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## Thursday, March 14

No School - Spring Break  
State BBB Tournament at Rapid City: 7 p.m. Central Time: Groton Area vs. Hamlin  
Groton Lions Club meeting, 104 N. Main, 6 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, garlic toast, chocolate cake, fruit.

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

*"You are worth the quiet moment. You are worth the deeper breaths, and you are worth the time it takes to slow down, be still, and rest."*

MORGAN HARPER NICHOLS



## Friday, March 15

No School - Spring Break  
State BBB Tournament at Rapid City  
Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu hot dish, vegetable Catalina blend, pears, tapioca pudding, whole wheat bread.

## Saturday, March 16

State BBB Tournament at Rapid City  
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.

**CLOSED:** **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

In partnership with **smartasset**<sup>™</sup>

The US House of Representatives voted 352-65 yesterday to ban TikTok in the US unless its Chinese-based parent company, Bytedance, divests the popular social video network's US operations within six months. The bill's prospects in the Senate are unclear, though President Joe Biden has said he would sign the bill should it pass.

Menopause may play a key role in significantly extending the life span of certain species of whales, according to new research published yesterday. The work also sheds light on the evolutionary origins of the biological process, a question that has vexed scientists for years.

Nigerian kidnappers have demanded over \$600K for the release of over 280 students taken hostage last week. At least 500 people have been kidnapped over the past two weeks in a crisis that has become increasingly common since the 2014 kidnapping by Boko Haram.

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Actress Olivia Munn reveals she underwent double mastectomy following breast cancer diagnosis. Michael Culver, actor known for role in "Star Wars," dies at 85.

Film director Roman Polanski's civil trial over sexual assault allegations set for August 2025; Polanski is accused of sexual battery against a minor in 1973.

NFL free agency period officially begins; see tracker of all signings and transactions. Dallas Seavey wins a record sixth Iditarod sled dog race.

## Science & Technology

Japan's Space One rocket launch fails shortly after takeoff; mission aimed to be the country's first private-sector-led effort to put a satellite into orbit.

New 3D printing technique allows mass production of microscale components for medicine, manufacturing, and other applications; high-throughput technique can fabricate up to 1 million components per day.

Scientists sequence genome from malaria-causing parasite found in the remains of an ancient Roman skeleton; results expected to shed light on the disease's evolution in Europe.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.5%) as shares of Nvidia and tech giants fall.

Dollar Tree to shutter 600 Family Dollar stores this year, and 370 Family Dollar stores and 30 Dollar Tree stores in coming years, after posting fourth quarter loss. Adidas reports first annual loss since 1992, warns North American sales will fall by roughly 5% this year due to lower demand and overstocked stores.

Athletic wear giant Under Armour to bring back founder and former CEO Kevin Plank; current CEO Stephanie Linnartz to step down April 1 after holding the role for over a year.

## Politics & World Affairs

Georgia judge dismisses six of 41 counts in 2020 election interference case against former President Donald Trump and five codefendants; dismissed charges include soliciting state officials to violate their oaths of office. Hunter Biden declines House Oversight Committee request to publicly testify as part of impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden.

Three men face firearm trafficking charges in connection with last month's mass shooting during Chiefs' Super Bowl parade in Kansas City that left one person dead, 22 others wounded.

Russian President Vladimir Putin says Russian forces will be deployed along border with Finland in response to the nation joining NATO last April. Ally of late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny reportedly attacked outside home.

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.



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## The end of the road!

For these six seniors, the end of the road is the State A Basketball Tournament in Rapid City. These GHS Seniors have been playing basketball together since they were in first grade in 2013. They will embark on their final basketball journey at Groton Area this weekend. Pictured are Holden Sippel, Lane Tietz, Braxton Imrie, Logan Ringgenberg, Colby Dunker and Jacob Zak. (Photo courtesy Dawn Imrie)

## Groton Area Boys play today at 7 p.m. Central Time

The Groton Area Boys Basketball team will open the State A Tournament taking on the Hamlin Chargers. It will be the number one and number two team in the Northeast Conference facing each other in Rapid City. When asked what will be the big difference with Hamlin compared to the first time they played them, Coach Brian Dolan said, "We trust each other more. Our younger kids have grown into their roles on the team."



## PROCLAMATION

### Groton Tiger Week – March 11<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>

WHEREAS, the Groton Area High School Boys' Basketball Team has distinguished themselves by their fine performance in the SoDak16 as well as the regular playing season; and

WHEREAS, the Groton Area High School Boys' Basketball Team has earned an invitation to the South Dakota State A Boys' Basketball Tournament; and

WHEREAS, Groton Area High School has accomplished superior standings in each of the athletic and academic student participation programs; and

WHEREAS, Groton Area School system has set a fine example in its role as an educational institution; and

WHEREAS, Groton City and the surrounding area are known for their support for the many athletic and academic programs of the Groton Area Schools;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Scott Hanlon, Mayor of the City of Groton, South Dakota, do hereby proclaim the week of March 11<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2024 as "Groton Tiger Week"

in the City of Groton, South Dakota in full recognition of their outstanding contributions to the community.



IN WITNESS THEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and cause the seal of the City of Groton to be affixed this 12<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2024.

*Scott Hanlon, Mayor*  
Scott Hanlon, Mayor

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## The Life of Gerald Rossow

Gerald "Jerry" Rossow, 83, of Groton passed away March 12, 2024 at his son's home.



Gerald "Jerry" Duane Rossow was born on February 23, 1941 in Aberdeen to Duane and Thelma (Hitchcock) Rossow. He graduated from Groton High School and joined the Army. On December 23, 1959 he was united in marriage with Ramona Liebel at the Presbyterian Church in Groton. Together, they were blessed with four boys. After service with the Army, he was employed at the gold mine in Lead, SD before returning to the Ferney area to farm. He also had various other jobs in the Groton area.

He enjoyed spending time with his family and attending activities and sports events for his children and grandchildren.

Celebrating his life is his sons, Rick (Melanie) Rossow of Glenwood Springs, CO; Marc (Jayne) Rossow of Canyon Lake, TX; Jamie Rossow of Groton, his grandchildren: Morgan (James), Tyler, Jeraka (Steve), Shay (Weston), Sydney (Ben), Parker (Kylie) and Taryn, his great grandchildren: Knox, Bowen, Ella, Wells, Adley and Abby and his sisters: Judy (Emmet) Anderson Chandler, Az, Ginger Vickers, Henderson, NV and Debbie Rossow, Henderson, NV.

Preceding his in death was his wife Ramona, infant son Roger, his parents and grandparents.

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## Yankton County Fatal Crash

What: Motorcycle vs. Truck fatal crash

Where: 301st Street and 446th Avenue, 4 miles north and 3 miles west of Volin, SD

When: 5 p.m., Tuesday, March 12, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 65, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2006 Harley Davidson

Helmet Use: No

Driver 2: Male, 54, no injuries

Vehicle 2: 2001 Septic Tanker Truck

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Yankton County, S.D.- A motorcyclist suffered fatal injuries yesterday in a two-vehicle crash near Volin, SD. The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 65-year-old male driver of a 2006 Harley Davidson motorcycle was traveling east on 301st Street near 446th Avenue behind a semi tractor/trailer. A septic tanker truck was traveling the same direction and was in front of the semi. The septic tanker truck slowed down to turn north into a field. The motorcycle driver attempted to pass the semi and struck the side of the septic tanker truck as it was turning into the field. The motorcycle rider was thrown from his motorcycle. He died at the scene as a result of his injuries. He was not wearing a helmet.

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.

## 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 141<sup>st</sup> St. Watch for auction signs on:

**THURSDAY, MARCH 14<sup>th</sup>, 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](http://www.burlagepeterson.com), or contact Auctioneers.

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

TERMS: Visit [burlagepeterson.com](http://burlagepeterson.com) for full sale terms. Possession for 2024.

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PETERSON**  
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## Driver Licensing Program Offers Online Renewal Tutorial

Pierre, S.D.- A video tutorial detailing how to renew your South Dakota driver license from the comfort of your home is now available online on the Department of Public Safety's website.

"Online license renewal is a fast and convenient way to renew your license," said John Broers, Director of the Driver Licensing Program. "Not only can you skip the line, online renewal is available anytime of the day or night."

"If your driver license has not expired and you did not use the online or mail-in method for your last renewal, you may be eligible to renew online," Broers added.

Applying online is done through a secure website. Users may log in or create an account at SD.gov. That account will also allow users to apply for and renew hunting and fishing licenses, reserve campground space, and access other state features without creating multiple logins. The system provides the user a single-source login for all those services.

While renewing your driver license, required documents may be scanned or uploaded during the application process. If a scanner is not available, a quality photo taken with your phone may be used. All the necessary forms are also available on the website.

A video tutorial is available to take you step by step through the application process if needed. Viewers may pause and replay any portions where they'd like additional help. Links to the video are easily found on the Driver License Program website, [DPS.SD.gov/driver-licensing](https://DPS.SD.gov/driver-licensing).

## GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

### Special School Board Meeting

March 19, 2024 – 6:00 PM

Bristol Community Center (86 S Main Street, Bristol, SD)

#### AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed.

#### POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

#### OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.
2. Public Discussion Regarding District Opt-Out Proposal.

#### ADJOURN



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **Noem slings accusations about tribes while signing education bills**

**Governor also signs quantum computing and cybersecurity legislation, answers town hall questions**

**BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MARCH 13, 2024 6:26 PM**

MITCHELL — Gov. Kristi Noem leveled accusations against Native American parents and political leaders Wednesday while saying she wants to help Native American students succeed.

She made the comments during a town hall meeting in Mitchell, where she signed two education bills into law, and at a later town hall in Winner.

Chronic absenteeism among South Dakota's Native American students attending public school increased from 31% to 54% from 2018 to 2023 – the highest among all South Dakota student demographics. A third of Native American public school students don't complete high school, 84% are not considered college and career ready, and only 7% take the ACT, according to the latest data from the state Department of Education.

Noem told town hall attendees in Mitchell that she is "only as good and doing as good a job as the kids that are suffering the most" in the state. With three of the five poorest counties in the nation located in areas of South Dakota with tribal lands, she said there's work to do.

"My next step would be to do what I can to get a tribe to participate with me to help their kids be more successful," Noem said. "Because they live with 80% to 90% unemployment. Their kids don't have any hope. They don't have parents who show up and help them. They have a tribal council or a president who focuses on a political agenda more than they care about actually helping somebody's life look better."

### **Tribal leaders 'personally benefitting' from cartels, Noem alleges**

Earlier this year, tribal leaders and tribally enrolled legislators criticized comments Noem made about drugs on South Dakota reservations during a speech to lawmakers about the U.S.-Mexico border. In that speech, Noem made multiple references to the ravages of fentanyl and other drugs on reservation communities, and said the drugs are coming from Mexican cartels.

On Wednesday afternoon, Noem expanded on those comments during her town hall in Winner.

"We've got some tribal leaders that I believe are personally benefitting from the cartels being here, and that's why they attack me every day," she said.

South Dakota Searchlight reached out to several Native American legislators and a tribal president after Noem's town hall comments, including some who were critical of her border speech. None responded with comments by the time of this article's publication. The Oglala Sioux Tribe banned Noem from the Pine Ridge Reservation after her border speech.

Lyle Miller, a Mitchell-based Native American artist and veteran who taught art at Crow Creek Tribal School for 20 years, told Noem during the Mitchell town hall that the problems Indigenous people face are connected to "trying to secure their identity." Many tribal communities experience generational trauma from colonization and policies that stripped Native Americans of their culture, language and religion.

"There's a history between the United States government and the Lakota people and other tribes here in the Northern Plains," Miller said. "Those students are struggling to understand American education, but it's hard to understand something that isn't very inclusive of who you are, who your identity is."



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The state passed standards in 2018, the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings, to teach South Dakota students about local Native American history and culture. But according to a 2021 survey by the state Department of Education, less than half of teachers taught the material.

State Department of Education Secretary Joe Graves told South Dakota Searchlight after the town hall that the state is working on a number of initiatives regarding Native American student success. One is to increase competition in education by further supporting alternative education.

"We have seen some really promising things come out of the Native American community specifically in what they're doing in forming private or alternative schools that are focused on language and culture," Graves said. "So, we want to support that in every way."

Rapid City Area Schools had a Lakota immersion program in 2021 but struggled to find qualified teachers, so the program is on hold, Media Relations Manager Bobbi Schaeftbauer said. The school district has a dedicated staff member for implementing the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and other Native American education programs.

## **Bills fund phonics training, require higher teacher pay**

One of the bills Noem signed allocates \$6 million toward phonics literacy training for teachers in an effort to improve students' reading proficiency levels. The effort was one of Noem's legislative priorities this year after she announced the initiative during her December budget address.

The other bill mandates a statewide minimum teacher salary of \$45,000 and requires districts to raise their average teacher compensation by 97% of the annual increases in state education funding. The law is intended to increase teacher salaries in the state – and thereby improve teacher recruitment and retention – since South Dakota ranks 49th in the nation for average teacher salaries.

Sioux Falls Republican Rep. Tony Venhuizen, one of the legislators who supported the teacher pay bill, said during the Wednesday event that the law will allow teachers to "teach in the best way possible."

"Studies tell you the number one factor in school for effective education is not facilities, it's not spending, it's not class size – it's having a quality teacher in the classroom," Venhuizen said. "Well, if you want to have quality teachers enter the workforce and stay in the workforce, you have to pay them."

## **Carbon pipeline discussed**

Aside from discussions about education, Noem took questions from the Mitchell audience ranging from potentially being picked as former President Donald Trump's running mate to workforce recruitment efforts to signing a group of pipeline bills into law last week. Those bills add new legal protections for landowners affected by a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline in eastern South Dakota, while preserving a regulatory path forward for the project.

Michael Boyle, a pastor from Parkston, asked Noem why she didn't veto the pipeline bills. Noem said the bills had been through thorough debate, were deemed constitutional and passed by legislators.

"I'm not Xi Jinping and I'm not a dictator and I'm not somebody who's going to come in and say, 'You know what? The constitution doesn't matter. I'm going to force my will on people,'" Noem responded.

Noem told town hall attendees that if they have any concerns about the pipeline bills they can bring them to her or their legislators ahead of the next legislative session. The 2024 legislative session ended last week, and the 2025 session will begin in January.

## **Quantum computing, local cybersecurity bills**

Earlier Wednesday, Noem visited Dakota State University in Madison, where she signed a bill providing about \$3 million in state funds to establish a Center for Quantum Information Science and Technology, which involves multiple state universities doing research into the developing field of quantum computing.

In a news release about that, Noem said she also signed a bill providing \$7 million to start a cybersecurity initiative for cities and counties.

The amount is roughly what South Dakota would have received from the federal government over the last several years if the state had enrolled in a grant program aimed at bolstering local government cybersecurity. South Dakota is the lone state in the nation not participating in the program, after Noem's administration said there were too many strings attached to the offer.

Noem also held a town hall meeting Wednesday afternoon in Winner and is scheduled to host a town hall at 9 a.m. Mountain time Thursday at Common Grounds in Spearfish.

## Crush of complaints forces state to hire extra help for officer misconduct investigations

**Record numbers tied in part to online reporting, officials say**

**BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 13, 2024 6:26 PM**

There are so many complaints about cops now flowing into the Division of Criminal Investigation that the agency has hired a second full-time investigator to handle them.

Former FBI agent Dave Keith was hired to handle allegations of officer misbehavior recently, DCI Director Dan Satterlee said Wednesday during the March meeting of the Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Training Commission in Pierre.

The primary investigator of officer misbehavior has been busy dealing with the spike in complaints since 2021, when the DCI streamlined the process and made an online complaint form available.

The commission heard short rundowns of the 59 complaints from 2023 that were deemed too minor to act on, unfounded, or outside the scope of its authority in the half hour before DCI Director Satterlee announced the new agent.

Those rundowns did not include the names of accused officers. They also did not identify the agencies that employed them beyond noting each as a county, city or state organization, and did not identify where in the state each incident happened beyond east or west of the Missouri River.

Allegations included harassment, unnecessary force, racial profiling, stolen items from citizen vehicles and failure to appropriately follow through on criminal complaints. One involved a sheriff who ceased policing for a time before resigning. Another involved a sheriff's deputy posting material on Facebook and TikTok deemed inappropriate by his employer.

Special Agent Guy DiBenedetto, the lead investigator for officer misconduct complaints in Pierre, has been "fully employed" dealing with the crush of complaints.

"Every one of these complaints is reviewed," Satterlee said. "But it takes time."

Hank Prim of the DCI, who leads its officer training and standards team, said another 27 complaints have landed in Pierre since the start of the year, putting the state on pace to surpass the 2023 record of 114 statewide.

"We're fortunate to have the extra help because it seems that's just going to continue to mount," Prim said.

### Five officers give up certification

Prim quickly walked the commission through the reasons behind five decertification agreements, in which an officer surrenders certification voluntarily to avoid a confrontational hearing before the commission.

Grace Waters, a former Mitchell telecommunications officer, was decertified voluntarily after an arrest for DUI and contributing alcohol to a minor.

Kole Mahoney, a former Platte police officer, gave up his certification over his use of marijuana tied to a traffic crash he was involved in.

Cole Larson, a former Yankton police officer, gave up his certification after an act of timecard fraud with an off-duty employer.

Joseph Curtin, a former state trooper, was decertified by consent following a DUI and domestic violence

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arrest.

Kipp Stearns, a former Turner County sheriff's deputy, surrendered his certification after allegations of an illegal search he'd attested to in a court affidavit.

Such "consent agreements" have been useful in clearing the workload for the commission, Prim said.

One other settlement was discussed on Wednesday, but that one allowed the officer to stay an officer on the condition of remedial training.

Former Turner County Sheriff's Deputy Darrell O'Connor got physical with a farmer who'd been trying to keep his cattle away from a burning tractor, Agent DiBenedetto told the commission. O'Connor had taken it upon himself to respond to a call to a volunteer fire department and hurried to the scene at speeds up to 114 miles an hour.

When the farmer didn't immediately follow O'Connor's commands to move away from the tractor, DiBenedetto said, "he wanted to handcuff the farmer."

The two exchanged words, and O'Connor eventually used a taser to subdue the farmer and arrested him. O'Connor hadn't even been dispatched.

"Terrible decision-making on the part of the deputy," DiBenedetto said.

O'Connor was disciplined by the sheriff with a 14-day suspension. His settlement agreement with the commission comes with a 20-day suspension with credit for those 14 days. The remaining six days will be held in abeyance until he finishes three classes: surviving verbal conflict, response to resistance, and fair and impartial treatment.

The commission voted unanimously to adopt the agreement.

## **One win, one loss in contested hearings**

Two contested case hearings took place Wednesday.

The first involved an officer named Chase Frank, who filled out several applications for law enforcement employment and certification, starting in 2020. On the departmental applications, he admitted to using marijuana in the past, and was eventually hired by the Winner Police Department.

When he filled out an application for a spot in the basic law enforcement certification course, however, he said he hadn't used marijuana in the preceding 365 days.

That was in 2020. In October of 2019, he'd puffed on a THC vape pen at his sister's wedding. He'd admitted to that prior drug use in his employment applications.

But using pot within a year of applying for the certification course bars a person from attending. At one point in Frank's hearing, Satterlee noted that the instructions about drug use are listed in bold, capital letters on the form.

Frank was admitted to the academy, passed and was certified. The discrepancy was eventually discovered, and its reflection of his moral character was the subject of Wednesday's hearing.

Frank told Prim over the phone that he knew he'd be denied a spot at the academy with an honest answer, Prim testified. Frank disputed that. He contends that answering "no" on the training course paperwork was an accidental oversight.

"I'm not denying that I put no when I should have put yes," Frank said. "What I deny is that I did it to deceive the law enforcement training commission."

Frank, currently employed by the Winner City Jail, told the commission he's sorry for his mistake and said he'd been as open as possible during the investigation.

The commission voted unanimously to allow him to maintain certification.

The other officer to take the stand on Wednesday did not walk away with his certification.

Tate Fremo had been employed for a short period of time by the Hughes County Jail in April 2022. That was the month he took a preliminary breath test machine and a fistful of plastic blow tubes from the jail without telling his supervisors.

Fremo told the commission he'd taken it home to find and read the manual online, allegedly an attempt to better understand an error message he kept seeing.

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He was caught on video taking the device and the tubes. He was fired and charged with petty theft, a crime for which he pleaded guilty under the terms of a plea agreement that would see the charge scrubbed from his record for good behavior.

Employees are not allowed to take county property home without permission, Hughes County Sheriff Patrick Callahan testified. He also testified that he'd given Fremo a second chance already, specifically when he'd walked into the jail's intake area with a firearm.

"There can't be a more serious matter," than bringing a weapon into a secure area, Callahan said.

Katilin Cummings, the Pierre detective who questioned Fremo about the incident, told the commission that Fremo had been honest about having taken the device, but said "I don't believe he was honest in regards to the reason he took the PBT machine."

Under questioning from Fremo's attorney, Jason Glodt, Callahan said it's true that some employees take home items like handcuffs or tasers, but only when those items are part of their official duties. Glodt argued that the jail employee handbook is vague, and that Fremo made a "big mistake" out of confusion about the rules.

Fremo testified that he sat with the device at his computer, looking up error messages on YouTube and reading the manual, blowing into the device with the tubes in a trial-and-error exercise.

Kelli Marnette, the DCI's lawyer in the case, asked Fremo why he wouldn't just ask another jailer for help. Callahan had said that some of his jailers had been giving breathalyzer tests since the early 1990s.

"I just decided myself that I was going to figure it out," Fremo said.

The commission decided that Fremo's actions were enough to keep him out of law enforcement. They voted unanimously for decertification.

## State board approves \$3.7 million in loans to businesses

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MARCH 13, 2024 3:47 PM

A state board approved three loans Wednesday worth a total of \$3.7 million, supporting \$9.7 million in capital investments and a projected 35 full-time jobs.

The Board of Economic Development approved the loans, which will be administered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development. The office announced the loan approvals in a news release.

Southern Sun LLC, of Huron, was approved for a \$1.7 million Revolving Economic Development and Initiative (REDI) loan and an SD Works loan for \$1.3 million. The loans will help finance the sunflower seed company's effort to move its seed roasting capacity in-house to South Dakota. A projected 21 full-time jobs will be created.

Centerville Manufacturing, LLC, of Centerville, was approved for a \$675,000 REDI loan. The machining shop will use the loan to help construct a building and purchase equipment. A projected 14 jobs will be created when the company is up and running.

The REDI Fund offers low-interest loans to promote economic growth and job creation, covering up to 45% of a project's cost. Projects can include land purchases, site improvements, building costs, or machinery and equipment purchases.

The SD Works program offers loans to businesses for construction, buying equipment, and general expenses.

## Tribal activist faults North Dakota for high DAPL protest costs

Winona LaDuke testifies she was 'alarmed' by regulatory review of pipeline

BY: AMY DALRYMPLE - MARCH 13, 2024 11:30 AM

An Indigenous environmental activist who testified Tuesday in a trial over Dakota Access Pipeline protest costs criticized the court case and said the state of North Dakota should pay the expenses.

"I think it's ridiculous," Winona LaDuke, former executive director of Honor the Earth, said in an interview after her testimony. "No one told them to spend \$38 million. I think they should pay."

LaDuke was called as a witness by the United States in a lawsuit with North Dakota over costs incurred

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in 2016 and 2017 during the Dakota Access protests. A bench trial in U.S. District Court in Bismarck began in February and is expected to finish this week.

LaDuke, a tribal leader from Minnesota's White Earth Reservation and enrolled member of the Mississippi band of Ashinaabeg, testified that she was invited in April 2016 to the Standing Rock Reservation by Dakota Access opponents because of her previous activism against another oil pipeline.

