking shipping in the Red Sea in what they say is a show of support for Palestinians during the nearly five-month war in Gaza.

Still, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Democratic caucus as a whole have largely held off on taking action on the U.S. role in the Middle East conflicts. That's despite growing concern — and rising political opposition nationally, especially among Muslim and Arab American voters — over the Biden administration's support for Israel's war in Gaza, and over Netanyahu's perceived shrugging off of U.S. demands to do more to spare Palestinian civilians and to allow in more aid.

Congressional Democrats are reluctant to be seen as challenging the Democratic president's handling of the conflict, mindful that criticism could further weaken Biden in his uphill reelection campaign against former President Donald Trump.

The killings of more than 100 Palestinians last week during a rare delivery of food helped spur more Biden allies in the Senate to speak out. Israel says its forces fired warning shots amid the chaos of the aid delivery. Witnesses and medical workers told The Associated Press many of the victims were shot when Israeli forces fired into crowds of hungry people.

In the last few days alone, Coons, a senator from Biden's home state of Delaware, called for the U.S. to cut military aid to Israel if Netanyahu goes ahead with a threatened offensive on the southern city of Rafah without significant provisions to protect the more than 1 million civilians sheltering there. Sen. Jack Reed, head of the Senate Armed Services Committee, appealed to Biden to deploy the U.S. Navy to get humanitarian aid to Gaza. Biden ally Sen. Tim Kaine challenged the U.S. strikes on the Houthis as unlikely to stop the Red Sea attacks. And the most senior Democrat in the Senate called for Israel to "change course."

"Israel needs to understand that the casualties they've inflicted on the people of Gaza — the devastation they have caused — cannot continue," Patty Murray of Washington, the senate pro tempore, said in a blistering speech on the chamber floor. "It is not in line with American interests, nor does it make Israel safer."

Continuing U.S. military support for Israel at current levels "becomes untenable when Israel demonstrates they are unwilling to listen to us," Coons told cable networks after the killings during the failed aid distribution.

The National Security Council pointed to Biden's own warnings about the looming Rafah offensive and support for a possible sea route to deliver aid. It did not answer questions about whether the administration has altered its opposition to cutting military aid to Israel or to seeking Congress' permission for its strikes on the Houthis.

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Lawmakers have sent at least a half-dozen letters to the administration calling for changes in the conduct of the war since the start of the year. The administration said this week it is actively exploring one possibility, pushed by Reed, to open a sea route for humanitarian aid. The U.S. began air drops to Gaza civilians last week, getting around Israeli restrictions blocking much of the aid delivery by land.

Biden's allies in Congress are trying to drive home the message that Netanyahu's conduct of the war is not in U.S. interests, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a Massachusetts Democrat, said. Biden and top aides have appealed privately and publicly to Israel for more precision in airstrikes and drone attacks, which have been killing whole families in crowded neighborhoods. Netanyahu also has publicly ruled out the U.S. goal of eventual Palestinian statehood.

"The conversations between senators and the White House are vigorous and frank" regarding the war and Netanyahu, Warren told the AP. "We would not be serving our president to do otherwise."

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee has not marked up legislation related to the region since the war began. And only this past week did the panel hold hearings on the growing Middle East conflicts. Two congressional aides, who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss private meetings, said the chairman, Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland, told the committee late last year that no legislation related to the Middle East would move until the war in Gaza is over.

Another congressional aide familiar with the discussions said that in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Oct. 7 that set off the war, Cardin urged caution on taking any immediate legislative action that would negatively affect the Israeli effort on the ground.

In a statement to the AP, Eric Harris, a spokesperson for the committee, did not directly respond to a question about the lack of legislative action but said the "committee continues to be actively engaged in conducting oversight on Middle East policy, including the ongoing conflict in Gaza, the humanitarian crisis, and efforts to free hostages abducted by Hamas — including American hostages."