Honor the Earth, an organization she founded and led for 30 years, was among the opponents of Enbridge's Sandpiper Pipeline, a project that proposed to carry oil from North Dakota through northern Minnesota. The proposal met significant opposition in Minnesota and was never constructed, with Enbridge later buying a stake in Dakota Access.

"I became very alarmed at the lack of tribal participation and informed decision-making on that pipeline," LaDuke said of Dakota Access.

LaDuke, who asked attorneys to call her a water protector rather than a protester, said she began camping along the Cannonball River on the Standing Rock Reservation in August 2016 with members of her family. She said she was there off and on during the demonstrations for a total of a month.

A key issue during the trial is how actions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers impacted the protests. The Corps issued a press release on Sept. 16, 2016, indicating it had granted a special use permit for protesters to occupy Corps-managed land, but the agency had not actually issued a permit.

North Dakota alleges the press release encouraged protesters to remain there, increasing costs to state law enforcement.

LaDuke testified that the press release and the actions of the Corps made no difference to her.

"I was there at the request of the Lakota people," she said, referring to Standing Rock tribal members.

She added the Corps lacked credibility with her for not conducting an environmental impact statement on Dakota Access.

LaDuke criticized what she called "excessive use of force by North Dakota," including military equipment used by law enforcement, police checkpoints, constant aerial surveillance and infiltrators in the camps. She said a Sept. 3, 2016, incident with a private security company that used dogs on protesters "set a bad tone."

"I think that strengthened my resilience to stand for justice and stand for the water," she said.

Previously, witnesses for the state testified about 9 million pounds of garbage removed from the camp by the state after protesters were ordered to leave in February 2017. The state sought to clean the area ahead of anticipated spring flooding.

LaDuke blamed the state for the high costs, saying the demonstrators could have cleared the camp sites if the state allowed more time.

"The state of North Dakota did a good job of making a big mess," she testified.

Edward Maguire, a law enforcement consultant, was hired by the United States to review the conduct of law enforcement during the DAPL protests and testify before the court on his findings. He testified earlier in the trial that while he found some instances of officers acting admirably during the protests, he also saw law enforcement using tactics that were flawed and inconsistent with established policing practices, including the excessive use of force.

Another law enforcement consultant — Robert Handy, who was hired to testify for the state of North Dakota — told the court that in his opinion, state and local law enforcement acted reasonably given the circumstances of the protests.

Also Tuesday, Emily Greenwald, a historian and expert witness on Sioux history, testified about the impact of history on the Dakota Access opposition and how protesters connected themselves to past events.

Greenwald and the firm she works for, Historical Research Associates, produced a report that highlights examples over 170 years of Sioux response when there were encroachments on their territory or tribal sovereignty. Examples she cited included treaties of 1851 and 1868, the taking of the Black Hills in South Dakota and the damming of the Missouri River to create Lake Oahe.

Indigenous activism since the 1960s, such as the occupation of Alcatraz Island, showed how direct action such as land occupation could be successful in gaining attention from the public, the media and

celebrities, she testified.

She also highlighted that the main protest camp, known as Oceti Sakowin, was on land that is considered unceded treaty land.

"It's still part of their territory as defined by the 1851 treaty," Greenwald testified.

Mary Steurer contributed to this report.

## **SD's Johnson, U.S. House vote to ban TikTok unless it's sold by China-controlled parent**

**BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MARCH 13, 2024 10:20 AM**

WASHINGTON — Citing major national security concerns, the U.S. House on Wednesday overwhelmingly passed a bill that effectively bans TikTok unless the company splits from its Chinese owner ByteDance.

The 352-65 vote occurred just a week after lawmakers introduced the bipartisan proposal and days after the powerful House Committee on Energy and Commerce unanimously advanced the legislation, an unusual speed for the 118th Congress.

The bill required a two-thirds majority because House leadership placed it on the floor under a fast-track procedure called suspension of the rules.

South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson is a co-sponsor of the bill and voted in favor of it.

"TikTok is Chinese Communist Party malware, promoting their propaganda and stealing Americans' private data," he said earlier this week.

The legislation, dubbed the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, now heads to the Senate, where concerns over singling out a private company in legislation may slow momentum.

"The overwhelming vote today is a strong signal to the Senate that they need to act," Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, the Washington Republican who chairs the Energy and Commerce Committee, said after the vote.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said in a statement late Wednesday morning that the body "will review the legislation when it comes over from the House."

Leaders on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said they are "united" in concern about a platform that has "enormous power to influence and divide Americans whose parent company ByteDance remains legally required to do the bidding of the Chinese Communist Party."

"We were encouraged by today's strong bipartisan vote in the House of Representatives and look forward to working together to get this bill passed through the Senate and signed into law," committee chair Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, and vice chairman Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican, said in a joint statement.

President Joe Biden, whose administration had a hand in crafting the bill, is expected to sign the measure if the upper chamber approves it.

Despite Biden's support of the bill, his re-election campaign joined TikTok last month as a way to reach Gen Z voters.

### **'Hell no'**

While broad support swells from both sides of the aisle, the legislation has been met by fierce opposition from TikTok users — totaling some 170 million in the U.S. — and from a coalition of young House lawmakers.

"Not only am I a 'no' on tomorrow's TikTok ban bill, I'm a 'Hell no,'" Rep. Maxwell Frost, a Democrat representing Florida, said at a Tuesday press conference where he questioned which companies are large enough to acquire TikTok. Frost is the youngest member of Congress at 27.

"Essentially what this bill is doing is setting this whole sale up to fail," he said.

Forty-nine Democrats joined Frost in opposing the bill Wednesday, including several members of the so-called squad, a group of progressive Democrats that includes Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal

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Bowman of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Greg Casar of Texas, Summer Lee of Pennsylvania, Cori Bush of Missouri and Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts.

Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and Washington Democrat Pramila Jayapal voted against the measure, saying in a statement that the "overly rushed" bill "provides an unworkable path to remove TikTok from ownership by a Chinese company, making it a de facto ban."

Notably, Connecticut Democrat Jim Himes, ranking member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, voted against the legislation.

"I have more insight than most into the online threats posed by our adversaries. But one of the key differences between us and those adversaries is the fact that they shut down newspapers, broadcast stations, and social media platforms. We do not. We trust our citizens to be worthy of their democracy. We do not trust our government to decide what information they may or may not see," Himes said in a statement after the vote.

The bill's original sponsor, Republican Rep. Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, said he and Himes were in the same security threats hearing Tuesday where intel officials warned against TikTok.

"We had every major Biden administration national security official saying the current ownership structure of TikTok is a security threat. Perhaps Mr. Himes had presidential concerns or constitutional concerns? I don't know. But I don't think anyone can make a case that under the current ownership structure TikTok is not a threat," said Gallagher, chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

## **Calls deluge congressional offices**

Users of the wildly popular social media platform flooded lawmakers' offices with thousands of calls Thursday after the company sent a push notification warning that a ban could be imminent, an argument the company maintains.

The platform attracts user-made videos hitting the areas of politics and news, celebrity gossip, dance trends, recipes, and expensive skin care routines.

"This process was secret and the bill was jammed through for one reason: it's a ban. We are hopeful that the Senate will consider the facts, listen to their constituents, and realize the impact on the economy, 7 million small businesses, and the 170 million Americans who use our service," a TikTok spokesperson said in a statement Wednesday.

Supporters from both parties refute that claim.

"The legislation before the Congress does not ban TikTok. It is designed to address legitimate national security and privacy concerns related to the Chinese Communist Party's engagement with a frequently used social media platform," House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat, said in a statement Wednesday.

"If enacted, the bill would require divestiture by ByteDance and the sale of TikTok to an American company," he continued.

## **Divestiture deadline set**

The bill gives TikTok 180 days to splinter from ByteDance and will make it unlawful for any American app store or web hosting company to distribute or maintain platforms controlled by designated U.S. foreign adversaries.

The social media platform, 100% owned by ByteDance, has long been in the crosshairs of federal and state lawmakers, whom intelligence officials have warned of the possibility of China's government accessing Americans' data via the app.

Lawmakers passed legislation in December 2022 banning the app from most federal employee devices. The Montana Legislature banned the app last year, but the law remained tied up in court.

Former President Donald Trump issued an executive order in 2020 banning TikTok unless it broke from ByteDance. This week Trump reversed his position on the platform, telling CNBC that "without TikTok you're going to make Facebook bigger."

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Wednesday's passage of the bill represents a rare departure for House Republicans from Trump, the party's front-runner in the 2024 general election.

But some Republican lawmakers have fallen in line with Trump's opposition, including Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, who said on the floor Wednesday before the vote she worries that Congress could open a "Pandora's box" and target other platforms like X.

Greene said her "free speech" was "restored" when Elon Musk purchased Twitter and reinstated her account.

"This is really about controlling Americans' data," said Greene on the floor before the vote.

## First Amendment concerns

Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky criticized the bill on the floor prior to the vote, despite saying he believes the bill's supporters "are sincere in their concerns and in their effort to protect Americans."

"They describe the TikTok application as a Trojan horse, but there's some of us who feel that either intentionally or unintentionally this legislation to ban TikTok is actually a Trojan horse," he said before the vote.

"Some of us are concerned that there are First Amendment implications here. Americans have the right to view information. ... Some of us just don't want the president picking which apps we can put on our phones," Massie continued.

The bill would empower the president to determine whether a "foreign adversary controlled application" poses a national security threat.

The president would then need to determine, in conjunction with executive branch agencies, if and when the foreign-owned app has undergone a "qualified divestiture," according to the bill text.

## Republicans voting no

Among the 15 House GOP members including Greene and Massie casting 'no' votes were: Andy Biggs and David Schweikert of Arizona, Dan Bishop of North Carolina, Warren Davidson of Ohio, John Duarte and Tom McClintock of California, Matt Gaetz and Greg Steube of Florida, Clay Higgins of Louisiana, Nancy Mace of South Carolina, Alex Mooney of West Virginia, Barry Moore of Alabama and Scott Perry of Pennsylvania.

Gallagher said he wanted to clear up "misconceptions" of the bill ahead of the vote.

"It does not apply to American companies," he said on the floor and later posted on X from his office's account.

"It only applies to companies subject to the control of foreign adversaries defined by Congress. It says nothing about election interference and cannot be turned against any American social media platform. It does not impact websites in general. The only impacted sites are those associated with foreign adversary apps, such as TikTok.com."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story has been extensively updated with additional information since its initial publication. The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.

## Noem commutes sentence of man who stabbed three, killed one 43 years ago

### Governor gives Roscoe Primeaux a future chance at parole

BY: JOHN HULT - MARCH 13, 2024 7:00 AM

Gov. Kristi Noem has granted a commutation to a convicted murderer that will allow him a shot at parole, but not for another eight years.

Roscoe Primeaux, 63, arrived in prison Dec. 28, 1981, on a life sentence for second-degree murder and two four-year sentences for aggravated assault.

Primeaux was 19 years old in October 1981 when he stabbed three people at an early morning house party in Wagner. He first stabbed a woman who was trying to break up a fight between another woman



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and Rodney Provost. When the first victim sat down, Primeaux fatally stabbed Provost at least 15 times, then opened the door and stabbed a partygoer who'd been outside during the altercations.

Everyone had been drinking.

Primeaux ran away, but police found him covered in blood at a Wagner housing complex at 7 a.m., less than two hours after their arrival at the scene of the stabbings. At 9:40 a.m. that morning, his blood alcohol content measured 0.13 – higher than the 0.08 level at which people can be charged with driving under the influence under current law.

He hasn't been free since.

"I turned 20 in November in the county jail," Primeaux said, referring to his initial detainment in 1981.

In February 2023, Primeaux appeared before the South Dakota Board of Pardons and Paroles. While in prison, he learned to be a diesel mechanic and took culinary arts courses, he told board members.

"I don't like to just sit around," said Primeaux, who was denied a commutation from Gov. Dennis Daugaard in 2012.

The time that's passed since that point without trouble behind the walls, the support Primeaux had from his family during his February 2023 commutation hearing, and the lack of opposition from the victims' family members were among the factors that swayed the board toward recommending a commutation.

In his more than 40 years in prison, his record showed, he'd never been given a major write-up.

The board voted 8-1 to recommend a commutation reducing his life sentence to 300 years. That recommendation would've made him parole-eligible immediately.

"It's been 10 years since Governor Daugaard said no," said board member Peter Lieberman. "This time it's been 41 years, not 31. I think he's been punished adequately."

Board Chair Myron Rau noted that Primeaux had support from some of the victims' family members and has reached out several times to ask for forgiveness from others unsuccessfully.

"He's done about all he can do to contact them," Rau said.

The board can only recommend a commutation. Under the South Dakota Constitution, only a governor can grant clemency, either in the form of a commutation that lessens a current sentence or as a pardon, which wipes an old charge completely from a person's record.

In Primeaux's case, Gov. Noem made a 100-year adjustment to the recommendation from the board, leaving him with a 400-year sentence and setting his initial parole date for May 2032.

Noem signed Primeaux's commutation on Feb. 23, just over a year after his hearing. South Dakota Searchlight obtained the commutation document through a public records request. Spokespersons for Noem's office did not immediately return messages seeking comment on her decision.

The latest commutation puts the number she's granted at 25. Primeaux went through the normal process: He applied to the board, got a hearing and earned a recommendation.

Just after Christmas, Noem issued 12 commutations – doubling the number she'd issued until that point – to nine women and three men held on charges of felony drug ingestion.

Noem did not respond to a request for comment about why she issued those commutations without the knowledge or review of the board, but said during her State of the State speech the following month that she'd done so to offer the women second chances.

Noem has also issued 28 pardons since the start of the year. Most of them were signed on Feb. 23, including for a man convicted of third-degree rape in 2005, another convicted of incest in 2001 and a woman convicted of aggravated assault in 2006. The remaining pardons were for lesser offenses like theft, drunken driving, disorderly conduct and marijuana or drug distribution.

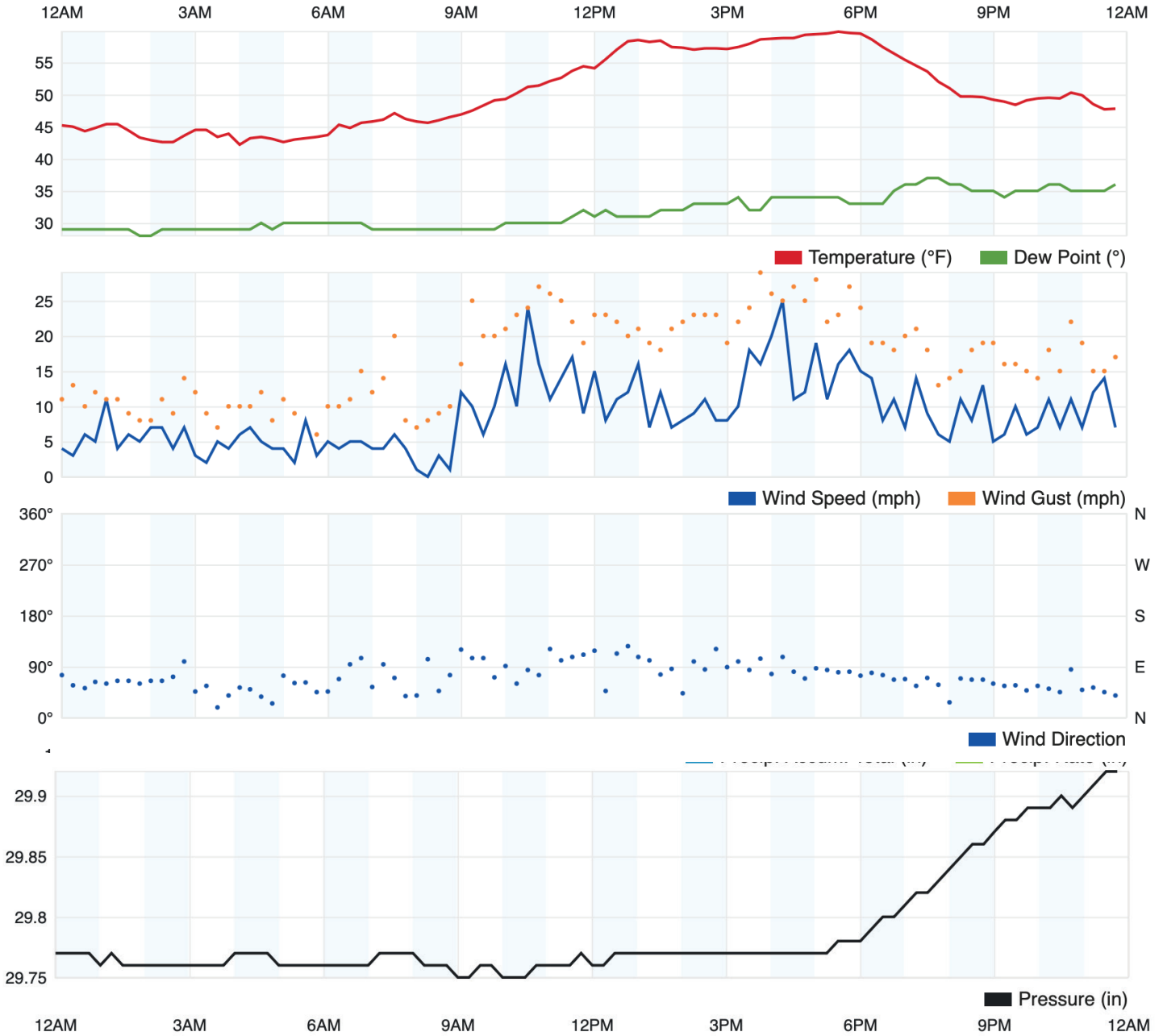
Noem has issued a total of 296 pardons since taking office in 2019.

Pardons issued by Gov. Kristi Noem in January and February of 2024:

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Partly Sunny

High: 51 °F

Tonight



Mostly Cloudy

Low: 27 °F

Friday



Mostly Sunny  
then Sunny  
and Breezy

High: 54 °F

Friday  
Night



Mostly Cloudy  
and Breezy

Low: 34 °F

Saturday



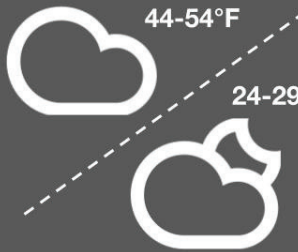
Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy

High: 47 °F



March 14, 2024 3:50 AM  
www.weather.gov/abr

## Today & Tonight



Cloudy skies will remain today, with some breaks possible tonight

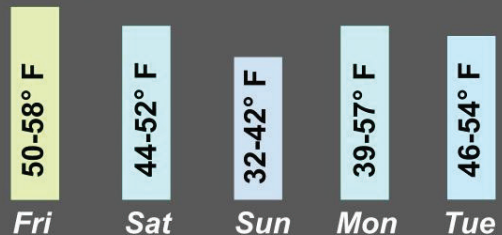


## Next 5 Days

There will be a **cooling trend into the weekend**, as cold front moves through later on Friday. Temperatures return to above normal values for next week.

**Elevated Fire Weather concerns** Friday and Saturday with wind gusts of 30 to 40 mph possible both days.

### High Temperatures



Highs today will be a little cooler - in the mid 40s to mid 50s - with mostly cloudy skies. Clouds are expected to remain overnight with some possible clearing early Friday morning. Weekend temperatures will be on a cooling trend starting with a cold front Friday night. Next week, temps are expected to return to above normal.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 60 °F at 5:30 PM

Low Temp: 42 °F at 3:58 AM

Wind: 29 mph at 11:04 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 55 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 71 in 1981

Record Low: -31 in 1897

Average High: 41

Average Low: 19

Average Precip in March.: 0.35

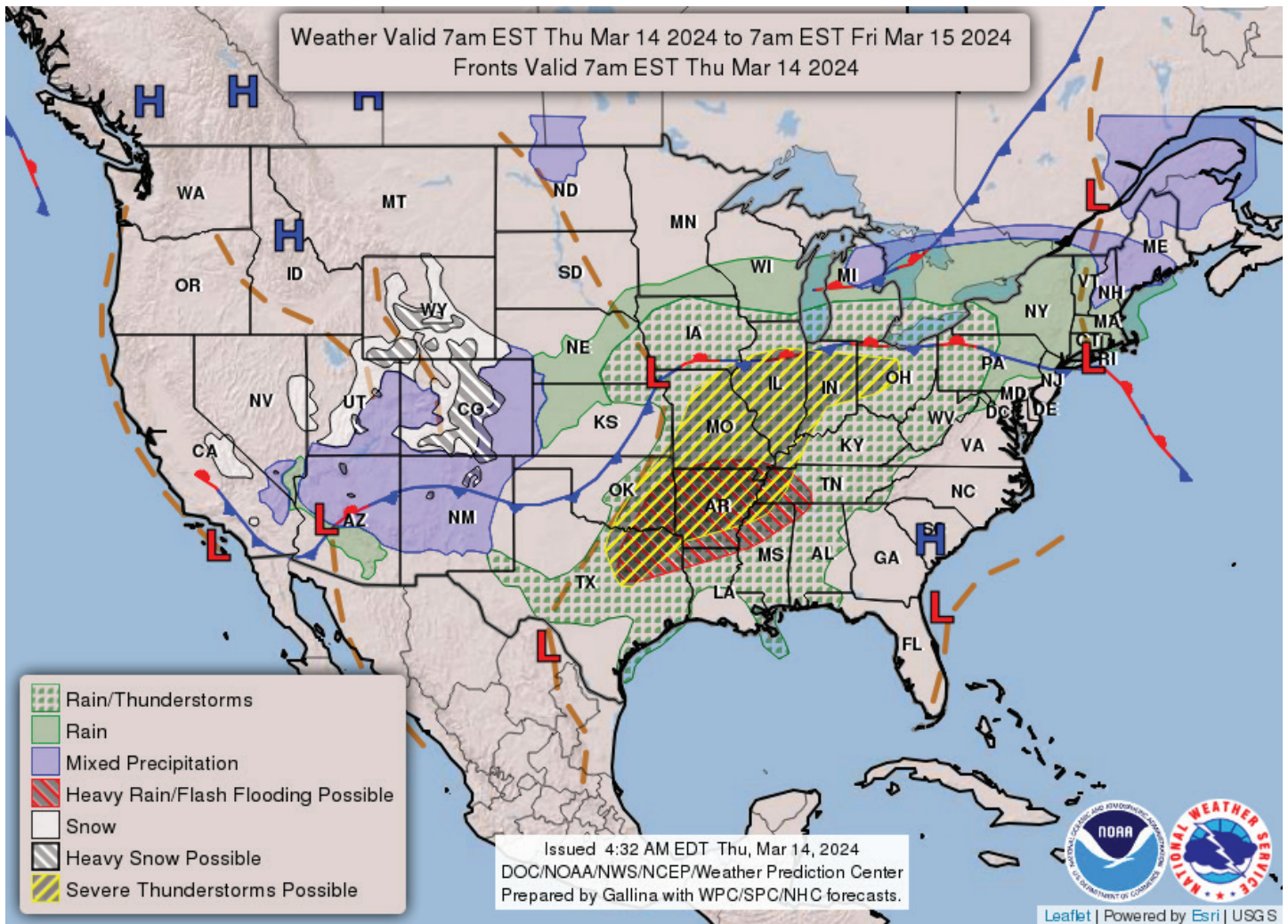
Precip to date in March: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 1.52

Precip Year to Date: 0.07

Sunset Tonight: 7:39:03 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:41:47 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 14, 1989: A fast-moving winter storm produced freezing rain and heavy snow across most of South Dakota. The visibility was reduced to 100 ft within areas of blowing snow. Driving conditions were treacherous, resulting in abandoned vehicles, several accidents, and the temporary closing of I-29 from Sioux Falls to the North Dakota border.

March 14, 1990: Heavy Snow fell across parts of the southwest, central, and north-central South Dakota from the late afternoon on the 13th into the morning hours of the 14th. The highest accumulations were recorded in the north-central part of the state, including 9 inches at Gettysburg, 8 inches at Pollock, and 5 inches at Pine Ridge.

March 14, 2002: Heavy snow of 6 to 16 inches fell across parts of central and northeast South Dakota from the early morning to the evening hours. Some freezing rain fell across parts of the area before changing over to snow. Also, the winds increased from the north resulting in blowing snow and reduced visibilities. The combination of ice, heavy snow, and blowing snow resulted in challenging travel conditions. There were several accidents across the area, along with many vehicles sliding off the road. Schools either started late or were closed. Some snowfall amounts included, 6 inches at Blunt, 7 inches at Murdo, 8 inches at Stephan and Clark, 9 inches at Gann Valley and Miller, and 11 inches at Highmore and Watertown. Locations with a foot or more of snowfall included, 12 inches at Hayti and Milbank, 14 inches at Castlewood and Presho, 15 inches at Clear Lake, and 16 inches at Kennebec.

1870 - The term blizzard was first applied to a storm which produced heavy snow and high winds in Minnesota and Iowa. (David Ludlum)

1933: A deadly tornado outbreak affected the Middle Tennessee region, including Nashville, on this day. The outbreak, which produced five or more tornadoes, killed 44 people and injured at least 461 others. The strongest tornado, F3, cut a path through the center of Nashville. About 1,400 homes were damaged or destroyed. Windows were blown out of the State Capitol Building.

1935: Suffocating dust storms frequently occurred in southeast Colorado between the 12th and the 25th of the month. Six people died, and many livestock starved or suffocated. Up to six feet of dust covered the ground. Schools were closed, and tenants deserted many rural homes.

1944 - A single storm brought a record 21.6 inches of snow to Salt Lake City UT. (The Weather Channel)

1960 - Northern Georgia was between snowstorms. Gainesville GA received 17 inches of snow during the month, and reported at least a trace of snow on the ground 22 days in March. Snow was on roofs in Hartwell GA from the 2nd to the 29th. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A powerful storm in the western U.S. produced 15 inches of snow in the Lake Tahoe Basin of Nevada, and wind gusts to 50 mph at Las Vegas NV. Thunderstorms in the Sacramento Valley of California spawned a tornado which hit a turkey farm near Corning. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Squalls in the Great Lakes Region continued to produce heavy snow in northwest Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, and produced up to 14 inches of snow in northeast Ohio. Poplar WI reported 27 inches of snow in two days. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - High winds in Colorado and Wyoming gusted above 120 mph at Horsetooth Heights CO. High winds in the Central Plains sharply reduced visibilities in blowing dust as far east as Kansas City MO. Winds gusting to 72 mph at Hill City KS reduced the visibility to a city block in blowing dust. Soil erosion in north-west Kansas damaged nearly five million acres of wheat. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Fifty-three cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings warmed into the 70s and 80s from the Gulf coast to the Great Lakes Region. Charleston WV was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 89 degrees. It was the fourth of five consecutive days with record warm temperatures for many cities in the eastern U.S. There were 283 daily record highs reported in the central and eastern U.S. during between the 11th and the 15th of March. (The National Weather Summary)

2007 - The temperature in Concord, NH, reaches a record high of 74 degrees less than one week after a record low temperature of 7 degrees below zero on March 8, an 81 degree temperature swing in six days.

2008: An EF2 tornado moved through downtown Atlanta, Georgia, shortly before 10 pm, damaging the Georgia Dome where the SEC men's basketball tournament was underway.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### GETTING DIRTY TAKES TIME

Two neglected young children from a poor neighborhood were invited to a Salvation Army Christmas banquet. They were amazed at the lovely surroundings and were surprised to discover that the tables were covered with clean white tablecloths.

When they placed their hands next to their napkins, one boasted, "Look, my hands are dirtier than yours."

"Yes," responded his friend, "but you are two years older than I am."

How like sin. Sin is subtle and moves silently but surely, quietly and quickly, until it invades every aspect of one's life. The longer one lives in sin, the more it expands and grows until it completely controls one's life. It is rarely recognized for what it is unless and until an individual comes to know and understand and accept God's Word and His message of salvation.

The only way to be redeemed and reclaimed from a sin-centered life is to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and exalt Him as Lord. Not only is He powerful enough to save us, but strong enough to strengthen us, to sustain us, and to keep us from sins that would destroy us.

Jesus offers us His salvation freely as a gift of His eternal love. There is nothing we can do to earn His salvation, but there is much to do once we accept it.

Prayer: Lord, we acknowledge our need for Your salvation if we want to be saved from our sins. Help us then to live lives that are free from sin and worth living. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure! Psalm 32



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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.12.24

2 16 31 57 64 24

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$792,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 16 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

23 33 34 41 50 7

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$2,200,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

27 43 44 45 47 18

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

3 18 31 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$21,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 46 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

2 25 64 65 67 5

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 22 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

21 29 54 59 62 4

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$600,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 21 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)



## News from the Associated Press

### **South Dakota prosecutors to seek death penalty for man charged with killing deputy during a pursuit**

FLANDREAU, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota prosecutors will seek the death penalty for a Sioux Falls man charged in the death of a deputy who was struck while putting out spikes during a police chase.

The South Dakota Attorney General's office filed an official notice Wednesday announcing it will seek the penalty for Joseph Gene Hoek, 40, in the death of Moody County Chief Deputy Ken Prorok, 51, of Wentworth, who died during the pursuit on Feb. 2.

Hoek pleaded not guilty Wednesday to charges of first-degree murder and aggravated eluding. Hoek's attorneys said they plan to seek a mental health evaluation of their client and will consider entering a plea of insanity to the charges.

Attorney General Marty Jackley said he made the death penalty decision after reviewing the circumstances and meeting with the victim's family and the sheriff who were at Wednesday's hearing. Jackley said the fact that Prorok was killed in the line of duty and that it happened while Hoek was trying to evade arrest made the crime worthy of the death penalty.

When he was charged, investigators described Hoek as being on a "downward spiral" marked by drug use and escalating threats of violence.

The pursuit started after officers responded to a call about a man, identified as Hoek, making "homicidal threats" near the business where the caller worked. Police spotted his car and tried to stop him, but Hoek sped off on Highway 34 toward Interstate 29, Special Agent Jeffrey Kollars of the South Dakota Division of Criminal Investigation wrote in a court filing.

The chase reached 115 mph (185 kph). Prorok stopped to deploy stop spikes across Highway 34. But a witness said he saw the approaching car intentionally swerve and strike the chief deputy before it went into the ditch and flipped, the agent wrote. Hoek ran off on foot. The witness followed Hoek, ran him down and detained Hoek until officers arrived.

### **Editorial Roundup: South Dakota**

By The Associated Press undefined

Yankton Press & Dakotan. March 11, 2024.

Editorial: USPS Facility Proposal Is Cause For Concern

A proposal by the United States Postal Service (USPS) that would downgrade the processing and distribution centers at both Sioux Falls and Huron could generate serious consequences that demand closer consideration.

Under the proposal, the eastern South Dakota mail distribution duties would be shifted to Omaha, Nebraska, and Fargo, North Dakota. It would also mean that there would not be a distribution center anywhere in South Dakota.

Of the aforementioned flaws, perhaps the most conspicuous is the fact that this proposed move — and it may be a little past the "proposed" stage — has barely received any notice. The Press & Dakotan did a story on the situation Saturday after receiving a tip on the matter just two days before. Some local pharmacists contacted by the P&D Friday either hadn't heard of the proposal or recalled seeing some rumblings about it a while ago.

There is a public hearing scheduled for 2 p.m. Wednesday in Sioux Falls on the matter — but much of the public appears unaware of it.

That's unfortunate because the decision could have broad implications.

Moving the area distribution center from Sioux Falls to Omaha will likely mean slower postal delivery times for people in the region (which would also include parts of southwest Minnesota, northwest Iowa

and northeast Nebraska).

This could be a particularly serious problem for people who receive prescription medicines by mail.

"When we send prescriptions out in the mail, making sure it gets to the patient on time is very important," Byron Olson, owner of Roger's Pharmacy, told the Press & Dakotan. "This will most certainly cause delays. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it just adds one more thing."

It will impact other areas, too, especially for businesses of all kinds that rely on the postal service for their operations.

"There are all sorts of time-sensitive items in the mail stream," said Dave Bordewyk, executive director of the South Dakota NewsMedia Association. "To me, this looks like it's not going to be a good thing."

For full disclosure, this could impact newspapers, too, although many of those mail deliveries are done directly at the local annex and might not be affected.

However, the process of sending out bills and receiving payments could take longer, thus impacting timely cash flow. And that could happen to many businesses.

This isn't the only region impacted. The Press & Dakotan story noted that Sen. Deb Fischer, R-Nebraska, recently sent a letter to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy expressing her concerns over the proposed downgrading of the processing facility at North Platte, which covers most of western Nebraska, and moving those duties to Denver.

"Americans rely on USPS to stay connected, and access to this vital service cannot be in doubt," Fisher's letter said. "While I appreciate the desire of USPS to modernize operations and address its fiscal stability, this must not come at the expense of our communities' access to timely mail services."

The move could also do harm to the USPS itself, said Todd West, president of the American Postal Workers Association Local No. 144, in a letter to Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota.

"At a time when the USPS is increasing rates but giving less service, it will continue to degrade the USPS, and when the service is degraded, the USPS will not be used," West wrote. "(That) will lead to the privatization of the USPS, which will not be good for the U.S. citizens and your constituents."

As of this writing, it's unclear if this proposal can be reversed. The public meeting would suggest that there is still room for change, but the lack of publicity is concerning, even damning, in regard to the process.

This proposal would hurt a lot of people and businesses in this region. It needs to be reevaluated.

END

## Indigenous people rejoice after city of Berkeley votes to return sacred Native land to Ohlone

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Ohlone people and others rejoiced Wednesday over the return of sacred Native land dating back thousands of years, saying the move rights a historic wrong and restores the people who were first on land now called Berkeley, California, to their rightful place in history.

The 2.2-acre (0.89-hectare) parking lot is the only undeveloped portion of the shellmound in West Berkeley, where ancestors of today's Ohlone people established the first human settlement on the shores of the San Francisco Bay 5,700 years ago.

Berkeley's City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to adopt an ordinance giving the title of the land to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, a San Francisco Bay Area collective led by women that works to return land to Indigenous people. The collective raised most of the money needed to reach the agreement with developers who own the land.

"We want to be a place for global Indigenous leadership to come and gather in solidarity," said Melissa Nelson, chair of the board of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, at a celebratory news conference Wednesday. "We want to educate, we want to restore and we want to heal."

The crowd cheered as speakers talked of a movement to restore other lands to Indigenous people.

The site — a three-block area Berkeley designated as a landmark in 2000 — will be home to Native medicines and foods, an oasis for pollinators and wildlife, and a place for youth to learn about their heri-

tage, including ancient dances and ceremonies.

"The site will be home to education, prayer and preservation, and will outlast every one of us today to continue telling the story of the Ohlone people," Mayor Jesse Arreguín said, adding that their history is "marked not by adversity, but more importantly, by their unwavering resilience as a community."

Before Spanish colonizers arrived in the region, the area held a village and a massive shellmound with a height of 20 feet and the length and width of a football field that was a ceremonial and burial site. Built over years with mussel, clam and oyster shells, human remains, and artifacts, the shellmound also served as a lookout.

The Spanish removed the Ohlone from their villages and forced them into labor at local missions. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Anglo settlers took over the land and razed the shellmound to line roadbeds in Berkeley with shells.

"It's a very sad and shameful history," said Berkeley City Councilmember Sophie Hahn, who spearheaded the effort to return the land.

The agreement with Berkeley-based Ruegg & Ellsworth LLC, which owns the parking lot, comes after a six-year legal fight that started in 2018 when the developer sued the city after officials denied its application to build a 260-unit apartment building with 50% affordable housing and 27,500 feet of retail and parking space.

The settlement was reached after Ruegg & Ellsworth agreed to accept \$27 million to settle all outstanding claims and to turn the property over to Berkeley. The Sogorea Te' Land Trust contributed \$25.5 million and Berkeley paid \$1.5 million, officials said.

The trust plans to build a commemorative park with a new shellmound and a cultural center to house some of the pottery, jewelry, baskets and other artifacts found over the years and that are in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Corrina Gould, co-founder of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust and tribal chair of the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Ohlone, attended Tuesday's city council meeting via video conference and wiped away tears after the council voted to return the land.

The shellmound that once stood there was "a place where we first said goodbye to someone," she said. "To have this place saved forever, I am beyond words."

## South Dakota legislator calls for inquiry into Gov. Noem's Texas dental trip and promo video

By JACK DURA and JOSH FUNK Associated Press

A Democratic legislator on Wednesday called for an inquiry into South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's trip to Texas for dental work and a promotional video in which she praises the doctors for giving her "a smile I can be proud of and confident in."

State Sen. Reynold Nesiba said he initially found the nearly five-minute video to be simply odd. Later he considered other questions and asked the Republican co-chairs of the Legislature's Government Operations & Audit Committee to put the matter on the panel's next meeting agenda in July for discussion and questions.

"I just thought it was a very strange video about how much she enjoyed having her teeth done at that particular place," said Nesiba, a member of the audit committee.

Nesiba said he wonders whether Noem used a state airplane or public funds for the Texas trip and whether the governor paid for the dental procedure or if it was discounted because of her video.

Noem's office did not respond to questions Wednesday about the promotional video posted Monday night to her personal account on X in which she praised the dentists and staff at Smile Texas, a cosmetic dental practice in the Houston area.

In the video, Noem complimented the dentists that recently "gave me a smile I can be proud of and confident in." Noem, who is seen as a potential vice-presidential pick by former President Donald Trump, identifies herself as the governor of South Dakota and includes clips of her speaking at a Republican Party

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event with Trump signs in the background.

A woman who answered the phone at Smile Texas cited privacy under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act in response to The Associated Press asking to speak with a member of the practice. When asked if Smile Texas plans to use Noem's video for promotion, the woman said, "No, she posted that," then hung up when asked again.

South Dakota law bans gifts of over \$100 from lobbyists to public officials and their immediate family. A violation is a misdemeanor punishable up to a year in jail and/or a \$2,000 fine. The state attorney general's office declined to answer questions about whether the gift ban applies to people who are not registered lobbyists.

Noem's video, in which the governor says she went to Smile because it was "the best," comes at a time when South Dakota has spent \$5 million on a workforce recruitment ad campaign in which she stars in TV spots portraying herself as a plumber, electrician, nurse and other high-demand workers. In one ad, Noem portrays a dentist in blue scrubs, speaking over a patient with a dental instrument in her hand amid the sound of a drill.

Nesiba said the dental promotion "just undermines the millions of dollars that we have invested in her as being a spokesperson for South Dakota."

Paul Miskimins, a Republican former state legislator who practiced dentistry over 37 years in South Dakota, said he saw nothing wrong with Noem seeking care out of state, noting he had sought dental care from a friend in Canada. Miskimins added that celebrities often give testimonials about dental work, and he didn't see why a public official couldn't do the same.

"I think that this is America, and we all have a right to choose where we receive our care," Miskimins said.

Noem has previously faced ethics questions, including an investigation in 2019 about her use of a state plane to attend six events outside of South Dakota hosted by political organizations, including the Republican Governors Association, Republican Jewish Coalition, Turning Point USA and the National Rifle Association. At the time, the governor's office defended the trips as part of her work as the state's "ambassador" to bolster the state's economy.

Noem also was criticized for having family members join her on several trips. But her office has said that was keeping in line with a precedent set by former governors.

Ultimately, South Dakota's ethics board dismissed the complaint over Noem's flights to the political events in 2022 because state law doesn't clearly define what is meant by "state business."

But the state ethics board did say Noem may have "engaged in misconduct" when she intervened in her daughter's application for a real estate appraiser license.

The governor intervened with a state agency after it had moved to deny her daughter's application for an appraiser license in 2020. Noem had called a meeting with her daughter, the labor secretary and the then-director of the appraiser certification program where a plan was discussed to give the governor's daughter, Cassidy Peters, another chance to show she could meet federal standards in her appraiser work.

Noem has said she followed the law in handling her daughter's licensure and that Peters received no special treatment.

Voters re-elected her in 2022 with 62% of the vote.

Michael Card, an emeritus political science professor at the University of South Dakota, said he has no ideas about the governor's motivation for the video but found it puzzling.

"It just seems unusual for an elected official in office to make an infomercial like that," he said.

## Families of hostages held in Gaza despair as Ramadan cease-fire deadline passes

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — A brother contemplated suicide. A sister stopped going to school. A father barely speaks. With each passing day, the relatives of hostages held in Gaza since Oct. 7 face a deepening despair.

Their hopes were raised that a cease-fire deal was near to bring some of their loved ones home by the

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start of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month that began Monday. But that informal deadline passed without any agreement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promise of "total victory" in the war against Hamas now rings hollow for many hostages' families after five emotionally draining months.

"We are reading the news every single minute. Egypt says something, the Qataris say something different, the Americans say a deal is close, Israel says it's not," said Sharon Kalderon, whose brother-in-law, Ofer, remains in captivity. "We try to read between the lines, but we haven't heard anything about Ofer for months. Nothing that can help us breathe."

When Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, they killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. Since then, Israel's offensive has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and driven hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation.

About 120 hostages were freed during a November cease-fire that also led to the release of hundreds of Palestinians from Israeli prisons; three hostages were accidentally killed by Israeli forces during an attempted rescue mission. Now families are focused on bringing home the remaining hostages, at least 34 of whom are dead, according to the Israeli government.

Some families channel their desperation into unrelenting advocacy — traveling to the U.N. in New York, marching to Jerusalem from southern Israel, or wearing red shirts emblazoned with the words "Bring them Home" while running the Jerusalem marathon.

But for other families, a quieter suffering has taken hold.

"You see some of the families running around, going on the TV, making noise. These are the ones that are holding on," said Ricardo Grichener, the uncle of Omer Wenkert, a 22-year-old hostage. "The ones that are not leaving the houses, they are in a really bad situation."

Since their home in Kibbutz Nir Oz was destroyed Oct. 7, Sharon Kalderon and her husband, Nissan, have stayed on the 12th floor of an apartment building in the Israeli city of Ramat Gan. Ofer, Nissan's only brother, remains in captivity.

Nissan said he's recently thought about killing himself.

"This situation is hard. I don't sleep, I don't eat. Not working. Nothing. I lose my mind. That's all. It's too much," said Nissan.

"Whenever he goes out to the balcony, I get scared," Sharon said.

International mediators had been optimistic they could broker a pre-Ramadan deal by bundling a six-week cease-fire with the release of dozens of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners, and the entry of a large amount of humanitarian aid into Gaza. But Hamas wanted assurances of a longer-term end to the fighting, which Israel refused.

"We don't see a prospect for a deal unless (U.S. President Joe) Biden does a miracle. We don't see any way out. We don't see any reason why Hamas would be flexible. They gain nothing," said Grichener. "We are pressing the (Israeli) government, but I think their mistakes have already been made."

His nephew in captivity, Omer, needs medication to treat his digestive disease. His family doubts the medical aid for hostages that entered Gaza in January ever made it to him.

Meetings between the families and war cabinet officials are ongoing, but families feel powerless to change the sweep of negotiations. Many have received no official updates on the status of their loved ones, clinging instead to snippets conveyed by hostages released in November.

Shlomi Berger, the father of 19-year-old Agam Berger, said he last heard that she was alive in November. A hostage released during the cease-fire, Agam Goldstein-Almog, told him that his daughter — one of 19 women hostages, according to Israel — was alive and had wished him a happy birthday.

"You can imagine what it was like to get a sign of life from my daughter for the first time," said Berger.

But months later that excitement is tempered by considerable anxiety and uncertainty — and by some former hostages' accounts of harrowing conditions.

"Nobody knows her situation. If she has air, if she has water, if she has bandages for her period. It's crazy. I don't know if somebody has sexually abused her," said Berger. "We don't know if she's alive or

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dead. We just don't know."

Israel's National Insurance pays for mental health counseling for parents, spouses, and children of hostages. Still, the situation has paralyzed Berger's family.

One of his three daughters, a senior in high school, has not gone to school since Oct. 7. One of his young daughters has stopped eating. His wife, an industrial engineer, does not go to work. He tries to avoid the news, to save himself the daily roller coaster.

"One minute you read the news and say, okay, it's close, and another minute it's not. Nobody really knows what's happening," he said.

Overnight, the parents of 33-year-old Or Levy became caretakers to Levy's 2-year-old son, Almog. Hamas militants killed Almog's mother, Eynav, and took Levy hostage on Oct. 7. The family had to explain to young Almog that his mother is dead and his father missing.

"Most days I don't even recognize my parents. My dad barely talks. Before Oct. 7, the last thing you could say about him was that he was a fragile man and now everybody who sees him is afraid to hug him," said Michael Levy, Or's brother. Levy said he's lost 9 kilos (20 pounds) and barely sleeps.

Going forward, relatives said their strategies won't change. They will continue to meet with the war cabinet, continue hoping for an eventual release.

On Monday, Sharon and Nissan Kalderon watched the sun set on the first full day of Ramadan.

"We really thought, today is the day," Sharon said. "But unfortunately, this is just another day."

## What's Pi Day all about? Math, science, pies and more

By CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

Math enthusiasts around the world, from college kids to rocket scientists, celebrate Pi Day on Thursday, which is March 14 or 3/14 — the first three digits of an infinite number with many practical uses.

Around the world many people will mark the day with a slice of pie — sweet, savory or even pizza.

Simply put, Pi is a mathematical constant that expresses the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. It is part of many formulas used in physics, astronomy, engineering and other fields, dating back thousands of years to ancient Egypt, Babylon and China.

Pi Day itself dates to 1988, when physicist Larry Shaw began celebrations at the Exploratorium science museum in San Francisco. The holiday didn't really gain national recognition though until two decades later. In 2009, Congress designated every March 14 to be the big day — to hopefully spur more interest in math and science. Fittingly enough, the day is also Albert Einstein's birthday.

Here's a little more about the holiday's origin and how it's celebrated today.

WHAT IS PI?

Pi can calculate the circumference of a circle by measuring the diameter — the distance straight across the circle's middle — and multiplying that by the 3.14-plus number.

It is considered a constant number and it is also infinite, meaning it is mathematically irrational. Long before computers, historic scientists such as Isaac Newton spent many hours calculating decimal places by hand. Today, using sophisticated computers, researchers have come up with trillions of digits for pi, but there is no end.

WHY IS IT CALLED PI?

It wasn't given its name until 1706, when Welsh mathematician William Jones began using the Greek symbol for the number.

Why that letter? It's the first Greek letter in the words "periphery" and "perimeter," and pi is the ratio of a circle's periphery — or circumference — to its diameter.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL USES?

The number is key to accurately pointing an antenna toward a satellite. It helps figure out everything from the size of a massive cylinder needed in refinery equipment to the size of paper rolls used in printers.

Pi is also useful in determining the necessary scale of a tank that serves heating and air conditioning systems in buildings of various sizes.

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NASA uses pi on a daily basis. It's key to calculating orbits, the positions of planets and other celestial bodies, elements of rocket propulsion, spacecraft communication and even the correct deployment of parachutes when a vehicle splashes down on Earth or lands on Mars.

Using just nine digits of pi, scientists say it can calculate the Earth's circumference so accurately it only errs by about a quarter of an inch (0.6 centimeters) for every 25,000 miles (about 40,000 kilometers).

IT'S NOT JUST MATH, THOUGH

Every year the San Francisco museum that coined the holiday organizes events, including a parade around a circular plaque, called the Pi Shrine, 3.14 times — and then, of course, festivities with lots of pie.

Around the country, many events now take place on college campuses. For example, Nova Southeastern University in Florida will hold a series of activities, including a game called "Mental Math Bingo" and event with free pizza (pies) — and for dessert, the requisite pie.

"Every year Pi Day provides us with a way to celebrate math, have some fun and recognize how important math is in all our lives," said Jason Gershman, chair of NSU's math department.