The committee cited classified bipartisan briefings it had held, meetings with heads of state and other influential figures, and other key policy advocacy by Cardin, including his leadership in getting Jacob Lew confirmed as U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Capitol, the House Foreign Affairs Committee has sent over bipartisan bills on the Middle East, including many that would target Iranian officials over Iran's support to Hamas, the Houthis and other armed groups that have stepped up attacks on U.S. and other targets.

Back on the Senate side, notably, it was a subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee, rather than the full committee, that summoned two senior Biden administration officials to answer questions about the strikes to try to quell Houthi attacks on international shipping routes.

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat, who led the session, said later he was working to gather support from other senators for legislation to compel the administration to seek congressional approval to continue the strikes, in line with his reading of the War Powers Act.

Kaine, a Virginia Democrat, suggested only an end to the fighting in Gaza was likely to calm the region.

"U.S. involvement in another war in the Middle East would reflect that we've learned virtually nothing over the last 25 years.," Kaine said of the U.S. strikes targeting Houthis. "This is the kind of a thing that can lead us to slip or slide into a war."

IVF gave hope to patients trying to build their families. The turmoil in Alabama put that in doubt

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Thirty-seven-year-old Corinn O'Brien is about two months pregnant through in vitro fertilization, but an ultrasound recently showed the fetus might be in trouble, and she wants the option to try again if she needs to.

Cancer survivor Kailani Greenwood, due to give birth in spring after undergoing IVF, hopes to have more children in the future and has four frozen embryos in storage.

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But the Alabama women who represent two groups most likely to turn to IVF to build the families they desperately want — women over 35 and those with serious diseases — worry about whether those options will be there when they need them. O'Brien and Greenwood are among the many whose dreams are in limbo after three of Alabama's largest clinics paused IVF services in the wake of a state Supreme Court ruling that described frozen embryos as "extrauterine children."

"It's been hard," O'Brien said, her voice breaking. "I have no idea what will happen next, and that's really scary."

An estimated 1 in 6 people are affected by infertility worldwide. In the U.S., women increasingly delay motherhood even though fertility gradually declines after age 30, particularly after 35. That raises the need for treatments like IVF. Women 35 to 44 are more than twice as likely as younger women to say they've used fertility services, according to a 2023 Pew Research Center survey.

Besides the growing ranks of older patients, doctors point to a smaller but significant number of women facing treatment for conditions such as cancer, lupus and sickle cell disease who want to preserve their fertility.

In Alabama, doctors say many of these women are in a holding pattern or seeking help outside the state. Some are also pushing for a legislative solution, and on Tuesday, committees in the state House and Senate advanced legislation that would shield clinics from prosecution and civil lawsuits. Lawmakers hope to get the measures to the governor this week.

But some doctors and patients worry they won't go far enough — and that legislation or court rulings in other states could eventually put IVF at risk more broadly.

Dr. Beth Malizia, Greenwood's doctor at Alabama Fertility, a clinic that paused services, said the upheaval has made life even tougher for women who are already struggling.

"Look, nobody wants to be in our clinic. ... No one chooses fertility issues. No one chooses cancer. No one chooses recurrent pregnancy loss," she said. "We're trying to provide the best care that we can, and this decision has really limited us in our ability to do that. We just want to grow families."

DREAMS INTERRUPTED

After losing her mother to pancreatic cancer and having no brothers or sisters to turn to, O'Brien realized how important it was for her young daughter "to have a sibling, to navigate life with after we're gone."

The Birmingham woman and her husband had tried for a baby for a few years, and she suffered through a dangerous, nonviable ectopic pregnancy. She tried various fertility treatments before starting IVF. Ten eggs were retrieved in October, and three were fertilized and frozen. Her doctor transferred one of the embryos into her womb in late January and she became pregnant.

But the same day the court ruling came down, an ultrasound showed problems with the fetal heartbeat.

"It was kind of a double punch — like, this might not work and you might not have access to IVF," she said.

For Greenwood, IVF is the only way she can have children.