At Michele's Pies in Norwalk, Connecticut, manager Stephen Jarrett said it's one of their biggest days of the year.

"We have hundreds of pies going out for orders (Thursday) to companies, schools and just individuals," Jarrett said in an interview. "Pi Day is such a fun, silly holiday because it's a mathematical number that people love to turn into something fun and something delicious. So people celebrate Pi Day with sweet pies, savory pies, and it's just an excuse for a little treat."

NASA has its annual "Pi Day Challenge" online, offering people plenty of games and puzzles, some of them directly from the space agency's own playbook such as calculating the orbit of an asteroid or the distance a moon rover would need to travel each day to survey a certain lunar area.

WHAT ABOUT EINSTEIN?

Possibly the world's best-known scientist, Einstein was born on March 14, 1879, in Germany. The infinite number of Pi was used in many of his breakthrough theories and now Pi Day gives the world another reason to celebrate his achievements.

In a bit of math symmetry, famed physicist Stephen Hawking died on March 14, 2018, at age 76. Still, Pi is not a perfect number. He once had this to say:

"One of the basic rules of the universe is that nothing is perfect. Perfection simply doesn't exist. Without imperfection, neither you nor I would exist."

## Indonesian presidential rivals plan to contest official election results with allegations of fraud

By NINIEK KARMINI Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — The camps of the two Indonesian presidential candidates who appear to have lost in an election last month said Thursday they plan to challenge the official results in the Constitutional Court with allegations of widespread fraud.

Indonesians voted on Feb. 14 for a successor to popular President Joko Widodo, who is serving his second and final term. The election is a three-way race among current Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and two former provincial governors, Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo.

Subianto is a former general linked to past human rights abuses who had the incumbent president's tacit backing because Widodo's son is Subianto's vice-presidential running mate. Subianto claimed victory on election day after unofficial tallies showed that he won the poll with nearly 60% of the votes.

The General Election Commission has officially tallied over 78% of the votes as of Thursday, with Subianto taking 58.82%, Baswedan 24.50% and Pranowo 16.68%. Baswedan and Pranowo have refused to concede and alleged fraud in the election.

The official vote-counting process, which is lengthy and laborious, may take up to 35 days to be completed — the maximum time regulated by the Elections Law — and the election commission is expected to announce the official winner by March 20.

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"I'm now preparing a petition to go to the Constitutional Court," said Todung Mulya Lubis, a prominent lawyer who represents Pranowo and his running mate Mohammad Mahfud. "That's the only legal course that we have to settle the election disputes, and for that we need a lot of witnesses and experts to testify."

Lubis said that election irregularities occurred before, during and after the polls, but noted his team has had difficulty getting witnesses to testify in court, saying they were intimidated by authorities. He acknowledged that successfully challenging the election result with such a wide margin of victory will be difficult.

"There's no way you can prove that, so we will argue that when we talk about election disputes, we are not only talking about the outcome of the election, but we are also talking about the process of the election, prior to the election," Lubis told foreign journalists at a news conference on Thursday.

He said irregularities also occurred over Widodo's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka. The Constitutional Court made an exception to the minimum age requirement of 40 for candidates in order for Raka, who is 37, to run.

The current chief justice is Widodo's brother-in-law, and he was removed by an ethics panel for failing to recuse himself and for making last-minute changes to the election candidacy requirements.

The campaign team of Baswedan and his running mate Muhaimin Iskandar said they would file cases with the Constitutional Court when it opens its three-day registration period for electoral disputes a day after the winner is announced.

"There are strong indications that violations occurred in a structured, systematic and massive way in the presidential election," said Hamdan Zoelva, a former Constitutional Court chief judge who is part of Baswedan's team.

Baswedan said his team wants to make sure that irregularities don't go "unchecked."

Subianto refused to accept the results of the 2019 presidential election, which pitted him against Widodo, leading to violence that left seven dead in Jakarta. In the past two elections, the Constitutional Court has rejected Subianto's bids to overturn Widodo's victories and dismissed his claims of widespread fraud as groundless.

"This is the challenge for the Constitutional Court because we expect it to be the guardian of the constitution," Lubis said.

## **Biden is coming out in opposition to plans to sell US Steel to a Japanese company**

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is coming out in opposition to the planned sale of U.S. Steel to Nippon Steel of Japan, saying in a statement to be released Thursday that the U.S. needs to "maintain strong American steel companies powered by American steel workers."

In a statement obtained in advance by The Associated Press, Biden adds: "U.S. Steel has been an iconic American steel company for more than a century, and it is vital for it to remain an American steel company that is domestically owned and operated."

Thursday's announcement, coming as Biden is campaigning in the Midwest, could have ripples in his race against the GOP presumptive nominee, Donald Trump. The Democratic president has made the restoration of American manufacturing a cornerstone of his agenda as he seeks reelection, and he has the endorsements of the AFL-CIO and several other prominent unions.

Nippon Steel announced in December that it planned to buy the Pittsburgh-based steel producer for \$14.1 billion in cash, raising concerns about what the transaction could mean for unionized workers, supply chains and U.S. national security.

Shortly after the deal was announced, the White House indicated it would be under review by the secretive Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States. The government does not officially provide updates on the CFIUS review process.

The Democratic president has a big megaphone to weigh in on the matter, but he is not intervening in the review process or formally blocking the deal, according to a person familiar with deliberations who



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insisted on anonymity to discuss the situation.

Trump said earlier this year after meeting with the Teamsters union that he would stop the U.S. Steel acquisition: "I would block it. I think it's a horrible thing, when Japan buys U.S. Steel. I would block it instantaneously."

Biden will travel on Thursday to Saginaw, Michigan, which was once home to multiple General Motors plants and where he hopes his backing from union workers can resonate with voters.

The city is in a swing county that narrowly backed Trump in 2016 and then flipped to Biden in 2020, making it a crucial contest in this year's presidential race.

Biden has a close relationship with the United Steelworkers. He gave the union "personal assurances" that he has their backs, according to a February statement by the union about Nippon Steel's plans. U.S. Steel is headquartered in Pennsylvania, another key state in this year's election.

The United Steelworkers issued a statement last week after meeting with representatives from Nippon Steel that it had concerns about whether the company would honor existing labor agreements and about the company's financial transparency, adding that there were "barriers" to closing a merger.

The U.S. considers Japan to be one of its closest allies and a key partner in countering China's ambitions and influence in Asia. Biden has visited the country twice as president and will host Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the White House on April 10.

But Nippon Steel's connections to China have raised concerns within the administration. More than half the steel produced globally comes from China, according to the World Steel Association. India is the second-largest producer, followed by Japan and the United States.

## The drama in Russia's election is all about what Putin will do with another 6 years in power

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — As Vladimir Putin heads for another six-year term as Russia's president, there's little electoral drama in the race. What he does after he crosses the finish line is what's drawing attention and, for many observers, provoking anxiety.

The voting that concludes on Sunday is all but certain to allow Putin to remain in office until 2030, giving him a full three decades of leading Russia as either president or prime minister.

The heft of that long tenure and the thorough suppression of effective domestic opposition voices gives Putin a very strong — and perhaps unrestrained — hand.

That position is bolstered by the Russian economy's surprising resilience despite wide-ranging Western sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine.

It's also strengthened by Moscow's incremental but consistent battlefield advances in recent months, flagging support for military aid to Kyiv from the United States and other quarters, and growing skepticism in some Western countries over more progressive social attitudes that echoes Putin's push for "traditional values."

Putin, in short, would head into a new term with few obvious restraints, and that could manifest itself quickly in major new actions.

"Russia's presidential election is not so important as what will come after. Putin has often postponed unpopular moves until after elections," Bryn Rosenfeld, a Cornell University professor who studies post-Communist politics, said in a commentary.

Probably the most unpopular move he could make at home would be to order a second military mobilization to fight in Ukraine; the first, in September 2022, sparked protests, and a wave of Russians fled the country to avoid being called up. However unpopular a second mobilization might be, it could also mollify relatives of the soldiers who were drafted 18 months ago.

Some in Russia believe it could happen.

"Russian leaders are now talking of 'consolidating the whole of Russian society around its defense needs,'"

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Brian Michael Jenkins, a senior adviser at the RAND Corporation think tank told The Associated Press.

"The precise meaning of this phrase is not entirely clear, but it suggests that Russia's leadership understands that the war Putin describes will go on for a long time, and therefore resources must be mobilized," he added. "In other words, Russian society must be organized for perpetual warfare."

But Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, says Putin doesn't need a mobilization partly because many Russians from poorer regions have signed up to fight in order to get higher pay than what they can earn in their limited opportunities at home.

In addition, Putin's apparent confidence that the war is turning in Russia's favor is likely to make him continue to insist that the only way to end the conflict is for Ukraine to sit down at the negotiating table, she said. "Which, in fact, means capitulation."

While support for Ukraine lags in Washington, both French President Emmanuel Macron and Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski have said recently that sending troops to back Kyiv is at least a hypothetical possibility.

With those statements in mind, Putin may be motivated to test the resolve of NATO.

Alexandra Vacroux, executive director of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, posits that Russia within several years will make an attempt to assess NATO's commitment to Article 5, the alliance's common defense guarantee under which an attack on one member is considered an attack on all.

"I don't think that Putin thinks that he needs to be physically, militarily stronger than all of the other countries. He just needs them to be weaker and more fractured. And so the question for him is like ... instead of worrying so much about making myself stronger, how can I make everyone else weaker?" she said.

"So in order to do that, it's like you have to find a situation where you could test Article 5," and if the response is mild or uncertain "then you've shown that, like NATO is just a paper tiger," Vacroux said.

Russia could run such a test without overt military action, she said, adding, "You could imagine, like, one of the big questions is what kind of cyberattack constitutes a threat to attack?"

Although it is not a NATO member, the country of Moldova is increasingly worried about becoming a Russian target. Since the invasion of Ukraine, neighboring Moldova has faced crises that have raised fears in its capital of Chisinau that the country is also in the Kremlin's crosshairs.

The congress in Moldova's separatist Transnistria region, where Russia bases about 1,500 soldiers as nominal peacekeepers, have appealed to Moscow for diplomatic "protection" because of alleged increasing pressure from Moldova.

That appeal potentially leaves "a lot of room for escalation," said Cristain Cantir, a Moldovan international relations professor at Oakland University. "I think it's useful to see the congress and the resolution as a warning to Moldova that Russia may get more involved in Transnistria if Chisinau does not make concessions."

On the Russian home front, more repressive measures could come in a new Putin term, even though opposition supporters and independent media already are cowed or silenced.

Stanovaya suggested that Putin himself does not drive repressive measures but that he approves such actions that are devised by others in the expectation that these are what the Kremlin leader wants.

"Many players are trying to survive and to adapt, and they compete against each other and often they have contradictory interests," she said. "And they are trying all together in parallel to secure their own priorities and the stability of the regime."

Russia last year banned the notional LGBTQ+ "movement" by declaring it to be extremist in what officials said was a fight for traditional values like those espoused by the Russian Orthodox Church in the face of Western influence. Courts also banned gender transitioning.

Ben Noble, an associate professor of Russian politics at University College London, said he believes the LGBTQ+ community could face further repression in a new Putin term.

In the Kremlin's eye, they "can be held up as an import from the decadent West," he said.

## Election disinformation takes a big leap with AI being used to deceive worldwide

By ALI SWENSON and KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Artificial intelligence is supercharging the threat of election disinformation worldwide, making it easy for anyone with a smartphone and a devious imagination to create fake — but convincing — content aimed at fooling voters.

It marks a quantum leap from a few years ago, when creating phony photos, videos or audio clips required teams of people with time, technical skill and money. Now, using free and low-cost generative artificial intelligence services from companies like Google and OpenAI, anyone can create high-quality “deepfakes” with just a simple text prompt.

A wave of AI deepfakes tied to elections in Europe and Asia has coursed through social media for months, serving as a warning for more than 50 countries heading to the polls this year.

“You don’t need to look far to see some people ... being clearly confused as to whether something is real or not,” said Henry Ajder, a leading expert in generative AI based in Cambridge, England.

The question is no longer whether AI deepfakes could affect elections, but how influential they will be, said Ajder, who runs a consulting firm called Latent Space Advisory.

As the U.S. presidential race heats up, FBI Director Christopher Wray recently warned about the growing threat, saying generative AI makes it easy for “foreign adversaries to engage in malign influence.”

With AI deepfakes, a candidate’s image can be smeared, or softened. Voters can be steered toward or away from candidates — or even to avoid the polls altogether. But perhaps the greatest threat to democracy, experts say, is that a surge of AI deepfakes could erode the public’s trust in what they see and hear.

Some recent examples of AI deepfakes include:

— A video of Moldova’s pro-Western president throwing her support behind a political party friendly to Russia.

— Audio clips of Slovakia’s liberal party leader discussing vote rigging and raising the price of beer.

— A video of an opposition lawmaker in Bangladesh — a conservative Muslim majority nation — wearing a bikini.

The novelty and sophistication of the technology makes it hard to track who is behind AI deepfakes. Experts say governments and companies are not yet capable of stopping the deluge, nor are they moving fast enough to solve the problem.

As the technology improves, “definitive answers about a lot of the fake content are going to be hard to come by,” Ajder said.

### ERODING TRUST

Some AI deepfakes aim to sow doubt about candidates’ allegiances.

In Moldova, an Eastern European country bordering Ukraine, pro-Western President Maia Sandu has been a frequent target. One AI deepfake that circulated shortly before local elections depicted her endorsing a Russian-friendly party and announcing plans to resign.

Officials in Moldova believe the Russian government is behind the activity. With presidential elections this year, the deepfakes aim “to erode trust in our electoral process, candidates and institutions — but also to erode trust between people,” said Olga Rosca, an adviser to Sandu. The Russian government declined to comment for this story.

China has also been accused of weaponizing generative AI for political purposes.

In Taiwan, a self-ruled island that China claims as its own, an AI deepfake gained attention earlier this year by stirring concerns about U.S. interference in local politics.

The fake clip circulating on TikTok showed U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman, vice chairman of the U.S. House Armed Services Committee, promising stronger U.S. military support for Taiwan if the incumbent party’s candidates were elected in January.

Wittman blamed the Chinese Communist Party for trying to meddle in Taiwanese politics, saying it uses

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TikTok — a Chinese-owned company — to spread “propaganda.”

A spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry, Wang Wenbin, said his government doesn’t comment on fake videos and that it opposes interference in other countries’ internal affairs. The Taiwan election, he stressed, “is a local affair of China.”

## BLURRING REALITY

Audio-only deepfakes are especially hard to verify because, unlike photos and videos, they lack telltale signs of manipulated content.

In Slovakia, another country overshadowed by Russian influence, audio clips resembling the voice of the liberal party chief were shared widely on social media just days before parliamentary elections. The clips purportedly captured him talking about hiking beer prices and rigging the vote.

It’s understandable that voters might fall for the deception, Ajder said, because humans are “much more used to judging with our eyes than with our ears.”

In the U.S., robocalls impersonating U.S. President Joe Biden urged voters in New Hampshire to abstain from voting in January’s primary election. The calls were later traced to a political consultant who said he was trying to publicize the dangers of AI deepfakes.

In poorer countries, where media literacy lags, even low-quality AI fakes can be effective.

Such was the case last year in Bangladesh, where opposition lawmaker Rumeen Farhana — a vocal critic of the ruling party — was falsely depicted wearing a bikini. The viral video sparked outrage in the conservative, majority-Muslim nation.

“They trust whatever they see on Facebook,” Farhana said.

Experts are particularly concerned about upcoming elections in India, the world’s largest democracy and where social media platforms are breeding grounds for disinformation.

## A CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY

Some political campaigns are using generative AI to bolster their candidate’s image.

In Indonesia, the team that ran the presidential campaign of Prabowo Subianto deployed a simple mobile app to build a deeper connection with supporters across the vast island nation. The app enabled voters to upload photos and make AI-generated images of themselves with Subianto.

As the types of AI deepfakes multiply, authorities around the world are scrambling to come up with guardrails.

The European Union already requires social media platforms to cut the risk of spreading disinformation or “election manipulation.” It will mandate special labeling of AI deepfakes starting next year, too late for the EU’s parliamentary elections in June. Still, the rest of the world is a lot further behind.

The world’s biggest tech companies recently — and voluntarily — signed a pact to prevent AI tools from disrupting elections. For example, the company that owns Instagram and Facebook has said it will start labeling deepfakes that appear on its platforms.

But deepfakes are harder to rein in on apps like the Telegram chat service, which did not sign the voluntary pact and uses encrypted chats that can be difficult to monitor.

Some experts worry that efforts to rein in AI deepfakes could have unintended consequences.

Well-meaning governments or companies might trample on the sometimes “very thin” line between political commentary and an “illegitimate attempt to smear a candidate,” said Tim Harper, a senior policy analyst at the Center for Democracy and Technology in Washington.

Major generative AI services have rules to limit political disinformation. But experts say it remains too easy to outwit the platforms’ restrictions or use alternative services that don’t have the same safeguards.

Even without bad intentions, the rising use of AI is problematic. Many popular AI-powered chatbots are still spitting out false and misleading information that threatens to disenfranchise voters.

And software isn’t the only threat. Candidates could try to deceive voters by claiming that real events portraying them in an unfavorable light were manufactured by AI.

“A world in which everything is suspect — and so everyone gets to choose what they believe — is also a world that’s really challenging for a flourishing democracy,” said Lisa Reppell, a researcher at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in Arlington, Virginia.

## Storm carrying massive 'gorilla hail' hits parts of Kansas and Missouri

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Massive chunks of hail pelted parts of Kansas and Missouri on Wednesday night, bringing traffic to a standstill along Interstate 70 and unleashing a possible tornado, as meteorologists urged residents to stay indoors.

At least one unconfirmed tornado was reported Wednesday in Alta Vista, Kansas, according to media reports. The National Weather Service in Topeka said quarter-size hail and wind gusts up to 60 mph (96 kph) were expected across northern Kansas overnight until 6 a.m. on Thursday.

Descriptions of the hail ranged from the size of golf balls and apples, to softballs and baseballs.

Alex Sosnowski, senior meteorologist at AccuWeather, previously said the predicted hail was deemed "gorilla hail" because it had the potential to be so big.

"Gorilla hail" is a term coined by Reed Timmer, a storm chaser who calls himself an extreme meteorologist, Sosnowski said. In this case, the term might fit: Some hail from north-central Kansas into north-central Missouri could be as big as a baseball.

"When you get up to tennis ball, baseball-sized or God forbid softball-sized, that can do a tremendous amount of damage, and if you get hit in the head, that could be fatal," Sosnowski said.

Traffic came to a standstill for a time on part of Interstate 70 because of the falling hail, the National Weather Service said on X. Images of large hail chunks and at least one cracked windshield were shown on KSHB-TV.

Late Wednesday, forecasters issued tornado warnings in the areas around Topeka and to the north, while severe thunderstorm warnings were issued northeast of Kansas City in Missouri.

"If you are in this warning, get away from windows and shelter inside now!!!" the National Weather Service posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. The weather service said the storm had previously produced "softball-sized hail," or 3.5-inch (8.9-centimeter) chunks.

The weather service also issued a severe thunderstorm watch for parts of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas through Thursday morning, after which forecasters said the storm will move to the east.

While the hail threat lessens Thursday, meteorologists said heavy rain and high winds were still possible from northeastern Texas through central Missouri.

The biggest threat on Friday is for torrential rain — perhaps up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) in some spots — in a line from central Louisiana up through central Arkansas, Sosnowski said.

## It's not just 'hang loose.' Lawmakers look to make the friendly 'shaka' Hawaii's official gesture

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

KANEHOE, Hawaii (AP) — A pinky and thumb extended with the remaining fingers curled down: That's the "shaka" in Hawaii.

The gesture is sometimes known outside the islands as the "hang loose" sign associated with surf culture, but it was a fixture of daily life in the islands long before it caught on in California, Brazil and beyond. People in Hawaii have a variety of shaka styles and use it to convey a range of warmhearted sentiments, from hi and bye to thanks and aloha, among other meanings.

When captains of the Lahainaluna High School football team, from the Maui community devastated by last summer's deadly wildfire, were invited to the Super Bowl in Las Vegas last month, they flashed shakas for the cameras.

Now, a pair of bills in the state Legislature would make the shaka the state's official gesture and recognize Hawaii as its birthplace.

Sen. Glenn Wakai, who introduced the Senate version, said he can't imagine the measure meeting any opposition and expects it to "sail through."

Here are some things to know about Hawaii's shaka — including its purported origin with a seven-fingered

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fisherman.

WHAT IS THE SHAKA?

On paper, the House bill notes that the “shaka generally consists of extending the thumb and smallest finger while holding the three middle fingers curled, and gesturing in salutation while presenting the front or back of the hand; the wrist may be rotated back and forth for emphasis.”

In practice, the shaka is far more nuanced.

Some say the only requirement is an extended pinky and thumb. Others say shaking the shaka is a no-no.

Those from beach or rural communities tend not to shake their shakas. But in the capital city of Honolulu, it’s common.

“It’s just a strong movement — one movement,” said Chase Lee, who grew up just outside Honolulu. He was taught never to shake the shaka. If you do, “you’re a tourist,” he said.

But Erin Issa, one of his colleagues at Central Pacific Bank, likes to wag hers.

“I’m a very animated person,” she said. “I feel awkward if I’m just standing still.”

She prefers to flash a shaka with the palm facing outwards, as a sign of respect: “It’s shaka-ing to you, not to me.”

“As long as you get your pinky finger and your thumb out, you can wave it or you can just do just a flat shaka,” Dennis Caballes, a Honolulu resident, said while fishing at a beach park.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The shaka carries friendliness and warmth — aloha spirit. Some hold it low when greeting a child, and some like to flash double shakas. It can convey greetings, gratitude or assent, or it can defuse tension. It was particularly useful in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when people were afraid to shake hands.

“It’s such a versatile gesture,” said state Rep. Sean Quinlan, who introduced the House bill at the behest of a documentary filmmaker exploring the sign’s backstory.

Big Island state Rep. Jeanné Kapela, one of the House bill’s co-sponsors, said residents are “so lucky to have a visual signal for sharing aloha with each other.”

Shakas can avert altercations when people are cut off in traffic, said Wakai, the state senator who introduced the Senate version.

“The angst toward that driver kind of just immediately gets reduced,” Wakai said.

WHERE DOES THE SHAKA COME FROM?

The prevailing story of the shaka’s origin traces back to a Native Hawaiian fisherman named Hāmana Kalili, who lived on Oahu’s North Shore in the early 1900s. Mailani Maka’īna’i, Kalili’s great-great-granddaughter, wants the bills amended to include his name — something lawmakers are considering.

Kalili lost three fingers in a sugar mill accident, she said.

After the mishap, Kalili worked as a guard on a train. Kids who jumped the train for a free ride would curl their middle fingers to mimic Kalili’s injured hand, giving other train-jumpers the all-clear, said Steve Sue, who researched shaka for his documentary.

Other residents adopted Kalili’s three-finger-less wave more broadly, according to family lore, and it spread, possibly fueled by the waves of tourists that began arriving after World War II.

“I love the compassion part of it, you know, where, ‘Oh, okay, he doesn’t have all three fingers. So, I’m going to say hi the way he’s saying hi,’” Maka’īnai said. “It’s the idea that ... I’m like you and you’re like me.”

There’s a bronze statue of Kalili, his right arm extended into a shaka, at the Polynesian Cultural Center in Laie.

There are various theories about how the term “shaka” became associated with the gesture. Some have suggested that the name came from Japan’s Shaka Buddha.

HOW IS THE SHAKA USED NOW?

The sign has spread around the world since the surfing boom of the 1950s and ‘60s. It’s popular in Brazil, where it’s been used by martial arts aficionados. Brazil soccer greats Ronaldinho and Neymar Jr. incorporated it into their goal celebrations.

The shaka is such an integral part of Hawaii life that it's easy to miss, said Sen. Chris Lee, chair of the Committee on Transportation and Culture and the Arts.

Some Honolulu city buses are outfitted with a digital shaka light that bus drivers can turn on to thank motorists for letting them merge. Texters have co-opted the "call me" emoji to symbolize the shaka, and local station KHON-TV has ended each evening newscast since the 1970s with clips of people flashing shakas.

Longtime KHON anchor Howard Dashefsky said throwing a shaka is almost a reflex when people in the community recognize him and call his name.

"There's a lot of other places where you only get a one-finger gesture," he said.

Shakas also come out naturally when people from Hawaii are somewhere else in the world and want to display connection to their island roots.

Businesses often use the shaka to project community belonging.

Central Pacific Bank, for example, called their digital checking account Shaka Checking at the suggestion of electronic banking manager Florence Nakamura.

"It makes people feel good when they receive one," she said.

## US lawmakers see TikTok as China's tool, even as it distances itself from Beijing

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — If some U.S. lawmakers have their way, the United States and China could end up with something in common: TikTok might not be available in either country.

The House on Wednesday approved a bill requiring the Beijing-based company ByteDance to sell its subsidiary TikTok or face a nationwide ban. It's unclear if the bill will ever become law, but it reflects lawmakers' fears that the social media platform could expose Americans to Beijing's malign influences and data security risks.

But while U.S. lawmakers associate TikTok with China, the company, headquartered outside China, has strategically kept its distance from its homeland.

Since its inception, the TikTok platform has been intended for non-Chinese markets and is unavailable in mainland China. It pulled out of Hong Kong in 2020 when Beijing imposed a national security law on the territory to curtail speech. As data security concerns started to rise in the U.S., TikTok sought to reassure lawmakers that data gathered on U.S. users stays in the country and is inaccessible to ByteDance employees in Beijing.

TikTok's parent company is following the same playbook as many other Chinese companies with global ambitions: To win customers and trust in the United States and other Western countries, they are playing down their Chinese roots and connections. Some have insisted they be called "global companies" instead of "Chinese companies."

But for TikTok, this may not be enough. The House bill passed overwhelmingly on a 352-65 vote. Its prospects in the Senate are uncertain, but if it clears both chambers, President Joe Biden said he would sign it into law. The moves in Washington threaten the app's survival and cast a spotlight on the quandary that many private Chinese companies have found themselves a part of as they seek to engage Western markets at a time of souring U.S.-China relations.

"It's the most difficult time for Chinese tech companies and private businesses in decades as tensions and rivalry between the United States and China continue to grow," said Zhiqun Zhu, professor of political science and international relations at Bucknell University.

"These companies and businesses face squeezing from both sides as they struggle to survive," Zhu said. "While the U.S. and other Western countries have imposed sanctions or restrictions on these companies, China itself has moved to favor state-owned enterprises in recent years, leaving little room for Chinese tech and private businesses to operate."

Alex Capri, senior lecturer at the National University of Singapore and research fellow at Hinrich Foun-

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dation, agreed that companies like TikTok with Chinese roots are “really stuck in two polar extremes” between the heavy-handed communist party and the deeply suspicious West.

“Any Chinese tech company has to operate under a cloud of suspicion, and that’s because there’s a total breakdown of trust,” Capri said.

With the rise of techno-nationalism, by which technological capabilities are deemed a national strategic asset, China’s tech companies are obligated by Beijing’s laws and rules to turn over data and have become “essentially a de-facto representative” of China’s ruling communist party, Capri said.

“That in itself makes it very challenging for companies like TikTok,” he said.

In 2018, Zhang Yiming, the founder of ByteDance, toed the party line after Beijing shut down ByteDance’s jokes app. He apologized publicly for his company’s deviations from socialistic core values and promised to “comprehensively rectify the algorithm” on its news app and add significantly more layers of censoring — a move considered necessary for any company to survive in China.

That explains the oft-repeated claim by Rep. Mike Gallagher, chair of the House Select Committee on China’s communist party, that “there’s no such thing as a private company in China.”

The bill, as approved by the House, seeks to remove applications from app stores or web hosting services in the U.S. unless the application severs its ties to companies — such as ByteDance — that are subject to the control from foreign adversaries, like China.

“This is my message to TikTok: Break up with the Chinese Communist Party or lose access to your American users,” said Gallagher, the bill’s sponsor. “America’s foremost adversary has no business controlling a dominant media platform in the United States. TikTok’s time in the United States is over unless it ends its relationship with CCP-controlled ByteDance.”

Congressional mistrust of TikTok was evident at a Jan. 31 hearing when Sen. Tom Cotton repeatedly asked CEO Shou Zi Chew if he is a Chinese citizen beholden to the Communist party. Chew, who is Singaporean, repeatedly said no.

On Tuesday, Rep. Nancy Pelosi said it’s problematic that ByteDance, which owns the social platform’s algorithm, is subject to Beijing’s control.

Chew, in another congressional hearing last year, told Congress that “we do not remove or promote content on behalf of the Chinese government.”

In a recent interview with Wired magazine, Chew acknowledged that the company’s Chinese origins have given TikTok a “bigger trust deficit than most other companies.”

“Maybe our trust starting line is behind other businesses, but I also think that there are very serious approaches that we’ve taken to try and earn that trust and to close that gap,” Chew said, citing efforts by TikTok to protect U.S. user data, be transparent and “not be manipulated by any government.”

Short of severance from the home country, Chinese companies chasing global ambitions have tried to distance themselves from China by introducing many foreign investors, hiring foreign executives, moving headquarters to outside China and limiting operations to overseas markets, said Thomas Zhang, China analyst at FrontierView, a U.S.-headquartered market intelligence provider. But “the effects are limited as long as the founder in China does not relinquish control,” Zhang said.

For TikTok, the trust is so lacking that even a full divestiture from its Chinese parent company may not work, because complicated ownership structures can obscure potential Chinese ownership, Capri said.

As TikTok fights for survival, it has made a move that is very present in American politics: It’s engaging in heavy lobbying, and appealing to its 170 million U.S. users to contact their lawmakers to say a TikTok ban would infringe on their free speech rights.

It’s won over one powerful critic: Former President Donald Trump, in a reversal, came out against the TikTok legislation. But Trump, for all his sway with congressional Republicans, couldn’t prevent House passage.

If the bill becomes law, Capri said, TikTok could pursue the ultimate American recourse: a lawsuit to challenge the ban.



## Women blast through gender barriers in Colombia's emerald mines, but struggle to emerge from poverty

By ASTRID SUÁREZ Associated Press

COSCUEZ, Colombia (AP) — Deep inside mountain tunnels where the heat is so intense it causes headaches, women with power tools are chipping away at boulders in search of gems. They have opened a difficult path for themselves in Colombia's emerald industry, a sector long dominated by men.

The lack of job opportunities, combined with the hope of a find that will make them rich, has pushed the women into mining. Colombian emeralds are known around the world for their quality and the best can be sold for thousands of dollars, though most people in the industry aren't wealthy.

"There are months or years in which I don't even make \$250" from the emerald mines, said Yaneth Forero, one of the women at a small, informal mine near the town of Coscuez, where production has long been centered.

"But we continue to struggle here for the dream of having a home with tiles on the floors, a place that smells good and where no one can kick me out," she said. She lives in a precarious hillside house where the walls are unpainted and the floor is made of cement.

Some of the biggest emeralds in the world have been mined in Colombia, including one weighing 3 pounds (1.36 kilograms) that broke the world record in 1995. In Coscuez, rumors circulate that one miner recently found an emerald that sold for \$177,000, and left the ramshackle town forever.

In 2022, Colombian emerald exports were worth \$122 million, according to the national federation of emerald companies. The gems are one of the nation's most iconic products, and are sold in jewelry shops in cities like Cartagena and Bogotá.

But most emerald profits go to merchants and large companies that have invested millions of dollars in technologies that help them find the most valuable stones.

Workers at small, unregulated mines like Forero, who still use dynamite sticks to open tunnels, have a slim chance of finding the emeralds that can change someone's destiny.

In her home outside Coscuez, Forero keeps some small, opaque emeralds that she has gathered over the past three months. She reckons that they are not worth more than \$76 in all.

Her earnings are not enough to maintain her four children or help her father, who has developed a respiratory illness after working in emerald mines for decades and needs an oxygen tank to breathe.

So she also works random jobs to make ends meet like washing uniforms, ironing clothes and cleaning homes.

The 52-year-old said she has struggled to leave this way of life because the economy in Coscuez revolves around mining, and there are few other opportunities.

Working in the mines is tougher for women. Once they are done drilling in deep tunnels and sifting through rocks, they must care for their children and do domestic tasks that men are often reluctant to do.

Flor Marina Morales said she started to work in the mines around Coscuez because she needed to provide for her kids.

She said she used to arrive home from the mines at 3 a.m. and stay awake to make breakfast for her children and send them to school.

Morales' children are now in university studying psychology and law.

"I'm glad they have a different outlook," she said. "Mining is exhausting, and in this job you put up with a lot of hunger, cold and lack of sleep."

To enter the small mines around Coscuez, women wear rubber boots and helmets and carry drills just like the men.

After they enter in a single file, they branch off in different directions and head into tunnels where each person has a designated area to drill. The rocks that break off the walls are carried outside in carts, washed and sifted through.

This kind of involvement by women was unthinkable a few decades ago in Colombia. Older villagers said that men previously barred women from approaching the mines because they believed that if women were

around, the emeralds would hide.

"That was pure machismo, they just didn't want us to work," said Carmen Alicia Ávila, a 57-year-old miner who has been in the industry for almost four decades.

She said that between the 1960s and 1990s, when miners attacked each other for control of the area in a period known as the "green wars," women who attempted to work in mines were threatened, and some were raped.

Ávila said she started to work at the mines when she was 19, but she was not allowed to enter the shafts. Instead, she sifted through rocks picked by the men.

"Women were only allowed into the shafts two decades ago" she said.

The area has become less violent after a series of peace deals brokered by the Catholic church. Many miners who were behind the violence have died. Some sold off their properties to international companies as finding valuable emeralds became tougher and required more money.

Currently there are 200 women working in the mines around Coscuez, according to the local association of female miners. Some work alongside men, while others work in five small mines owned by women, where only female miners are allowed.

Because the tunnels are so small, the women take turns working inside them.

Like others who work in small mines, they are trying to get the government to officially recognize them as artisanal miners. That would give them the right to legally exploit the mines. It would also give them more stability and make it easier to get loans.

Colombia's government has already granted more than 900 titles to companies and individuals to exploit emerald mines. But according to the National Mining Agency, 576 requests are still under review, including those from small-scale miners.

Luz Myriam Duarte Ramírez, president of the National Federation of Mines, said that her organization is backing the efforts of the Coscuez miners to be registered as artisanal miners, as well as the legalization of the five mines owned by women.

Despite these efforts to improve conditions, Forero said she doesn't want to stay in the industry for long. She said that if she gets lucky and finds a valuable gem, she will buy a house and set up a small business to keep her away from the hot, dark tunnels where she has labored for years.

"Life is tough in these mines, even if some people have found emeralds that were sold in Dubai," Forero said. "Sometimes I sit in those tunnels and talk to God. But unfortunately, it seems like we haven't had a good connection."

## Judge to hear arguments on whether to dismiss Trump's classified documents prosecution

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — A federal judge will hear arguments Thursday on whether to dismiss the classified documents prosecution of Donald Trump, with his attorneys asserting that the former president was entitled to keep the sensitive records with him when he left the White House and headed to Florida.

The dispute centers on the Trump team's interpretation of the Presidential Records Act, which they say gave him the authority to designate the documents as personal and maintain possession of them after his presidency.

Special counsel Jack Smith's team, by contrast, says the files Trump is charged with possessing are presidential records, not personal ones, and that the statute does not apply to classified and top-secret documents like those kept at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.

The Presidential Records Act "does not exempt Trump from the criminal law, entitle him to unilaterally declare highly classified presidential records to be personal records, or shield him from criminal investigations — let alone allow him to obstruct a federal investigation with impunity," prosecutors wrote in a court filing last week.

It was not clear when U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon might rule, but the outcome will determine

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whether the case proceeds or whether, as Trump's lawyers hope, it is thrown out before ever reaching a jury — a rare action for a judge to take.

Cannon, who was nominated to the bench by Trump, is also expected to hear arguments Thursday on a separate but related Trump team motion that says the statute that forms the bulk of the criminal charges — making it a crime to willfully retain national defense information — is unconstitutionally vague as it applies to a former president.

It is not surprising that defense lawyers are seeking dismissal of the case based on the Presidential Records Act given that the legal team has repeatedly invoked the statute since the FBI's August 2022 search of Mar-a-Lago.

The law, enacted in 1978, requires presidents upon leaving office to transfer their presidential records to the U.S. government for management — specifically, the National Archives and Records Administration — though they are permitted to retain personal records, including diaries and notes that are purely private and not prepared for government business.

Trump's lawyers have said that he designated as personal property the records he took with him to Mar-a-Lago, which prosecutors say included top-secret information and documents related to nuclear programs and the military capabilities of the U.S. and foreign adversaries.

Cannon has suggested in the past that she sees Trump's status as a former president as distinguishing him from others who have held onto classified records.

After the Trump team sued the Justice Department in 2022 to get his records back, Cannon appointed a special master to conduct an independent review of the documents taken during the FBI's Mar-a-Lago search. That appointment was later overturned by a federal appeals court.

More recently, even while ruling in favor of Smith's team on a procedural question, Cannon pointedly described the case as the "first-ever criminal prosecution of a former United States President — once the country's chief classification authority over many of the documents the Special Counsel now seeks to withhold from him (and his cleared counsel) — in a case without charges of transmission or delivery of national defense information."

Trump faces 40 felony counts in Florida that accuse him of willfully retaining dozens of classified documents and rebuffing government demands to give them back after he left the White House. Prosecutors in recent court filings have stressed the scope of criminal conduct that they say they expect to prove at trial, saying in one that "there has never been a case in American history in which a former official has engaged in conduct remotely similar to Trump's."

They allege, for instance, that Trump intentionally held onto some of the nation's most sensitive documents — only returning a fraction of them upon demand by the National Archives — and then urged his lawyer to hide records and to lie to the FBI by saying he no longer was in possession of them. He's also charged with enlisting staff to delete surveillance footage that would show boxes of documents being moved around the property.

The hearing is the second this month in the case in Florida, one of four prosecutions Trump confronts as he seeks to reclaim the White House this year. Cannon heard arguments on March 1 on when to set a trial date, but has not immediately ruled. Both sides have proposed summertime dates for the trial to begin.

## Former Mormon bishop highlighted in AP investigation arrested on felony child sex abuse charges

By JASON DEAREN and MICHAEL REZENDES Associated Press

A former bishop in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who was featured in an Associated Press investigation into how the church protects itself from allegations of sexual abuse was arrested by police in Virginia this week after being indicted on charges he sexually abused his daughter while accompanying her on a school trip when she was a child, according to court filings.

Police and federal authorities had been searching for John Goodrich after a grand jury in Williamsburg on Jan. 17 found probable cause that he committed four felonies, including rape by force, threat or in-

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timidation, forcible sodomy, and two counts of felony aggravated sexual battery by a parent of a child.

Those charges were filed weeks after the AP investigation revealed how a representative of the church, widely known as the Mormon church, employed a risk management playbook that has helped it keep child sexual abuse cases secret after allegations surfaced that Goodrich abused his daughter Chelsea, now in her 30s, at their home in Idaho as well as on a school field trip to the Washington, D.C., area 20 years ago.

"I hope this case will finally bring justice for my childhood sexual abuse," Chelsea Goodrich said in a statement to the AP. "I'm grateful it appears that the Commonwealth of Virginia is taking one event of child sexual assault more seriously than years of repeated assaults were treated in Idaho."

A call Wednesday to John Goodrich's cellphone went immediately to voicemail. Tommy Norment, a Williamsburg defense attorney for John Goodrich, declined to comment, saying he was still familiarizing himself with the case. The Williamsburg Police Department also did not respond to multiple requests for comment on Goodrich's case.

Goodrich's arrest in Virginia comes nearly eight years after he was arrested in Idaho on similar charges. Chelsea and her mother, Lorraine, went to Idaho police in 2016 to report wide-ranging allegations of abuse during her childhood.

Those charges were eventually dropped after a key witness in the case, another Mormon bishop to whom John had made a spiritual confession about him and his daughter, refused to testify. While the details of that confession have not been made public, the church excommunicated Goodrich.

The AP's investigation was based in part on hours of audio recordings of Chelsea's 2017 meetings with Paul Rytting, a Utah attorney who was head of the church's Risk Management Division, which works to protect the church against sexual abuse lawsuits and other costly claims.

Chelsea went to Rytting for help in getting the bishop to testify about John's spiritual confession. During the recorded meetings, Rytting expressed concern for what he called John's "significant sexual transgression," but said the bishop, whose position in the church is akin to a Catholic priest, could not testify. He cited a "clergy-penitent privilege" loophole in Idaho's mandatory reporting law that exempts clergy from having to divulge information about child sex abuse that is gleaned in a spiritual confession.

Without that testimony, prosecutors in Idaho dropped that earlier case.

Invoking the clergy privilege was just one facet of the risk management playbook that Rytting employed in the Goodrich matter. Rytting offered Chelsea and her mother \$300,000 in exchange for a confidentiality agreement and a pledge to destroy their recordings of their meetings, which they had made at the recommendation of an attorney and with Rytting's knowledge. The AP obtained similar recordings that were made by a church member at the time who attended the meetings as Chelsea's advocate.

The church also employed the use of its so-called sex abuse Helpline, which John Goodrich's bishop had called after his confession. As AP revealed in 2022, the Helpline is a phone number set up by the church for bishops to report instances of child sex abuse. Instead of connecting church victims to counseling or other services, however, the Helpline often reports serious allegations of abuse to a church law firm.

In a statement to the AP for its recent investigation, the church said, "the abuse of a child or any other individual is inexcusable," and that John Goodrich, following his excommunication, "has not been readmitted to church membership."

News coverage of the Idaho case brought out another alleged victim. After learning about Chelsea's allegations, a 53-year-old single mother accused him of having nonconsensual sex with her after giving her the drug Halcion, a controlled substance John Goodrich often used to sedate patients during dental procedures. She alleged that Goodrich drugged her the previous July after she cut off a sexual relationship with him.

In the end, John Goodrich reached a plea agreement in that case, and escaped sex crimes charges.

Chelsea Goodrich approached the AP with her story, she said, because her father remained free and practicing dentistry in Idaho with access to children.

On Tuesday, after authorities spent two weeks searching for him, Goodrich turned himself in to police in Williamsburg, a court official told Chelsea Goodrich, and he posted bond. He will be allowed to leave Virginia during legal proceedings, the court official said.

## House passes a bill that could lead to a TikTok ban if Chinese owner refuses to sell

By KEVIN FREKING, HALELUYA HADERO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press  
WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Wednesday passed a bill that would lead to a nationwide ban of the popular video app TikTok if its China-based owner doesn't sell its stake, as lawmakers acted on concerns that the company's current ownership structure is a national security threat.

The bill, passed by a vote of 352-65, now goes to the Senate, where its prospects are unclear. TikTok, which has more than 170 million American users, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Chinese technology firm ByteDance Ltd.

The lawmakers contend that ByteDance is beholden to the Chinese government, which could demand access to the data of TikTok's consumers in the U.S. whenever it wants. The worry stems from a set of Chinese national security laws that compel organizations to assist with intelligence gathering.

"We have given TikTok a clear choice," said Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash. "Separate from your parent company ByteDance, which is beholden to the CCP (the Chinese Communist Party), and remain operational in the United States, or side with the CCP and face the consequences. The choice is TikTok's."

House passage of the bill is only the first step. The Senate would also need to pass the measure for it to become law, and lawmakers in that chamber indicated it would undergo a thorough review. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said he'll have to consult with relevant committee chairs to determine the bill's path.

President Joe Biden has said if Congress passes the measure, he will sign it.

The House vote is the latest example of increased tensions between China and the U.S. By targeting TikTok, lawmakers are tackling what they see as a grave threat to America's national security — but also singling out a platform popular with millions of people, many of whom skew younger, just months before an election.

In a video posted on Wednesday evening, TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said that the company has invested to keep user data safe and the TikTok platform free from outside manipulation. If passed, he said the bill would give more power to a handful of other social companies.

"We will not stop fighting and advocating for you. We will continue to do all we can, including exercising our legal rights, to protect this amazing platform that we have built with you," Chew said in his message to the app's users.

In anticipation of the vote, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin, accused Washington of resorting to political tools when U.S. businesses fail to compete. He said the effort would disrupt normal business operations and undermine investor confidence "and will eventually backfire on the U.S. itself."

Overall, 197 Republican lawmakers voted for the measure and 15 against. On the Democratic side, 155 voted for the bill and 50 against.

Some Republican opponents of the bill said the U.S. should warn consumers if there are data privacy and propaganda concerns, but the final choice should be left with consumers.

"The answer to authoritarianism is not more authoritarianism," said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Calif. "The answer to CCP-style propaganda is not CCP-style oppression. Let us slow down before we blunder down this very steep and slippery slope."

Democrats also warned of the impact a ban would have on users in the U.S., including entrepreneurs and business owners. One of the no votes came from Rep. Jim Himes, the ranking Democratic member of the House Intelligence Committee.

"One of the key differences between us and those adversaries is the fact that they shut down newspapers, broadcast stations, and social media platforms. We do not," Himes said. "We trust our citizens to be worthy of their democracy. We do not trust our government to decide what information they may or may not see."

The day before the House vote, top national security officials in the Biden administration held a closed-door briefing with lawmakers to discuss TikTok and the national security implications. Lawmakers are

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balancing those security concerns against a desire not to limit free speech online.

"What we've tried to do here is be very thoughtful and deliberate about the need to force a divestiture of TikTok without granting any authority to the executive branch to regulate content or go after any American company," said Rep. Mike Gallagher, the bill's author, as he emerged from the briefing.

TikTok has long denied that it could be used as a tool of the Chinese government. The company has said it has never shared U.S. user data with Chinese authorities and won't do so if it is asked. To date, the U.S. government also has not provided evidence that shows TikTok shared such information with Chinese authorities.

Republican leaders moved quickly to bring up the bill after its introduction last week by Gallagher and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill. A House committee approved the legislation unanimously, on a 50-0 vote, even after their offices were inundated with calls from TikTok users demanding they drop the effort. Some offices even shut off their phones because of the onslaught. Supporters of the bill said the effort backfired.

"(It) provided members a preview of how the platform could be weaponized to inject disinformation into our system," Gallagher said.

Lawmakers in both parties are anxious to confront China on a range of issues. The House formed a special committee to focus on China-related issues. And Schumer directed committee chairs to begin working with Republicans on a bipartisan China competition bill.

Schumer is likely to feel some pressure from within his own party to move on the TikTok legislation. Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner announced after the House vote that he would work to "get this bill passed through the Senate and signed into law."

In a joint statement with Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, the top Republican on the intelligence panel, Warner said that "we are united in our concern about the national security threat posed by TikTok — a platform with enormous power to influence and divide Americans whose parent company ByteDance remains legally required to do the bidding of the Chinese Communist Party."

Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell, who chairs another panel with jurisdiction on the issue, said she would "try to find a path forward that is constitutional and protects civil liberties."

Roughly 30 TikTok influencers and others who traveled with them spoke out against the bill on Capitol Hill on Wednesday. They chanted phrases like "Keep TikTok" ahead of the vote. They also held signs that read "TikTok changed my life for the better" and "TikTok helped me grow my business."

Dan Salinger, a Sacramento, California-based TikTok creator in attendance, said he started creating content on the app during the COVID-19 pandemic purely out of boredom. But since then his account, which features videos about his life and his father, who suffers from dementia, has grown in popularity. Today, he has 2 million followers on the app.