The 31-year-old Montgomery woman was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma 11 years ago. She went into remission after chemotherapy, but the cancer returned when she was 25. The ensuing radiation, chemotherapy and stem cell transplant led to infertility. So she had her eggs harvested and frozen.

Being a mom "is something I've always dreamed about my whole life," she said.

Last year, Greenwood became pregnant with her little girl through an embryo transfer and is now in her third trimester. She doesn't want to stop at one child, though. "I definitely want at least two, if not more," she said.

She's been trying to stay hopeful that IVF will resume at her clinic. But each day brings fresh reminders of the court decision in her job as a physician assistant in surgical breast oncology, where many of her patients hope to preserve their fertility.

'EVERY MONTH THAT YOU'RE NOT PREGNANT FEELS LIKE GRIEF'

Dr. Kara Goldman, medical director of fertility preservation at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago, said older patients and those with serious diseases face different challenges.

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Patients with cancer, for example, urgently need cancer treatment. This means they must begin taking medications to get ready for egg retrieval almost immediately. They can choose to freeze their eggs or fertilize them and freeze embryos — which have a greater likelihood of surviving the thaw later.

Older patients face a decreasing likelihood of pregnancy and an increasing chance of chromosomal abnormalities in their offspring the longer they wait. The time it can take to get pregnant often exacts an emotional toll.

“When you are ready to have a child, every month that you’re not pregnant feels like grief,” said Goldman, 41, who had her 9-month-old son through IVF.

Doctors said the turmoil in Alabama has deepened that grief for many.

Dr. Mamie McLean, O’Brien’s doctor, said a patient in her 40s who desperately wants a second child had an unsuccessful IVF cycle and wanted to begin the process again this month. She’s considering doing that in Georgia.

“She would much prefer to stay in Alabama,” McLean said. “But she also knows that time isn’t on her side.”

Dr. Jennifer Kawwass, medical director of the Emory Reproductive Center in Atlanta, said she’s already seeing an influx of Alabama patients, and many are stressed out.

“Fertility treatment already puts patients at so much social and financial stress,” she said. “The unexpected, sort of indefinite pause on IVF in Alabama is compounding this.”

Without insurance, one cycle of IVF costs about \$15,000 to \$25,000. Travel and lodging costs can add thousands more — especially since an IVF cycle requires six to 10 visits over two weeks.

As patients consider their options and push for solutions in Alabama, they and their doctors also hope that threats to IVF don’t spread to other states.

“I would hope that as a country, we can unite over the fact that these treatments are really aiming to help people grow families and bring life into this world,” Kawwass said. “It is somewhat ironic and also tragic that this is actually hurting individuals that are trying to build their families.”

Facebook, Instagram, Messenger and Threads logins restored after widespread outage

Associated Press undefined

A technical issue caused widespread login issues for a few hours across Meta’s Facebook, Instagram, Threads and Messenger platforms Tuesday.

Andy Stone, Meta’s head communications, acknowledged the issues on X, formerly known as Twitter, and said the company “resolved the issue as quickly as possible for everyone who was impacted, and we apologize for any inconvenience.”

Users reported being locked out of their Facebook accounts and feeds on the platform as well as Threads and Instagram were not refreshing. WhatsApp, which is also owned by Meta, appeared unaffected.

A senior official with the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency told reporters Tuesday that the agency was “not aware of any specific election nexus nor any specific malicious cyberactivity nexus to the outage.”

The outage comes just ahead of Thursday’s deadline for Big Tech companies to comply with the European Union’s new Digital Markets Act. To comply, Meta is making changes, like allowing users to separate their Facebook and Instagram accounts so personal information can’t be combined to target them with online ads. It’s not clear whether the outage is connected to any preparations Meta might be carrying out for the DMA.

In 2021, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp were down for hours, an outage the company said was a result of faulty changes on routers that coordinate network traffic between its data centers. The next year, WhatsApp had another brief outage.