"I'm actually appalled for many reasons," Salinger said. "The speed with which they're pushing this bill through does not give enough time for Americans to voice their concerns and opinions."

Former President Donald Trump has spoken out against the House effort, but his vice president, Mike Pence, is urging Schumer to bring the House bill to a vote.

"There can be no doubt that this app is Chinese spyware and that a sale to a non-foreign adversary company is in the best interests of the American people," Pence said in a letter to Schumer.

## Indigenous people rejoice after city of Berkeley votes to return sacred Native land to Ohlone

By OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ and JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Ohlone people and others rejoiced Wednesday over the return of sacred Native land dating back thousands of years, saying the move rights a historic wrong and restores the people who were first on land now called Berkeley, California, to their rightful place in history.

The 2.2-acre (0.89-hectare) parking lot is the only undeveloped portion of the shellmound in West Berkeley, where ancestors of today's Ohlone people established the first human settlement on the shores of the San Francisco Bay 5,700 years ago.

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Berkeley's City Council voted unanimously Tuesday to adopt an ordinance giving the title of the land to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, a San Francisco Bay Area collective led by women that works to return land to Indigenous people. The collective raised most of the money needed to reach the agreement with developers who own the land.

"We want to be a place for global Indigenous leadership to come and gather in solidarity," said Melissa Nelson, chair of the board of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust, at a celebratory news conference Wednesday. "We want to educate, we want to restore and we want to heal."

The crowd cheered as speakers talked of a movement to restore other lands to Indigenous people.

The site — a three-block area Berkeley designated as a landmark in 2000 — will be home to Native medicines and foods, an oasis for pollinators and wildlife, and a place for youth to learn about their heritage, including ancient dances and ceremonies.

"The site will be home to education, prayer and preservation, and will outlast every one of us today to continue telling the story of the Ohlone people," Mayor Jesse Arreguín said, adding that their history is "marked not by adversity, but more importantly, by their unwavering resilience as a community."

Before Spanish colonizers arrived in the region, the area held a village and a massive shellmound with a height of 20 feet and the length and width of a football field that was a ceremonial and burial site. Built over years with mussel, clam and oyster shells, human remains, and artifacts, the shellmound also served as a lookout.

The Spanish removed the Ohlone from their villages and forced them into labor at local missions. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Anglo settlers took over the land and razed the shellmound to line roadbeds in Berkeley with shells.

"It's a very sad and shameful history," said Berkeley City Councilmember Sophie Hahn, who spearheaded the effort to return the land.

The agreement with Berkeley-based Ruegg & Ellsworth LLC, which owns the parking lot, comes after a six-year legal fight that started in 2018 when the developer sued the city after officials denied its application to build a 260-unit apartment building with 50% affordable housing and 27,500 feet of retail and parking space.

The settlement was reached after Ruegg & Ellsworth agreed to accept \$27 million to settle all outstanding claims and to turn the property over to Berkeley. The Sogorea Te' Land Trust contributed \$25.5 million and Berkeley paid \$1.5 million, officials said.

The trust plans to build a commemorative park with a new shellmound and a cultural center to house some of the pottery, jewelry, baskets and other artifacts found over the years and that are in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Corrina Gould, co-founder of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust and tribal chair of the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Ohlone, attended Tuesday's city council meeting via video conference and wiped away tears after the council voted to return the land.

The shellmound that once stood there was "a place where we first said goodbye to someone," she said. "To have this place saved forever, I am beyond words."

## **A Massachusetts town spent \$600K on shore protection.**

### **A winter storm washed it away days later**

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A Massachusetts beach community is scrambling after a weekend storm washed away \$600,000 in sand that was trucked in to protect homes, roads and other infrastructure.

The project, which brought 14,000 tons (12,701 metric tons) of sand into Salisbury over several weeks, was completed just three days before Sunday's storm clobbered southern New England with strong winds, heavy rainfall and coastal flooding.

The Salisbury Beach Citizens for Change group, which facilitated the project and helped raise funds, posted on social media about the project's completion last week and then again after the storm. They

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argued that the project still was worthwhile, noting that “the sacrificial dunes did their job” and protected some properties from being “eaten up” by the storm.

Tom Saab, president of the group and a real estate broker/developer, said the money was contributed by 150 property owners who said the state has refused to help them protect the beachfront and build up the dunes.

“The state will not contribute any money to the rebuilding of dunes. That is the bottom line,” Saab said. “Everybody is angry and upset. We can’t survive without sand rebuilding the dunes and can’t survive paying out of our pocket after every storm.”

Last weekend’s tempest was the latest of several recent severe storms in the community and across Massachusetts, which also suffered flooding, erosion and infrastructure damage in January.

Sand replenishment has been the government’s go-to method of shore protection for decades. Congress has long appropriated money for such work, arguing it effectively protects lives and property and sustains the tourism industry.

But critics say it’s inherently wasteful to keep pumping sand ashore that will inevitably wash away.

Climate change is forecast to bring more bad weather, including hurricanes, to the Northeast as waters warm, some scientists say. Worldwide, sea levels have risen faster since 1900, putting hundreds of millions of people at risk, the United Nations has said. And erosion from the changing conditions jeopardizes beaches the world over, according to European Union researchers.

Salisbury is also not the first town to see its efforts literally wash away.

Earlier this year, after a storm destroyed its dunes, one New Jersey town sought emergency permission to build a steel barrier — something it had done in two other spots — along the most heavily eroded section of its beachfront after spending millions of dollars trucking sand to the site for over a decade. The state denied the request and instead fined North Wildwood for unauthorized beach repairs. The Department of Environmental Protection has often opposed bulkheads, noting that the structures often encourage sand scouring that can accelerate and worsen erosion.

Republican state Sen. Bruce Tarr, who is working to secure \$1.5 million in state funding to shore up the Salisbury dunes, says the efforts will protect a major roadway, water and sewer infrastructure as well as hundreds of homes, which make up more than 40% of Salisbury’s tax base.

“We’re managing a natural resource that protects a lot of interests,” Tarr said, adding that replenishing the dunes is one of the few options available to the town since hard structures such as sea walls or boulders aren’t allowed on Massachusetts beaches.

A spokesperson for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation said to ensure the safety of the public, DCR has closed access points 9 and 10 at Salisbury Beach after they sustained damage from the recent rainstorms.

“The Healey-Driscoll Administration remains in regular communication with representatives from the Town, the legislative delegation and the community and will continue to work with them to address the impacts of erosion at the Beach,” DCR spokeswoman Ilyse Wolberg said in a statement.

Saab said it makes financial sense to continue rebuilding the dunes, rather than allowing nature to take its course and consume the beach.

“What, and destroy \$2 billion worth of property?” he asked. “Salisbury is home to thousands of people that use this beach in the summer. ... It would be much cheaper to continue to rebuild dunes after a series of nor’easters like we’ve had over the past year than letting the beach be destroyed by the ocean.”

Still, others questioned the logic of dumping more sand on the beach.

Resident Peter Lodi responded to the Salisbury beach group’s Facebook post, saying he wasn’t sure why anyone was shocked.

“Throw all the sand down you want. Mother nature decides how long it will protect your homes,” he wrote. “It’s only going to get worse. Not sure what the solution is but sand is merely a bandaid on a wound that needs multiple stitches.”

The group responded that the state has a responsibility to protect the beach and that the residents are



doing the community a favor by funding the project.

"Our feeling is if you regulate something, you have to be accountable and maintain it," the group said. "The residents that repaired the dune in front of their property actually helped both the city and the state. Now it's their turn to step up to the plate."

## **Biden looks to shore up Democratic 'blue wall' as he announces millions for projects**

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — President Joe Biden is getting to be a familiar face around the Great Lakes — and with a November rematch against Donald Trump looming, that's no accident.

He started a two-day swing through Wisconsin and Michigan in Milwaukee on Wednesday as he tried to shore up a Democratic "blue wall" and build momentum for his reelection campaign after a fiery State of the Union address last week.

Aiming to show voters that his administration has improved their lives, Biden used the stop to announce \$3.3 billion for infrastructure projects in disadvantaged communities, including \$36 million to reconnect parts of Milwaukee's 6th Street, which had been divided by highway construction in the 1960s.

"We're rebuilding the roads, we're filling in the cracks in the sidewalk, we're creating spaces to live and work and play safely, and to breathe clean air, and to shop at a nearby grocery stocked with fresh and healthy food," he said.

"You've lived and felt decisions made decades ago," Biden said. "Today, today, we're making decisions to transform your lives for decades to come."

The money comes from the bipartisan infrastructure law that Biden signed in the first year of his presidency.

Biden told voters that Donald Trump, his Republican predecessor and likely opponent in this year's election, had promised infrastructure improvements but never delivered.

"He didn't get a single thing done," Biden said. "Not one."

Biden and Trump clinched their parties' nominations on Tuesday after decisive victories in the primaries, setting up what promises to be a grinding rematch between the two men.

Much of that battle will be fought in Michigan and Wisconsin, as well as Pennsylvania, which was Biden's first stop after his State of the Union. They're collectively known as a "blue wall" because of their historic support for Democrats.

Trump flipped all three to win the White House in 2016, but Biden took them back four years ago and likely needs to hold them if he's going to secure a second term.

Biden also plans to travel to North Carolina and other battleground states in the coming weeks. He has been overseeing openings of field offices as his campaign hires and trains organizers and begins assembling volunteers.

That's meant as a show of political organizing strength — an area where the president has so far outpaced Trump, who has been occupied for months with a competitive primary and four ongoing criminal cases in which he faces 91 felony counts.

Biden's reelection campaign hopes on-the-ground organization can neutralize the president's low approval ratings and polling showing that a majority of voters — even a majority of Democrats — don't want him to seek reelection.

"This particular president is a really impressive retail politician. He doesn't just do the rally and leave," said Jim Paine, the mayor of Superior, Wisconsin, a port city on the border with Minnesota. Biden has been there twice, including in January to promote a bridge built as part of the infrastructure law.

"He really puts time in with people, listens to individual stories, he talks about his own life one-on-one," Paine said.

The \$3.3 billion in grants announced on Wednesday covers 132 total projects, including in Atlanta; Los Angeles and Philadelphia as well as Birmingham, Alabama; Syracuse, New York; and Toledo, Ohio. Trans-

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portation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said that some of the projects are relatively modest and can be completed in "short order," while others are "massive and ambitious undertakings that will take many years."

Biden visited the opening of his campaign headquarters in Milwaukee, where nearly 40% of residents are Black, rather than Madison, the state capital that typically serves as the fulcrum for Democratic campaigns.

He said volunteers and staff in places like Milwaukee would help ensure his victory over Trump.

"This is how we are going to win again," he said. "A lot of you helped me in 2020, and we made sure he was a loser and is a loser and we're going to make sure that happens again, right?"

It's Biden's ninth visit to Wisconsin as president and his fifth to Milwaukee, where Republicans are holding their national convention this summer. Chris LaCivita, an adviser to Wisconsin Republican Sen. Ron Johnson's successful reelection campaign in 2022, is also a top Trump campaign aide — another signal that the state is a top GOP priority.

On Thursday, the president heads to Saginaw, north of Detroit, which has high concentrations of Black and union-affiliated voters. It was once reliably Democratic, but swung to Trump in 2016 and only narrowly backed Biden four years ago.

Biden and top advisers, both from the campaign and the White House, have made frequent trips to Michigan recently amid criticism of his administration's handling of the war in Gaza, visiting places like Dearborn, a Detroit suburb with the nation's highest concentration of Arab Americans.

His challenge was demonstrated in Michigan's Democratic presidential primary last month, when activists promoted an "uncommitted" movement that garnered about 13% of the vote.

Thursday's visit won't take him to Dearborn, but will instead help Biden connect with key constituencies in other parts of the state. The campaign promises to open more than 15 Michigan field offices, complementing the 44 it and the state Democratic Party have in Wisconsin.

Early polls have shown Biden faring better against Trump in Wisconsin than Michigan. Richard Czuba, a longtime Michigan pollster, said far more potentially decisive in November than supporters of the "uncommitted" movement during the Democratic primary are many "double-unfavorable" voters. He described those as state residents who plan to vote in November but don't like either Trump or Biden.

"If they are persuaded to vote for Joe Biden, Joe Biden will win the state of Michigan," Czuba said. "But, for Donald Trump, I think it's an easier assignment to make sure that those double-unfavorables get divided."

One way Biden can win over such voters might be to make the race about issues like abortion rights, rather than himself, Czuba said. He noted that the president's criticism of a suggestion by Trump that he'd allow Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to some NATO allies might resonate with Michigan's large Polish-American population as well as immigrants from the Baltic nations.

Biden's campaign moved quickly to highlight those comments in a three-week, six-figure digital ad campaign that targeted roughly 900,000 Baltic Americans in Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

Still, that may not be enough for some voters in Michigan, where apathy about the Trump-Biden rematch is palpable. Said Saginaw resident Jeffrey Bulls: "I probably will be skipping that top spot on the ballot."

## **Evangelical Christians are fierce Israel supporters. Now they are visiting as war-time volunteers**

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — When Shawn Landis, an evangelical Christian from Pennsylvania, heard about the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, he knew he would come to Israel to volunteer as soon as it was safe.

Five months later, he was chopping vegetables in a Tel Aviv kitchen, preparing meals for Israeli soldiers.

Evangelicals have been among Israel's fiercest foreign supporters for years, particularly in the United States, where their significant political influence has helped shape the Israel policy of recent Republican administrations.

They believe Israel is key to an end-times prophecy that will bring about the return of the Christian Messiah. Many of these Christians support Israel due to Old Testament writings that Jews are God's chosen

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people and that Israel is their rightful homeland.

"In the Scripture it instructs us to support Israel, and sometimes the best time to support someone is when they're grieving," said Landis, who has been on four previous faith-based trips to Israel. "Friendship is not just about being there for the good times, it's also about the rough times."

Landis is part of a wave of religious "voluntourism" to Israel, organized trips that include some kind of volunteering aspect connected to the war in Gaza.

Israel's Tourism Ministry estimates around one-third to half of the approximately 3,000 daily visitors expected to arrive in March are part of faith-based volunteer trips. Before the fighting, around 15,000 visitors arrived in Israel per day, about half of whom were Christian, according to Tourism Ministry statistics. In 2019, the latest tourism statistics available that were not impacted by COVID-19, about 25% of visitors arrived on organized trips, according to the Tourism Ministry.

A study by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem found that almost half of Israelis volunteered in some capacity during the early weeks of the war. But many Israeli volunteers have returned to work and school, and now international visitors are filling the gaps.

In the U.S., support for Israel has become a top priority for evangelical Christians during a presidential election year. They are among the most outspoken backers of Israel's handling of the conflict, and Republicans have faced pressure to hew not just to traditional Republican support for Israel but to beliefs rooted in the Bible.

The war began with Hamas' attack in southern Israel in which militants killed around 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage. Israel responded with an invasion of the Gaza Strip that so far has killed more than 30,000 Palestinians.

On Oct. 11, dozens of leading evangelicals signed a statement of support for Israel organized by the public policy wing of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest evangelical faith group in the U.S.

One of the key pro-Israel groups in the U.S. is Christians United for Israel, founded and led by evangelical pastor John Hagee. CUFU says it has raised and dispersed more than \$3 million to support Israeli first responders, health care workers, and survivors of the Oct. 7 attack.

Landis was part of a two-week volunteer trip organized by the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. The evangelical group has put together five volunteer trips since January and expects to bring half a dozen more in the coming month. Normally, ICEJ brings about 6,000 Christian visitors to Israel annually.

Like Landis, Claudio Pichardo, a 37-year-old from Colombia studying business in Holland, was inspired by Scripture to join the ICEJ trip. "This is the best way I can help, because posting on Facebook doesn't help," he said.

When the war started, many international airlines suspended flights and tourism stopped, aside from a handful of Jewish and Christian solidarity missions. Some major airlines resumed flights to Israel in recent weeks, and others plan to soon.

Peleg Lewi, the foreign affairs adviser to the Tourism Ministry, said the faith-based solidarity missions boost morale. They can also kick-start overall tourism to Israel after a cycle of war or violence, he said.

With the war in its sixth month, Israel is under growing international pressure to do more to end the suffering of civilians in Gaza, including allowing in more aid. Aid groups say the fighting has displaced most of the territory's population and pushed a quarter of the population to the brink of famine. Hospitals have reported that some children have died of hunger.

Many Israelis fear the world is forgetting about Oct. 7.

Elizabeth Ødegaard, a trip participant from Norway, said she was surprised by how emotional Israelis get when they meet international visitors who have come to support them.

"Many people tell us, 'The whole world hates us. Everyone is against us,' so I want to say to them, 'You're not alone,'" she said. "I know the people of Israel are important to God. These are my brothers and sisters, and when they attack Israel, they attack me too."

ICEJ trip participants visited hard-hit communities in southern Israel, including the site where the shells of hundreds of burned-out cars are being stored, many from the Tribe of Nova music festival, where 364

people were killed.

"It was humbling and sobering to be there, to know what happened a few months ago and to see Israeli resilience," said Landis.

During such trips, visitors join volunteer initiatives that sprang up in Israel over the past five months, providing extra hands for farmers struggling to harvest crops, cooking meals for families who have a parent serving in the reserves or sorting donations for evacuees still living in hotels.

One initiative is Citrus & Salt, which previously hosted cooking classes and tours of Tel Aviv's markets for tourists. When the war started, it pivoted to making more than 35,000 donated meals.

"It really helps boost morale for people to come from abroad to Israel in a time of conflict, to physically say, 'I'm here to help. What do you need?'" said Aliya Fastman, a native of Berkeley, California, who has lived in Israel for over a decade and runs Citrus & Salt with her sister. "Chopping onions is no small thing when you fly across the world to do it."

## **3 men charged with federal firearms counts after Kansas City Chiefs Super Bowl parade shooting**

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

Three Missouri men have been charged with federal counts related to the illegal purchase of high-powered rifles and guns with extended magazines after last month's shooting at the Kansas City Chiefs' Super Bowl parade and rally left one person dead, roughly two dozen others injured and sent hundreds of people scrambling for cover, federal prosecutors said Wednesday.

Court documents unsealed Wednesday said 12 people brandished firearms and at least six people fired weapons at the Feb. 14 rally, which drew an estimated 1 million people to downtown Kansas City. The guns found at the scene included at least two AR-15-style rifles, court documents said. And U.S. Attorney Teresa Moore said in a news release that at least two of the guns recovered from the scene were illegally purchased.

The federal charges come three weeks after state authorities charged two other men, Lyndell Mays and Dominic Miller, with second-degree murder and several weapons counts for the shootings. Authorities also last month detained two juveniles on gun-related and resisting arrest charges. Police said the shooting happened when one group of people confronted another for staring at them.

Authorities have said a bullet from Miller's gun killed Lisa Lopez-Galvan, who was in a nearby crowd of people watching the rally. She was a mother of two and the host of a local radio program called "Taste of Tejano." The people injured range in age from 8 to 47, according to police.

Named in the new federal charges were 22-year-old Fedo Antonia Manning, Ronnel Dewayne Williams Jr., 21, and Chaelyn Hendrick Groves, 19, all from Kansas City. Manning is charged with one count each of conspiracy to traffic firearms and engaging in firearm sales without a license, and 10 counts of making a false statement on a federal form. Williams and Groves are charged with making false statements in the acquisition of firearms, and lying to a federal agent.

According to online court records, Manning made his initial appearance Wednesday. He did not have an attorney listed, but asked that one be appointed for him. The online court record for Williams and Groves also did not list any attorneys to comment on their behalf.

A phone call to the federal public defender's office in Kansas City on Wednesday went unanswered.

The new complaints made public Wednesday do not allege that the men were among the shooters. Instead, they are accused of involvement in straw purchases and trafficking firearms.

"Stopping straw buyers and preventing illegal firearms trafficking is our first line of defense against gun violence," Moore said in the news release.

Federal prosecutors said that one weapon recovered at the rally scene was an Anderson Manufacturing AM-15 .223-caliber pistol, found along a wall with a backpack next to two AR-15-style firearms and a backpack. The release said the firearm was in the "fire" position with 26 rounds in a magazine capable of holding 30 rounds — meaning some rounds may have been fired from it.

The affidavit stated that Manning bought the AM-15 from a gun store in Lee's Summit, Missouri, a Kansas City suburb, on Aug. 7, 2022. It accuses him of illegally trafficking dozens of firearms, including many AM-15s.

Also recovered at the scene was a Stag Arms 300-caliber pistol that the complaint said was purchased by Williams during a gun show in November. Prosecutors say Williams bought the gun for Groves, who accompanied him to the show but was too young to legally purchase a gun for himself.

Prosecutors say Manning and Williams also bought firearm receivers, gun parts also known as frames that can be built into complete weapons by adding other, sometimes non-regulated components.

The complaint said Manning was the straw buyer of guns later sold to a confidential informant in a separate investigation.

## Prosecutor urges jury to convict Michigan school shooter's dad, says he could have prevented tragedy

By ED WHITE Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — A prosecutor urged jurors to convict the father of a Michigan school shooter on Wednesday, saying he ignored the "easiest, most glaring opportunities" to prevent the killing of four students, especially when confronted with his son's violent classroom drawing.

Instead of taking Ethan Crumbley home, James Crumbley left Oxford High School with his wife and made DoorDash runs, passing near their home during deliveries, prosecutor Karen McDonald said.

He didn't check the house for a gun similar to one in the drawing until news of the shooting started to spread in the small community. That's when he frantically called 911 and said the gun was missing — and his 15-year-old son could be the killer.

"There were 1,800 students at Oxford High School," McDonald said. "There was one parent who suspected their son was a school shooter, and it was James Crumbley. You know what that's called? That's called foreseeability."

Parents are not responsible for everything their kids do, she said later, but "this is a very egregious and rare set of facts."

A jury of six men and six women will resume deliberations Thursday after meeting for roughly 90 minutes Wednesday.

Crumbley, 47, is charged with involuntary manslaughter, accused of failing to safely secure the gun used by Ethan and not seeking help for the boy's mental distress.

Parents in Michigan have a "legal duty" to exercise reasonable care to prevent their child from harming others, the prosecutor said.

"James Crumbley was presented with the easiest, most glaring opportunities to prevent the deaths of four students and he did nothing," McDonald said. "He did nothing — over and over and over again."

The boy took the gun to school, killing four students and wounding seven more people on Nov. 30, 2021. Investigators said a cable that could have locked the gun was still in its package.

McDonald demonstrated for the jury how to use it, picking up the murder weapon, inserting a lock and removing the keys.

"Ten seconds," she said, "of the easiest, simplest thing."

Ethan's mental state was declining: He made a macabre drawing of a gun and a wounded man on a math assignment and added disturbing phrases, "The thoughts won't stop. Help me. Blood everywhere. The world is dead."

But the parents declined to take Ethan home following a brief meeting at the school, accepting only a list of mental health providers. They didn't tell school staff that a Sig Sauer 9 mm handgun had been purchased by James Crumbley just four days earlier.

Ethan called it "my beauty" on social media. He pulled it from his backpack and began shooting. No one had checked the bag.

Earlier in November 2021, he wrote in his journal that he needed help for his mental health "but my

parents don't listen to me so I can't get any help."

Defense attorney Mariell Lehman rested her case after calling just one witness, Ethan's aunt. James Crumbley declined to testify, telling the judge he understood the risks and benefits of speaking to the jury.

In her closing remarks, Lehman said the father didn't know that Ethan knew where to find the gun. She also noted that school officials didn't seem to think the teen was an immediate threat to others.

A day earlier, a teacher saw him looking up bullets on his phone.

"They saw images that weren't concerning, that are common, that other kids write and draw about," Lehman said of the anguished drawing on the math paper. "The concern was that he was sad and needed to talk to someone."

James Crumbley "had no idea" that his son was capable of a mass shooting, she said.

"You can come up with your own reasonable doubt. You're not limited with what I come up with," Lehman said.

The Oxford victims were Justin Shilling, 17, Madisyn Baldwin, 17, Hana St. Juliana, 14, and Tate Myre, 16.

The Crumbleys are the first U.S. parents to be charged with having criminal responsibility for a mass school shooting committed by a child. Jennifer Crumbley, 45, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter last month.

Testifying at her own trial, she told the jury that she wouldn't have done anything differently.

Ethan Crumbley, now 17, is serving a life prison sentence for murder and terrorism.

## A blood test for colon cancer performed well in a study, expanding options for screening

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

A blood test for colon cancer performed well in a study published Wednesday, offering a new kind of screening for a leading cause of cancer deaths.

The test looks for DNA fragments shed by tumor cells and precancerous growths. It's already for sale in the U.S. for \$895, but has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration and most insurers do not cover it. The maker of the test, Guardant Health, anticipates an FDA decision this year.

In the study, the test caught 83% of the cancers but very few of the precancerous growths found by colonoscopy, the gold standard for colon cancer screening. Besides spotting tumors, colonoscopies can prevent the disease by removing precancerous growths called polyps.

But some people avoid the exam because of the hassle of getting time off work or the day-ahead preparation that involves drinking a strong laxative to empty the bowels.

A convenient alternative is an annual stool test, where people send a stool sample to a lab for analysis.

"The best test is the one someone will actually complete," said Dr. Douglas Corley, chief research officer for Kaiser Permanente, Northern California, who was not involved in the study. "Giving people a choice increases the number of people who will get screened."

In the U.S., screening is recommended for healthy adults ages 45 to 75 at average risk for colon cancer. Frequency depends on the test: a routine colonoscopy is every 10 years. Screening is inching up but falls well short of the 80% of age-eligible adults goal set by the American Cancer Society and other groups.

Guardant recommends testing with its blood test called Shield every three years. Like a stool test, the blood test requires a follow-up colonoscopy if there's an abnormal result, which could lead to more out-of-pocket costs.

The study, sponsored by Guardant and published in the New England Journal of Medicine, involved 7,861 people in the U.S. who had both a colonoscopy and a blood test.

While the blood test caught 83% of the cancers found by colonoscopy, it missed 17%. That's on par with stool-based tests.

There were also false alarms: For 10% of the people where the colonoscopy found nothing, the blood test falsely indicated they might have colon cancer. That means a sizeable number of people would face the anxiety of follow-up colonoscopies.

The blood test is tuned to pick up the signature of colon cancer but more research is needed to determine if it might pick up other cancers as well and give misleading results, Corley said.

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States and the third worldwide. In the U.S., more than 153,000 new cases and 53,000 deaths from the disease are expected this year.

More screening should result in fewer cancer deaths, said study co-author Dr. William Grady of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle and a paid member of Guardant's scientific advisory board.

In a separate study published Wednesday in the same journal, an updated version of the Cologuard stool test, which also looks for DNA fragments, seemed to improve its performance on false alarms, possibly leading to fewer follow-up colonoscopies. That study, involving more than 20,000 people, was sponsored by Exact Sciences, maker of the test.

"The more options we have for our patients, the better," said Dr. Nabil Mansour of Baylor College of Medicine, who was not involved in either study. He'll continue to recommend a colonoscopy for his patients but "I'm excited there will be a pretty good blood test option available."

## **Putin warns again that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty is threatened**

By The Associated Press undefined

President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty or independence is threatened, issuing another blunt warning to the West just days before an election in which he's all but certain to secure another six-year term.

The Russian leader has repeatedly talked about his readiness to use nuclear weapons since launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022. The most recent such threat came in his state-of-the-nation address last month, when he warned the West that deepening its involvement in the fighting in Ukraine would risk a nuclear war.

Asked in an interview with Russian state television released early Wednesday if he has ever considered using battlefield nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Putin responded that there has been no need for that. He also noted that he doesn't think that the world is heading for a nuclear war, describing U.S. President Joe Biden as a veteran politician who fully understands the possible dangers of escalation.

When asked for U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres' reaction to Putin's remarks, spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said that "all rhetoric that could lead to miscalculation or escalation with obvious catastrophic consequences for the world must be avoided."

Putin's comments appeared to be a message to the West that he's prepared to use all means to protect his gains in Ukraine. He said that in line with the country's security doctrine, Moscow is ready to use nuclear weapons in case of a threat to "the existence of the Russian state, our sovereignty and independence."

"All that is written in our strategy, we haven't changed it," he said.

In an apparent reference to NATO allies that support Kyiv, he also declared that "the nations that say they have no red lines regarding Russia should realize that Russia won't have any red lines regarding them either."

Lithuania's foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, recently lamented that the West too often constrains itself with self-imposed "red lines" regarding Russia. He also welcomed a comment by French President Emmanuel Macron that the possibility of Western troops being sent to Ukraine couldn't be ruled out.

Putin noted the statements from Biden and his administration that the U.S. wasn't going to send its troops to Ukraine. He charged that if the U.S. acts otherwise, Moscow would see the American troops as invaders and act accordingly. He claimed that even if some NATO allies deploy troops to Ukraine, it won't change the course of the war.

"If it turns to official foreign military contingents, I'm sure it will not change the situation on the battlefield ... just as the weapons supplies haven't changed anything," he said.

In the wake of recent battlefield gains, Putin argued that Ukraine and its Western allies will eventually have to accept a deal to end the war on Russian terms.

"It shouldn't be a break for the enemy to rearm, but a serious talk involving the guarantees of security for the Russian Federation," he said.

Putin said that a recent spike in Ukrainian drone attacks deep inside Russia is part of efforts to derail the country's three-day presidential election, which starts Friday and which he's set to win by a landslide, given his near total crackdown on dissent and tight control over Russia's political system.

Russian authorities reported another major attack by Ukrainian drones early Wednesday. The Defense Ministry said air defenses downed 58 drones over six regions. One of the drones hit an oil refinery in the Ryazan region, injuring at least two people and sparking a fire. Another was downed as it was approaching a refinery near St. Petersburg.

Along with drone attacks on facilities deep inside Russian territory, Ukrainian forces have launched a series of successful attacks on Russia's naval and air assets in the Black Sea region with sea drones and missiles. The strikes have crippled Moscow's naval capability and forced it to limit its operations in the Black Sea.

Earlier this week, Russian media reported that the Russian navy chief, Adm. Nikolai Yevmenov, was fired and replaced with Northern Fleet commander, Alexander Moiseyev. The Kremlin and the Defense Ministry haven't yet confirmed the reshuffle, which Russian commentators linked to the latest Black Sea Fleet's mishaps.

Ukraine, meanwhile, reported more Russian attacks early Wednesday.

A Russian strike killed two people and wounded another five in the town of Myrnohrad in the eastern region of Donetsk, about 30 kilometers (about 20 miles) from the front line, according to Gov. Vadym Filashkin. Local rescuers managed to pull a 13-year-old girl out of the rubble of an apartment building.

A five-story building in the northern city of Sumy was struck by a drone launched from Russia overnight, killing two people and wounding eight, according to the regional administration.

In Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown, the death toll from a Russian missile attack the previous night rose to five, Gov. Serhii Lysak said. He said that 43 people were wounded in Kryvyi Rih, including 12 children, the youngest a 2-month-old infant.

"Every day our cities and villages suffer similar attacks. Every day Ukraine loses people because of Russian evil," Zelenskyy said.

## **Judge dismisses some charges against Trump in the Georgia 2020 election interference case**

By KATE BRUMBACK and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The judge overseeing the Georgia 2020 election interference case on Wednesday dismissed some of the charges against former President Donald Trump and others, but the rest of the sweeping racketeering indictment remains intact.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee quashed six counts in the indictment, including three against Trump, the presumptive 2024 Republican presidential nominee. But the judge left in place other counts — including 10 facing Trump — and said prosecutors could seek a new indictment to try to reinstate the ones he dismissed.

The ruling is a blow for Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who already is facing an effort to have her removed from the prosecution over her romantic relationship with a colleague. It's the first time charges in any of Trump's four criminal cases have been dismissed, with the judge saying prosecutors failed to provide enough detail about the alleged crime.

The sprawling indictment charges Trump and more than a dozen other defendants with violating Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, known as RICO. The case uses a statute normally associated with mobsters to accuse the former president, lawyers and other aides of a "criminal enterprise" to keep him in power after he lost the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden.

Defense attorneys applauded the ruling, which came after challenges to the indictment from Trump, former New York mayor and current Trump attorney Rudy Giuliani, former White House chief of staff Mark



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Meadows and attorneys John Eastman, Ray Smith and Robert Cheeley. They have all pleaded not guilty.

"The ruling is a correct application of the law, as the prosecution failed to make specific allegations of any alleged wrongdoing on those counts," Trump attorney Steve Sadow said. "The entire prosecution of President Trump is political, constitutes election interference, and should be dismissed."

Jeff DiSantis, a spokesperson for Willis, declined to comment other than to say prosecutors were reviewing the ruling.

The six challenged counts charge the defendants with soliciting public officers to violate their oaths. One count stems from a phone call Trump made to Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a fellow Republican, on Jan. 2, 2021, in which Trump urged Raffensperger to "find 11,780 votes."

Another of the dismissed counts accuses Trump of soliciting then-Georgia House Speaker David Ralston to violate his oath of office by calling a special session of the legislature to unlawfully appoint presidential electors.

McAfee said the counts did not allege sufficient detail regarding the nature of the violations.

"The lack of detail concerning an essential legal element is, in the undersigned's opinion, fatal," McAfee wrote. "They do not give the Defendants enough information to prepare their defenses intelligently."

McAfee's order leaves Meadows facing only a RICO charge. Jim Durham, a lawyer for Meadows, declined to comment. The order quashed three of 13 counts against Giuliani.

"There simply was not enough detail to put the defendants on notice of what to defend against," Giuliani's attorney Allyn Stockton said, adding that the ruling "effectively removes nearly 25% of the charges" against his client.

McAfee wrote that prosecutors could seek a reindictment to supplement the six dismissed counts. Even if the statute of limitations has expired, the judge gave the state six months to resubmit the case to a grand jury. Prosecutors could also ask for permission to appeal the ruling. The case has yet to be scheduled for trial.

The ruling comes as McAfee is considering a bid to have Willis disqualified from the case over what defense attorneys say is a conflict of interest due to her romantic relationship with special prosecutor Nathan Wade. McAfee is expected to rule by the end of this week on the disqualification bid, which would throw the most sprawling of the four criminal cases against Trump into question.

Willis, who has said their relationship ended months ago, has said there is no conflict of interest and no reason to remove her from the case.

The nearly 100-page Georgia indictment details dozens of alleged acts by Trump or his allies to undo his defeat, including harassing an election worker, who faced false claims of fraud, and attempting to persuade Georgia lawmakers to ignore the will of voters and appoint a new slate of Electoral College electors favorable to Trump.

Of the 19 people originally charged in the indictment, four have pleaded guilty after reaching deals with prosecutors. They include prominent Trump allies and attorneys Sidney Powell and Kenneth Chesebro.

The Georgia case covers some of the same ground as the federal case in Washington brought by special counsel Jack Smith that charges Trump with conspiring to overturn his election loss in a desperate bid to stay in power. Trump is charged separately by Smith with hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate and thwarting government efforts to retrieve them.

Trump is scheduled to go to trial later this month in the New York case accusing him of falsifying his company's internal records to hide the true nature of payments to a former lawyer who helped Trump bury negative stories during his 2016 presidential campaign.

## Israel says it plans to direct Palestinians out of Rafah ahead of anticipated offensive

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The Israeli military said Wednesday it plans to direct a significant portion of the 1.4 million displaced Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip's southernmost town of Rafah toward "humanitarian islands" in the center of the territory ahead of its planned offensive in the area.

The fate of the people in Rafah has been a major area of concern of Israel's allies — including the United States — and humanitarian groups, worried an offensive in the region densely crowded with so many displaced people would be a catastrophe. Rafah is also Gaza's main entry point for desperately needed aid.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said a Rafah offensive is crucial to achieve Israel's stated aim of destroying Hamas following the militants' Oct. 7 attack in which about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed and around 250 taken hostage and brought into Gaza. Israel's invasion of Gaza has killed more than 31,000, according to Gaza health officials, left much of the enclave in ruins and displaced some 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people.

Israel's chief military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said moving those in Rafah to the designated areas, which he said would be done in coordination with international actors, was a key part of the military's preparations for its anticipated invasion of Rafah, where Israel says Hamas maintains four battalions it wants to destroy.

Rafah has swelled in size in the last months as Palestinians in Gaza have fled fighting in nearly every other corner of the territory. The town is covered in tents.

"We need to make sure that 1.4 million people or at least a significant amount of the 1.4 million will move. Where? To humanitarian islands that we will create with the international community," Hagari told reporters at a briefing.

Hagari said those islands would provide temporary housing, food, water and other necessities to evacuated Palestinians. He did not say when Rafah's evacuation would occur, nor when the Rafah offensive would begin, saying that Israel wanted the timing to be right operationally and to be coordinated with neighboring Egypt, which has said it does not want an influx of displaced Palestinians crossing its border.

The U.S. has been firm with Israel over its concerns about Rafah, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that Washington had yet to receive from Israel its plans for civilians there.

"We need to see a plan that will get civilians out of harm's way if there's a military operation in Rafah," he told reporters in Washington after convening a virtual ministerial meeting on Gaza aid with officials from the UN, the EU, Britain, Cyprus, Qatar and the UAE. "We've not yet seen such a plan."

At the start of the war, Israel directed evacuees to a slice of undeveloped land along Gaza's Mediterranean coast that it designated as a safe zone. But aid groups said there were no real plans in place to receive large numbers of displaced there. Israeli strikes also targeted the area.

More than 31,270 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and most of its 2.3 million people forced from their homes, Gaza's Health Ministry says. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Israel blames the civilian death toll on Hamas because the militants fight in dense, residential areas. The military has said it has killed 13,000 Hamas fighters, without providing evidence.

Meanwhile, fighting continued across Gaza. An Israeli strike Wednesday hit a food distribution site in southern Gaza run by UNRWA, the U.N. agency that works with Palestinian refugees, killing one staff member from the agency and wounding 22 others.

The death brings to 165 the number of workers for the agency killed during the past five months of fighting, according to UNRWA.

Gaza's health authorities said a total of five people were killed in the strike on the yard of an UNRWA warehouse.

Hagari said the army was looking into the report.

The conflict has sparked a humanitarian disaster that has led to growing hunger. Aid delivery has been

hobbled by Israeli restrictions, the ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of order inside Gaza, according to the United Nations. Israel denies it is restricting the entry of aid.

The crisis has been particularly acute in northern Gaza, Israel's initial target in the early weeks of the war. Hagari said Wednesday Israel plans to "flood the area" with aid, with plans to scale up the entry of goods from multiple points in northern Gaza, after half a dozen trucks delivered aid entered from the north on Tuesday as part of a pilot program. He did not say how many more trucks were expected to enter and at what frequency.

Hagari also said representatives from the U.S. military were expected in Israel this week to further coordinate a planned U.S. floating pier that will be built off the coast of Gaza, which he said would be "significant" for northern Gaza.

The U.S. and other countries have also been airdropping food into northern Gaza in recent weeks to help alleviate the crisis. Aid groups said air drops and bringing sea shipments are far less efficient and effective than bringing in food by truck.

## **Geert Wilders says he doesn't have support of likely coalition partners to become Dutch premier**

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — Geert Wilders, whose anti-Islam, anti-immigration rhetoric swept him to a stunning victory in the November election, said Wednesday he doesn't have the support of his prospective coalition partners to become the next Dutch prime minister.

Wilders took to X, formerly Twitter, to say that "I can only become premier if ALL parties in the coalition support that. That wasn't the case."

His comment came after media reported, citing unnamed sources, that a breakthrough in coalition talks announced Tuesday night was that the leaders of all four parties involved in drawn-out coalition negotiations would remain in parliament.

That sets up the likelihood of some sort of technical Cabinet made up of experts. While it now looks like Wilders will not lead the government, he and his Party for Freedom will remain the driving force behind the next administration.

Wilders did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Other leaders involved in the talks also did not immediately comment.

But Wilders later added another comment on X to say that, one day, he still wants to be prime minister. "Don't forget: I will still become premier of the Netherlands," he said. "With the support of even more Dutch people. If not tomorrow, then the day after tomorrow. Because the voice of millions of Dutch people will be heard!"

After the Nov. 22 elections, Wilders' party holds 37 seats in the 150-seat lower house of the Dutch parliament. The four parties in government talks hold a combined 88 seats, giving them a comfortable majority. Polls since the election show that support for Wilders' party continues to grow.

After two decades of trenchant opposition, Wilders seemed to have a shot at leading a nation that long prided itself on its tolerant society, but he has stepped aside in the interests of pushing through most of his agenda.

"I really wanted a right-wing Cabinet. Less asylum and immigration. Dutch people number 1," Wilders said on X. "The love for my country and voter is bigger and more important than my own position."

The rise of the populist far right in a polarized political landscape has been underway for years in Europe but Wilders' election victory still came as a shock to the Netherlands and well beyond.

Wilders has often called for a ban on mosques, Islamic schools and the Quran, but in a concession to his prospective coalition partners in January, he withdrew draft legislation to implement the bans.

The Netherlands is not alone in seeing a shift to the right.

Far right parties also are expected to make significant gains in June elections for the European Union's

parliament and Portugal's inconclusive result in Sunday's election thrust the populist Chega — or Enough — party into a possible kingmaker's role. Chega's leader, Andre Ventura, has made common cause with other right-wing parties across the continent.

Wilders spent Monday and Tuesday in talks with the leaders of the center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, populist Farmer Citizen Movement and centrist New Social Contract.

With New Social Contract leader Pieter Omtzigt ruling out joining a majority Cabinet led by Wilders, the four parties now will likely look at other options — a Cabinet made up of experts and politicians or a minority Cabinet propped up by support from Omtzigt's party.

The Netherlands could turn to Italy for a model of how to move past its political stalemate. Italy has a history of resorting to "technical" governments headed by figures outside the political party mainstream. These experts are called on to guide the country through a particular period, often due to economic instability or political gridlock, before fresh elections are held.

The most recent such government was headed by Mario Draghi, the internationally respected former European Central Bank chief who was called on to shepherd Italy through the second half of the COVID-19 pandemic and reboot economic growth.

Despite his broad-based support, Draghi's coalition collapsed in July 2022 and fresh elections were called that were subsequently won by Premier Giorgia Meloni of the far-right Brothers of Italy and her right-wing allies.

## **Another dangerous amoeba has been linked to neti pots and nasal rinsing. Here's what to know**

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For years, scientists have known people who use neti pots can become infected with a brain-eating amoeba if they use the wrong kind of water. On Wednesday, researchers linked a second kind of deadly amoeba to nasal rinsing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a report that for the first time connects Acanthamoeba infections to neti pots and other nasal rinsing devices.

Officials also renewed their warning that extremely rare, but potentially deadly, consequences can come from flushing nasal passages with common tap water.

"We published this study because we want people to be aware of this risk," said the CDC's Dr. Julia Haston.

What are neti pots?

Neti pots are one of the better known tools of nasal rinsing. They look like small teapots with long spouts, and usually are made of ceramic or plastic.

Users fill them with a saline solution, then pour the liquid in one nostril. It comes out the other, draining the nasal passage of allergens and other bothersome contaminants.

Neti pot use in the U.S. has boomed in the last couple of decades, driven in part by the increasing prevalence of allergies and other respiratory diseases, market researchers say.

There also are other methods of rinsing nasal passages, including specially shaped cups and squeezable plastic bottles.

Why you shouldn't use untreated tap water in neti pots

Tap water in the U.S. is treated to meet safe drinking standards, but low levels of microscopic organisms can still be found in it. It's usually not a problem when people drink or cook with the water, but it can pose more of a danger when tap water is used for other purposes — like in humidifiers or for nasal irrigation.

CDC officials, citing a 2021 survey, say about one-third of U.S. adults incorrectly think tap water was free of bacteria and other microorganisms. Nearly two-thirds say tap water could be safely used for rinsing their sinuses.

The CDC recommends using boiled, sterile or distilled water.

If tap water is used, it must be boiled for a minimum of one minute — or three minutes at higher elevations — before it is cooled and used, officials say.

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Rare illnesses and nasal rinsing

More than a decade ago, health officials linked U.S. deaths from a brain-eating amoeba — named *Naegleria fowleri* — to nasal rinsing. More recently, they started to note nasal rinsing as a common theme in illnesses caused by another microscopic parasite, *Acanthamoeba*.

*Acanthamoeba* causes different kinds of illness but is still dangerous, with a 85% fatality rate in reported cases.

“These infections are very serious and even life threatening,” said Haston who was lead author of the report published in the journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*.

The new study focused on 10 patients who fell ill between 1994 and 2022, three of whom died. Researchers say they can’t be sure how the patients were infected, but they noted several commonalities: All had weakened immune systems and practiced nasal rinsing.

Seven patients reported nasal rinsing for relief of chronic sinus infections, and at least two of them used neti pots. Two other patients did nasal rinsing as part of a cleansing ritual that is part of Indian tradition.

What is *Acanthamoeba*?

This amoeba can be found naturally all over the environment — in lakes, rivers, seawater and soil.

It can cause diseases of the skin and sinuses, and can infect the brain, where it can cause a deadly form of inflammation. The microorganism also has been connected to non-fatal, but sight-threatening, eye infections, sometimes through contaminated contact lens solution.

U.S. health officials have identified about 180 infections from the single-cell organism since the first one was diagnosed in 1956.

In the vast majority of cases, researcher don’t know exactly how people became infected. But in reviewing cases in recent decades, CDC researchers increasingly received information that a number of the cases had done nasal rinsing, Haston said.

Research also has indicated it’s common in tap water. A study done in Ohio in the 1990s found more than half of tap water samples studied contained the amoeba and similar microorganisms.

“It’s very likely that we’re all exposed to *Acanthamoeba* all the time,” she said.

## **Biden’s fraying coalition and Trump’s struggle with moderates: AP data shows nominees’ challenges**

LINLEY SANDERS AND AMELIA THOMSON-DeVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump have secured their party’s nominations for president, setting up a rematch of the 2020 election.

While both men sailed through the primary season, their paths to a win in November will be more difficult.

An analysis of survey data from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and AP VoteCast highlights the two men’s electoral challenges as they square up for a second contest. Polling from throughout Biden’s time in office reveals a widespread sense of disappointment with Biden’s performance as president, even among some of his most stalwart supporters, including Black adults. That’s a sign that his winning coalition may be fraying and that as a result, Biden will need to work to build enthusiasm about his candidacy within his own base as well as among the moderates who helped propel him to victory in 2020.

Meanwhile, Trump, who has perennially struggled to broaden his appeal beyond his base, won his party’s nomination with limited support from moderates and independents. That shortcoming wasn’t an issue for the conservative GOP primary electorate, but it could turn into a bigger problem as Trump looks to November when those voters could play a pivotal role in deciding the election.

Some of Biden’s most important groups are unhappy with his performance as president

The Democratic coalition that sent Biden to the White House came in with high hopes about his presidency — which may have been a double-edged sword. AP-NORC polling shows that three years after Biden took office, the share of U.S. adults who approve of the way he’s handling his job as president has fallen more than 20 percentage points, from 61% in early 2021 to 38% last month.

Nearly all Democrats, 97%, approved of Biden’s job performance in an AP-NORC poll conducted in

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February 2021. That's down to 74% now, with even lower ratings when it comes to immigration and his handling of the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. And it includes substantial erosion among some of Biden's most important constituencies. Only about half of Black adults have approved of Biden's job performance in recent months, down from 94% in early 2021 — a huge decline in satisfaction among a cornerstone of the Democratic coalition.

Biden's approval rating has also fallen at least 20 percentage points among Hispanic adults, independents, young adults and moderates. According to last month's AP-NORC poll, he's now underwater among all four groups.