Mideast Starbucks franchisee firing 2,000 workers after being targeted in Israel-Hamas war boycott

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The Middle East franchisee of Starbucks said Tuesday it has begun firing around 2,000 workers at its coffee shops across the region after the brand found itself targeted by activists during the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The Kuwait-based Alshaya Group, a private family firm holding franchise rights for a variety of Western companies including The Cheesecake Factory, H&M and Shake Shack, issued a statement acknowledging the firings at its Middle Eastern and North African locations.

"As a result of the continually challenging trading conditions over the last six months, we have taken the sad and very difficult decision to reduce the number of colleagues in our Starbucks MENA stores," the statement read.

Alshaya later confirmed it was firing about 2,000 employees, as first reported by Reuters. Many of its employees in the Gulf Arab states are foreign workers hailing from Asian nations.

Alshaya runs about 1,900 Starbucks branches in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates. It had employed more than 19,000 staff, according to the Seattle-based company. The layoffs represent just over 10% of its staff.

Since the beginning of the war on Oct. 7, Starbucks has found itself alongside other Western brands targeted by pro-Palestinian activists over the war. The company prominently has been trying to counter what it describes as "ongoing false and misleading information being shared about Starbucks" being spread online.

"We have no political agenda," Starbucks said. "We do not use our profits to fund any government or military operations anywhere — and never have."

In October, Starbucks sued Workers United, which has organized workers in at least 370 U.S. Starbucks stores. over a pro-Palestinian message posted on a union social media account.

Starbucks said it was trying to get the union to stop using its name and likeness, as the post also drew protests from pro-Israel demonstrators. Boycotters also felt the company wasn't adequately supporting Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Starbucks revenue rose 8% to a record \$9.43 billion for the October-December period. But that was lower than the \$9.6 billion analysts had forecast, likely in part because of activist boycotts.

Starbucks isn't the only brand targeted by activists in the war. Others have called for a boycott of McDonald's after a local franchisee in Israel announced in October that it was providing free meals to Israeli soldiers.

Democrats make play for veteran and military support as Trump homes in on GOP nomination

By JAMES POLLARD Associated Press/Report for America

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Highway signs welcome drivers entering North Carolina to "the nation's most military friendly state," and veterans here know they're being courted. But in a state where camouflage-colored appeals have become commonplace, recent efforts by progressive groups to cut into what has long been a reliably red constituency face an early test on Super Tuesday.

Among the 16 states and one territory casting ballots in Tuesday's 2024 presidential primaries and caucuses are some with the nation's highest rates of active-duty service members and largest populations of veterans: Texas, California, Virginia and North Carolina. But Tar Heel State veterans interviewed in the runup to the primary season's biggest voting day varied in their politics, even if they agreed that their military service informed their opinions.

Ryan Rogers, who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, says the Biden administration mishandled the August 2021 attacks on Kabul's airport that killed at least 60 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops during U.S. forces' Af-

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ghanistan withdrawal. The right-leaning independent voter from eastern North Carolina fears the blasts signaled a weakness that could endanger U.S. troops overseas.

"I don't care what side you're on," he said. "You better be strong."

But Ric Vandett, a 78-year-old Vietnam veteran from Hickory, won't vote for President Joe Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump. The left-leaning independent voter said he cannot forget Trump's refusal to acknowledge defeat in the 2020 election, which he blames for the Jan. 6 attacks on the U.S. Capitol.

"We came extremely close to a major constitutional crisis on Jan. 6," he said. "I'm afraid to see that happen again."

Recent statements by Trump have fueled Democrats' sense that there's an opening among voters with strong military ties, even if that gap hasn't surfaced during his march toward the GOP nomination.

Ahead of South Carolina's Republican primary, Trump said he "would encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to NATO countries that don't meet defense spending targets. He also questioned why the husband of rival Nikki Haley wasn't joining her on the campaign trail, though Michael Haley was then deployed with the South Carolina Army National Guard.

Haley responded that Trump knows "nothing about" serving the country. Trump handily defeated Haley in South Carolina, just like every state primary and caucus to date. Her only win came on Sunday in Washington, D.C.

Trump benefited from the bloc's support in the 2020 general election. AP VoteCast found that about 6 in 10 military veterans said they voted for Trump then, as did just over half of those with a veteran in the household.

Among voters in this year's South Carolina Republican primary, AP VoteCast found that close to two-thirds of military veterans and people in veteran households voted for Trump over Haley.

Still, progressive groups are citing Trump's unorthodox foreign policy and past comments to argue that he's no friend to Americans in uniform. Any significant departure from the more conservative constituency of veterans and military families could spell trouble for Trump in a November rematch with Biden.

The Democrats will have to work for that support, according to Cal Cunningham, North Carolina Democrats' 2020 nominee for U.S. Senate and an Army reservist who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Winning over this community is always challenging, Cunningham said, because people with military experience tend to value a culture more aligned with the "hierarchical" GOP than the "egalitarian" Democrats.

Their ability to do so could help determine which candidate receives North Carolina's 16 electoral votes this fall.

"It's going to be part of where the presidency is won and lost," Cunningham said.

Trump's weekend rally in Greensboro was protested by Common Defense, a progressive organization founded in 2016 to engage veterans as more than just "political props." The group said Trump's "alarming disregard for the core tenets of democracy" goes against their oaths.

The Biden campaign has also ratcheted up attacks over Trump's history of disparaging remarks about the armed forces.

"I call them patriots and heroes. The only loser I see is Donald Trump," said Biden, angrily wagging his finger during the South Carolina Democratic Party's fundraising dinner, in reference to reports that his predecessor described the American war dead at a French cemetery as "losers" and "suckers."

VoteVets, a liberal political action committee, is planning a \$10 million to \$15 million push targeting veterans and military families in key battleground states, according to co-founder Jon Soltz. A 60-second ad invoking former President Ronald Reagan to attack Republicans over blocking Ukraine aid will hit airwaves soon, Soltz said.

Soltz, a U.S. Army officer in the Iraq War, said the GOP lost its status as "the party of the military" during the Trump era. Anyone who claims to support service members "just can't vote" for someone with a "ridiculous amount of deferments" who "trashes" the likes of the late U.S. Sen. John McCain, he said.

Some veterans who oppose Biden say Trump has better defended the country's priorities despite past comments. Rogers, the Afghanistan and Iraq veteran, didn't like Trump's description of McCain as "not

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a war hero," but said he's voting "on a strong America" and not "what comes out of the man's mouth." "I've been the guy on the ground," he said. "I've lost Marines because of decisions."

The modern GOP has grown skeptical of foreign entanglements. So have many former military members, according to John Byrnes, a senior adviser for a conservative advocacy group called Concerned Veterans for America.

Ken Deery, a Charlotte resident whose Army career took him from Missouri to Germany in the 1980s, said he sought to defend the "American way" against the Soviet Union. That dream — affordable home ownership and education, for example — isn't possible nowadays, he said.

"We've got global wars starting up all over the place. Any one of these could blossom into a world war," said Deery, who described himself as libertarian. "And that's all on Biden's watch."

Biden supporters say they trust his administration more to navigate the wars in Russia and Gaza than Trump — who as president bucked tradition by currying favor with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Liberal veterans also point to 2022 legislation that extended health care services to millions who served at military bases exposed to toxic "burn pits," but who had often seen their disability claims denied. Considered the largest expansion of benefits in three decades, the law added hypertension to the list of ailments presumably caused by exposure to chemicals used during the Vietnam War.

For Sandra Williams, who spent most of her five years with the Army in Georgia, it "means a lot" that Biden pushed that to the forefront. She said the law opened up medical services for several relatives.

Williams plans to back Biden and disagrees that Trump has the country's best interests at heart. She said the United States "almost turned into a laughingstock" and "lost our credibility" under Trump.

What's certain is that veterans do tend to vote. According to the Census Bureau, they cast ballots at rates 8 percentage points higher than non-veterans in the last presidential election.

Those votes should not be taken for granted, cautioned Allison Jaslow, CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. In a survey of over 2,500 members, the non-partisan organization found that nearly three-fourths of respondents were dissatisfied with the way democracy is currently practiced.

Jaslow said veterans are so politically engaged because they want their sacrifices "to be worth it." She said some politicians claim they're "for the troops" but lack "the guts" to fully debate the cost of going to war.

"I think it's fair for the average veteran to feel like our service was taken for granted," she said.

Today in History: March 6, Supreme Court issues Dred Scott decision

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, March 6, the 66th day of 2024. There are 300 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 6, 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, ruled 7-2 that Scott, a slave, was not an American citizen and therefore could not sue for his freedom in federal court.

On this date:

In 1834, the city of York in Upper Canada was incorporated as Toronto.

In 1836, the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, fell as Mexican forces led by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna stormed the fortress after a 13-day siege; the battle claimed the lives of all the Texan defenders, nearly 200 strong, including William Travis, James Bowie and Davy Crockett.

In 1912, Oreo sandwich cookies were first introduced by the National Biscuit Co.

In 1933, a national bank holiday declared by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, aimed at calming panicked depositors, went into effect.

In 1944, U.S. heavy bombers staged the first full-scale American raid on Berlin during World War II.

In 1964, heavyweight boxing champion Cassius Clay officially changed his name to Muhammad Ali.

In 1970, a bomb being built inside a Greenwich Village townhouse in New York by the radical Weathermen accidentally went off, destroying the house and killing three group members.

In 1973, Nobel Prize-winning author Pearl S. Buck, 80, died in Danby, Vermont.

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In 1981, Walter Cronkite signed off for the last time as principal anchorman of "The CBS Evening News."

In 1998, the Army honored three Americans who'd risked their lives and turned their weapons on fellow soldiers to stop the slaughter of Vietnamese villagers at My Lai (mee ly) in 1968.

In 2002, Independent Counsel Robert Ray issued his final report in which he wrote that former President Bill Clinton could have been indicted and probably would have been convicted in the scandal involving former White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

In 2016, former first lady Nancy Reagan died in Los Angeles at age 94.

In 2022, a second attempt to evacuate Ukrainians from the besieged city of Mariupol collapsed as Russian attacks made it impossible to create a humanitarian corridor.

Today's birthdays: Former FBI and CIA director William Webster is 100. Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan is 98. Dancer-actor Carmen de Lavallade is 93. Former Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova is 87. Former Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond, R-Mo., is 85. Actor-writer Joanna Miles is 84. Actor Ben Murphy is 82. Opera singer Dame Kiri Te Kanawa is 80. Rock musician Hugh Grundy (The Zombies) is 79. Rock singer-musician David Gilmour (Pink Floyd) is 78. Actor Anna Maria Horsford is 77. Actor-director Rob Reiner is 77. Singer Kiki Dee is 77. TV consumer reporter John Stossel is 77. Composer-lyricist Stephen Schwartz is 76. Rock singer-musician Phil Alvin (The Blasters) is 71. Sports correspondent Armen Keteyian is 71. Actor Tom Arnold is 65. Actor D.L. Hughley is 61. Country songwriter Skip Ewing is 60. Actor Shuler Hensley is 57. Actor Connie Britton is 57. Actor Moira Kelly is 56. Actor Amy Pietz is 55. Rock musician Chris Broderick (Megadeth) is 54. Basketball Hall of Famer Shaquille O'Neal is 52. Country singer Trent Willmon is 51. Rapper Beanie Sigel is 50. Rapper Bubba Sparxxx is 47. Actor Shaun Evans is 44. Rock musician Chris Tomson (Vampire Weekend) is 40. Former MLB pitcher Jake Arrieta is 38. Actor Eli Marienthal is 38. Rapper/producer Tyler, the Creator is 33. Actor Dillon Freasier is 28. Actor Savannah Stehlin is 28. Actor Millicent Simmonds (Film: "Wonderstruck") is 21.