The economy has been a particular thorn in Biden's side since 2022, when inflation hit a 40-year high. Broad discontent over rising prices is reflected in Biden's approval regarding the economy: Just 34% approve in the latest AP-NORC poll, down from 55% in February 2021. An AP-NORC poll released last month found that 57% of U.S. adults think the national economy has gotten worse since Biden took office.

Trump showed weakness among moderates in the early primaries and caucuses

Although Trump won resoundingly in almost every state, the conservative Republican primary electorate is very different from the broader array of voters Trump will be trying to win over in November.

Unlike Biden's struggle with falling approval, Trump's challenge as president was an approval rating that started low and stayed low, with the bulk of his support coming from his Republican base. His post-presidency favorability rating has been similarly sticky: 36% of U.S. adults had a favorable view of Trump in January 2021, which was essentially unchanged in the recent February poll. And despite Biden's apparent weakness with Black and Hispanic adults, only about one-quarter of Black adults and about 4 in 10 Hispanic adults had a favorable view of Trump in February, which could make it harder for him to capitalize on those potential shortcomings.

There are serious risks for Trump if he can't broaden his appeal beyond his Republican base this time around. He lost moderates to Biden in 2020, and the first head-to-head Republican contests showed continued signs of trouble for Trump among these voters.

According to VoteCast surveys of the 2024 Republican primaries in New Hampshire and South Carolina, Trump won only about 3 in 10 independents in each state. His support from moderate Republicans was a little higher but still notably tepid: Between 46% and 51% of this group backed him in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina.

Those groups were more skeptical than conservative Republicans (who overwhelmingly supported Trump in all three states) about Trump's ability to win a general election or govern as president. Roughly 6 in 10 moderate Republicans in New Hampshire and South Carolina were concerned that Trump is too extreme to win a general election, while 4 in 10 moderate Republicans in South Carolina said Trump doesn't have the mental capability to govern effectively as president.

Trump could have his best chance with white, moderate voters without a college degree. Those voters represent one of Trump's primary constituencies — but he split voters in this group who identify as moderates by a margin of 48% to 50% in the last election. Biden's previous appeal to moderates of all backgrounds could cause problems for Trump.

A significant share of centrist Republicans have also indicated that they might not be willing to vote for Trump in the general election. Between 29% and 37% of Republican moderates in the early contests said they wouldn't vote for Trump if he became the nominee.

But while moderates are a relatively small share of the GOP electorate, they are crucial in general elections. About one-third of voters in the 2020 election identified as moderates. About half of those moderate voters identify as Democrats, with about one-third being Republicans.

And Trump now has less than a year to win over a group of voters who were less inclined to support him in 2020. According to AP VoteCast surveys from 2020, 62% of moderate voters backed Biden, while only about one-third, or 36%, voted for Trump.

## 50 years later, Tommy John surgery remains a game-changer

By JAY COHEN AP Baseball Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. (AP) — There is a bridge that runs from Tommy John and Dr. Frank Jobe in 1974, all the way to Shohei Ohtani, Justin Verlander and Bryce Harper. A thread that connects an increasing number of baseball's biggest stars. Mostly on the mound, but at the plate, too.

An operation that changed everything.

Almost 50 years ago, on Sept. 25, 1974, Jobe reconstructed a torn ulnar collateral ligament in John's left arm. It was a pioneering achievement for Jobe and a lifeline for John, who went from a career-ending injury to 14 more years in the majors — and an eponymous connection to sports medicine that would live on long past his playing days.

Tommy John surgery.

"I wouldn't still be standing here if it weren't for a surgery like this," Chicago White Sox pitcher Michael Kopech said. "It's doubled the length of my career."

Alongside arthroscopic surgery and ACL reconstruction, Tommy John is one of the biggest advancements in sports medicine in the last 50 years, according to Dr. Tim Kremchek, a longtime physician for the Cincinnati Reds.

"It (has) just prolonged and saved so many careers," he said. "Not just in baseball, but now for some other sports that we're doing it for so many other athletes, especially overhead athletes. But in terms of baseball, I think it's allowed us to see some of the greatest players in the world continue to play for a long period of time."

The roots of the surgery can be found in Jobe's work at Rancho Los Amigos, a Southern California hospital, where doctors used tendon transfers to help people with polio.

Jobe just applied the same concept to John's elbow. He removed the palmaris longus tendon from John's right arm, drilled four holes in his left elbow and then used the tendon to replace the torn ligament.

"It wasn't a new idea," Jobe said in July 2013, about seven months before he died. "It was just new for the elbow."

The actual surgery largely remains the same as the one Jobe performed in 1974. But doctors have made improvements in terms of protecting the ulnar nerve, along with avoiding excessive scarring, putting the ligament in the right place and creating the proper tension.

The evolution of the procedure — along with the physical evolution of the players themselves — is seen in the results on the field.

Verlander won the AL Cy Young Award in 2022, two years after he had Tommy John surgery. Kopech had the operation in 2018, and he averaged 95.2 mph on his fastball last season. Dodgers pitcher Tyler Glasnow had Tommy John in 2021, and he struck out 162 batters in a career-high 120 innings last year. Harper, who had the procedure in November 2022, returned to Philadelphia's lineup in May.

Then, of course, there's Ohtani, who received a record-breaking \$700 million contract from the Los Angeles Dodgers within months of his second major elbow operation.

"If you put it in dollars and cents, I think there's no question that Tommy John is the most valuable reconstructive procedure there is," said Dr. Neal ElAttrache, the head team physician for the Dodgers and the NFL's Los Angeles Rams.

Following thousands of successful Tommy John surgeries — everyone from middle schoolers to major leaguers — the biggest challenge for players just might be the monotony of the lengthy rehab process.

The arm that had the surgery is in a cast at an approximately 90-degree angle for about 10 days following the operation. After it comes off and the stitches are removed, it takes months to recover the full range of motion. That's all before the player starts throwing again on flat ground.

It typically takes at least a year before a big leaguer returns to the majors.

"I remember the very first day of throwing," said Dodgers pitcher Tony Gonsolin, who had surgery on Sept. 1. "It was like 30 throws, nice and easy, and just felt super foreign, like I'd never thrown before. Took some video on it, and they did not look pretty at all. Then I threw a couple days later and it felt much better."

As Gonsolin makes his way through the process, he is grateful for the opportunity presented by Tommy John — one he knows wasn't available to big leaguers before 1974.

"I think the evolution of the surgery and just the sheer medical breakthrough from it allows to extend people's careers," he said.

"It gives everybody a second opportunity."

The operation was a source of pride for Jobe later in life. ElAttrache recalled being at a dinner with his wife after the Baseball Hall of Fame honored Jobe and his work. He was seated at a table with Jobe, John and Hall of Fame pitcher Sandy Koufax — whose illustrious career ended at age 30 due to chronic elbow pain.

"Frank said, 'Sandy, the only bittersweet part of this, I wish I would have been smart enough to think of this a few years earlier. You would have been pitching a lot longer,'" ElAttrache said.

## **In 'Bob Marley: One Love' film, what's his faith? And why is marijuana deemed holy to the Rastafari?**

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The biopic "Bob Marley: One Love" has been a box-office hit in the United States and several other countries. The film, starring Kingsley Ben-Adir, is focused on the Rastafari legend's story during the making of his 1977 album "Exodus" while leading up to a momentous concert in his native Jamaica.

The Rastafari faith is rooted in the Caribbean island in the 1930s. Its message was spread across the world in the 1970s by Marley — the faith's most famous exponent. For decades, Rastafari have been prosecuted for their ritualistic use of marijuana. Some of those laws have eased, granting Rastafari sacramental authorization to grow the marijuana they deem sacred.

Here is a quick look at the faith's beliefs and history:

### **WHAT DO RASTAFARI BELIEVE?**

The Rastafari faith is rooted in 1930s Jamaica, growing as a response by Black people to white colonial oppression. The beliefs are a melding of Old Testament teachings and a desire to return to Africa.

Both are crucial to Marley's lyrics and worldview. In "The Bible and Bob Marley: Half the Story Has Never Been Told," author Dean A. MacNeil writes that Marley's personal Bible was a King James version. It included on its cover a photocopied image of the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, who is worshipped by most Rastafari.

The Rastafari message was spread across the world in the 1970s by Marley and Peter Tosh, another Jamaican reggae legend and globally known Rastafari.

In the film "One Love," the actor who plays Marley mentions "Jah" several times.

That's because Rastafari's personal relationship with "Jah," or God, is considered central to the faith.

Rastafari reject materialist values and often practice a strict oneness with nature. They also let their hair grow, uncombed, into dreadlocks.

In several scenes in the film — produced with the involvement of the Marley estate — Marley sings to large crowds of people who wave Rastafari flags in the green, gold and red colors of the faith.

### **WHY DO RASTAFARI USE SACRAMENTAL MARIJUANA?**

Rastafari followers believe the use of marijuana is directed in biblical passages and that the "holy herb" induces a meditative state and brings them closer to the divine. The faithful smoke it as a sacrament in chalice pipes or cigarettes called "spliffs," add it to plant-based organic stews and place it in fires as a burnt offering.

For decades, many have been jailed and endured racial and religious profiling by law enforcement because of their marijuana use. Many also were treated as second-class citizens across the Caribbean islands, looked down on for their dreadlocks and use of marijuana.

### **WHO BROUGHT MARIJUANA TO THE CARIBBEAN?**

"Ganja," as marijuana is known in the Caribbean, has a long history in Jamaica, and its arrival predates the Rastafari faith. Indentured servants from India brought the cannabis plant to the island in the 19th



century, and it gained popularity as a medicinal herb.

As public opinion and policy continues to shift across the world toward the legalization of marijuana for both medical and recreational purposes, Rastafari are demanding for broader relaxation to curb persecution and ensure freedom of worship.

Some nations, including the Caribbean nation of Antigua & Barbuda, have granted the Rastafari authorization to grow and smoke the herb that they deem holy.

WHO IS HAILE SELASSIE?

In one of the first scenes of the film, Marley mentions this name. That's because most of the many Rastafari sects worship Selassie. This is rooted in Jamaican Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey's 1920s prediction that a "Black king shall be crowned" in Africa, ushering in a "day of deliverance."

When an Ethiopian prince named Ras Tafari, who took the name Haile Selassie I, became emperor in 1930, the descendants of the enslaved in Jamaica took it as proof that Garvey's prophecy was being fulfilled. When Selassie visited Jamaica in 1966, he was greeted by adoring crowds, and some Rastafari insisted miracles and other mystical occurrences took place during his visit to the island.

## **Mississippi has the nation's worst infant mortality. It will allow earlier Medicaid to help babies**

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — A new Mississippi law will allow earlier Medicaid coverage for pregnant women in an effort to improve health outcomes for mothers and babies in a poor state with the worst rate of infant mortality in the U.S.

The "presumptive eligibility" legislation signed Tuesday by Republican Gov. Tate Reeves will become law July 1. It says Medicaid will pay for a pregnant woman's outpatient medical care for up to 60 days while her application for the government-funded insurance program is being considered.

Processing Medicaid applications can take weeks, and physicians say early prenatal care is vital.

The advocacy group Mississippi Black Women's Roundtable praised the new law, which passed the Republican-controlled Legislature with bipartisan support.

"This represents a significant step forward in the effort to create better health for women and their families," the group said in a statement.

Black infants in Mississippi were nearly twice as likely as white ones to die over the past decade, according to a report unveiled Jan. 18 by the state Department of Health.

Presumptive Medicaid eligibility during pregnancy would be based on questions about income, asked by health care providers such county health department workers. If a woman's Medicaid application is ultimately rejected because her income is too high, Medicaid would still pay for services provided during the time of presumptive eligibility.

House Medicaid Committee Chairwoman Missy McGee, a Republican from Hattiesburg, said the total cost to the Medicaid program will be just under \$600,000 a year.

About 41% of births in the U.S. and 57% in Mississippi were financed by Medicaid in 2022, according to the health policy research group KFF. Only Louisiana had a larger share of births covered by Medicaid that year, at 61%.

In Mississippi, Medicaid coverage for pregnant women 19 and older is based on income. A woman in that age category who has no dependents can receive up to about \$29,000 and qualify for Medicaid during pregnancy. One with three dependents can get as much as \$59,700 and qualify.

Mississippi Medicaid coverage is available to all income levels for those who are pregnant and younger than 19.

In 2023, Mississippi extended postpartum Medicaid coverage from two months to a full year, with Reeves saying the change was part of a "new pro-life agenda" to help mothers in a state where abortion is tightly restricted.

But, Mississippi is among 10 states that have not expanded Medicaid eligibility to include people earning

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up to 138% of the federal poverty level, or \$20,120 annually for a single person. Expansion is allowed under the federal health overhaul that then-President Barack Obama signed into law in 2010.

The Mississippi House recently voted for Medicaid expansion. The state Senate has not voted on an expansion proposal this year, and Reeves has said for years that he opposes adding people to government programs.

## Virgin of Charity unites all Cubans — Catholics, Santeria followers, exiled and back on the island

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO and GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO Associated Press

EL COBRE, Cuba (AP) — Ramon Nieblas fixed his tearful eyes on the small golden statue, a beloved icon of Cuba's patron saint. Whispering, he asked the Virgin of Charity of Cobre for a miracle: Please save his sick son.

"I came to pray for his health," said Nieblas, a Cuban living in Brazil who traveled thousands of miles to the basilica in eastern Cuba, a pilgrimage site nestled in the shadow of the Sierra Maestra mountains.

He sat in Mass, wrapping his arm around 26-year-old Hernando Nieblas, a physician undergoing treatment for leukemia. They were among the thousands who visit the shrine each year, seeking intercession from the Virgin Mary for their most desperate concerns and giving thanks for their blessings.

The Virgin of Charity has been crucial to Catholicism in Cuba, which repressed religious practice after becoming an atheist state following the 1959 revolution. It turned into a secular state in the early 1990s and has become more tolerant of religion over the past quarter century.

But the Vatican-recognized Virgin, venerated by Catholics and followers of Afro-Cuban Santeria traditions, is more than a religious icon. She is at the heart of Cuban identity, uniting compatriots from the Communist-run Caribbean island to those who were exiled or emigrated to the U.S.

"The Virgin is deeply entrenched in our culture," said the Rev. Rogelio Dean Puerta, the basilica's parish priest who also has celebrated Mass at the sister shrine in Miami. "You can't talk about Cuba without talking about the Virgin of Charity."

A replica of the Virgin was smuggled to Miami by exiles six decades ago, who later built the National Shrine of Our Lady of Charity just south of downtown. It remains a powerful symbol of unity despite decades-old political divisions among Cubans.

"Cachita," as she's affectionately called, is etched in tattoos, street murals, cartoons and other artwork on the island. She is revered in makeshift home altars, songs — and at her shrine some 500 miles (805 kilometers) east of Havana.

Many of the offerings left behind decorate Cuba's ivory-colored shrine with soaring red domes: college diplomas, crutches, stethoscopes, handwritten notes, baby clothes, military insignia and more. Mementos left by the shrine's famous visitors include baseball jerseys, Olympic medals and other accolades.

Fidel and Raul Castro's mother once left a small golden figure of a guerrilla when her sons were fighting dictator Fulgencio Batista before the revolution. And Ernest Hemingway, who lived in Cuba for two decades, had a replica of his 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature placed at the Virgin's feet to thank Cubans for inspiring "The Old Man and the Sea" and other works.

Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVII visited the basilica during their papacies. And Pope Francis said he would pray to the Virgin of Charity for Cuba during his visit to the island.

Some people visit more than once. Years back, Ramon Nieblas and his wife went to the shrine to pray for their family. This year, his wife also has cancer, and they have a two-year-old boy. "We once came here to ask the Virgin to let her have that baby. Today, I prayed that she could be blessed to see him grow up," he said.

Juan Gonzalez, who lives near the shrine, prays to the Virgin every day. His home altar is adorned with statues of Afro-Cuban Santeria deities, whose followers know the Virgin as "Ochun," the goddess of female sensuality and maternity.

"They're the ones who bless humanity — that's why I believe in the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre and the

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great power of God," he said.

## A SAINT BECOMES A NATIONAL SYMBOL

The Virgin of Charity of Cobre dates to 1612 when two Indigenous brothers, Juan and Rodrigo de Hoyos, along with Juan Moreno, an enslaved African boy, are said to have found the statue of the Virgin holding the infant Jesus in the Bay of Nipe. It was floating on a wooden board inscribed with the words, "I am the Virgin of Charity," according to the basilica.

Over the past four centuries, the Virgin of Charity's significance has grown. She became a symbol for injured soldiers in Cuba's fight for independence from Spain, and veterans of that war petitioned the Vatican to make her Cuba's patron saint.

"She became this national symbol," said Michelle Maldonado, an expert on the Virgin of Charity and provost at the University of Scranton in Pennsylvania.

The cult of the Virgin of Charity became part of Cuban nationalism in late 19th century. Among the Cuban diaspora in Miami, it has taken on a strong political significance, also in rebuke to the Cuban government's history of religious repression, said Jorge Duany, director of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University.

Many of the early worshippers at Our Lady of Charity fled or were expelled by the Castro government – and reached safety in Florida on rickety rafts like the one featured behind the Virgin's statue in the Miami shrine's mural.

Looking at the ocean separating him from his homeland, the Miami shrine's vicar, the Rev. Angel Andrés González, sees how the Virgin has been "the connecting thread" of his life.

"It's like the heart of Cuba, here in the United States," he said.

Like many of the Cuban exiles who built, and still worship at, La Ermita, as the Miami shrine is known, González's devotion to the Virgin preceded his Catholic faith – and anchors his life in the United States.

Though his family was largely non-practicing, his mother still made him recite Hail Marys during thunderstorms to a print of the Virgin. It had hung behind his bed since he was baptized in the Cobre sanctuary.

## THE MIAMI SHRINE REMAINS A BEACON FOR MIGRANTS

La Ermita welcomes both long-term Miami residents for whom the church is a symbol of resistance to Cuba's government and new arrivals who want to make a video call to their mother in Cuba from a familiar place.

At the Ash Wednesday celebrations marking the beginning of Lent, both political refugees and "santeras," or Santeria practitioners, brought their petitions to the Miami Virgin – who, as a mother, has a gift for all her children, as visitors are told by Sister Inés Espinoza.

The Havana native and member of the Daughters of Charity order, which was expelled from Cuba in 1972, ministers to the material and spiritual needs of growing numbers of migrants from across Latin America, including Cuba, who make the Ermita their first stop. In just the past few years, U.S. border authorities encountered more than half a million Cubans.

During an Ash Wednesday Mass, as the prayers of the faithful were recited, attendee Rafael Madlum Payas loudly called out a petition for freedom in Cuba.

The 81-year-old political refugee fled to the United States nearly 20 years ago, he said, and finds comfort in La Ermita because "it means that the Virgin is with us wherever we are."

In this, he was of one spirit with Yenise Hoyos, a santera who came to the Ermita during the same Mass, carrying a figure of her Yoruba religion's deity, who she considers a "sister" to the virgin.

"What you are, your idiosyncrasy, your religion, never, never gets lost wherever we go," said Hoyos, who came from Cuba four years ago. "It's an incredible peace that one breathes when one gets here."

To clergy, the Virgin allows the Miami shrine to remain a beacon to migrants. The Biblical exhortation to welcome the stranger is the theme the rector, the Rev. José Espino, chose for this Lent.

"This is always the place of giving thanks to the Virgin for a safe arrival," Espino said. "She has always accompanied the dreams of the Cuban people."

## New AI tools can record your medical appointment or draft a message from your doctor

By CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writer

Don't be surprised if your doctors start writing you overly friendly messages. They could be getting some help from artificial intelligence.

New AI tools are helping doctors communicate with their patients, some by answering messages and others by taking notes during exams. It's been 15 months since OpenAI released ChatGPT. Already thousands of doctors are using similar products based on large language models. One company says its tool works in 14 languages.

AI saves doctors time and prevents burnout, enthusiasts say. It also shakes up the doctor-patient relationship, raising questions of trust, transparency, privacy and the future of human connection.

A look at how new AI tools affect patients:

### IS MY DOCTOR USING AI?

In recent years, medical devices with machine learning have been doing things like reading mammograms, diagnosing eye disease and detecting heart problems. What's new is generative AI's ability to respond to complex instructions by predicting language.

Your next check-up could be recorded by an AI-powered smartphone app that listens, documents and instantly organizes everything into a note you can read later. The tool also can mean more money for the doctor's employer because it won't forget details that legitimately could be billed to insurance.

Your doctor should ask for your consent before using the tool. You might also see some new wording in the forms you sign at the doctor's office.

Other AI tools could be helping your doctor draft a message, but you might never know it.

"Your physician might tell you that they're using it, or they might not tell you," said Cait DesRoches, director of OpenNotes, a Boston-based group working for transparent communication between doctors and patients. Some health systems encourage disclosure, and some don't.

Doctors or nurses must approve the AI-generated messages before sending them. In one Colorado health system, such messages contain a sentence disclosing they were automatically generated. But doctors can delete that line.

"It sounded exactly like him. It was remarkable," said patient Tom Detner, 70, of Denver, who recently received an AI-generated message that began: "Hello, Tom, I'm glad to hear that your neck pain is improving. It's important to listen to your body." The message ended with "Take care" and a disclosure that it had been automatically generated and edited by his doctor.

Detner said he was glad for the transparency. "Full disclosure is very important," he said.

### WILL AI MAKE MISTAKES?

Large language models can misinterpret input or even fabricate inaccurate responses, an effect called hallucination. The new tools have internal guardrails to try to prevent inaccuracies from reaching patients — or landing in electronic health records.

"You don't want those fake things entering the clinical notes," said Dr. Alistair Erskine, who leads digital innovations for Georgia-based Emory Healthcare, where hundreds of doctors are using a product from Abridge to document patient visits.

The tool runs the doctor-patient conversation across several large language models and eliminates weird ideas, Erskine said. "It's a way of engineering out hallucinations."

Ultimately, "the doctor is the most important guardrail," said Abridge CEO Dr. Shiv Rao. As doctors review AI-generated notes, they can click on any word and listen to the specific segment of the patient's visit to check accuracy.

In Buffalo, New York, a different AI tool misheard Dr. Lauren Bruckner when she told a teenage cancer patient it was a good thing she didn't have an allergy to sulfa drugs. The AI-generated note said, "Allergies: Sulfa."

The tool "totally misunderstood the conversation," said Bruckner, chief medical information officer at

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Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. "That doesn't happen often, but clearly that's a problem."

WHAT ABOUT THE HUMAN TOUCH?

AI tools can be prompted to be friendly, empathetic and informative.

But they can get carried away. In Colorado, a patient with a runny nose was alarmed to learn from an AI-generated message that the problem could be a brain fluid leak. (It wasn't.) A nurse hadn't proofread carefully and mistakenly sent the message.

"At times, it's an astounding help and at times it's of no help at all," said Dr. C.T. Lin, who leads technology innovations at Colorado-based UC Health, where about 250 doctors and staff use a Microsoft AI tool to write the first draft of messages to patients. The messages are delivered through Epic's patient portal.

The tool had to be taught about a new RSV vaccine because it was drafting messages saying there was no such thing. But with routine advice — like rest, ice, compression and elevation for an ankle sprain — "it's beautiful for that," Linn said.

Also on the plus side, doctors using AI are no longer tied to their computers during medical appointments. They can make eye contact with their patients because the AI tool records the exam.

The tool needs audible words, so doctors are learning to explain things aloud, said Dr. Robert Bart, chief medical information officer at Pittsburgh-based UPMC. A doctor might say: "I am currently examining the right elbow. It is quite swollen. It feels like there's fluid in the right elbow."

Talking through the exam for the benefit of the AI tool can also help patients understand what's going on, Bart said. "I've been in an examination where you hear the hemming and hawing while the physician is doing it. And I'm always wondering, 'Well, what does that mean?'"

WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY?

U.S. law requires health care systems to get assurances from business associates that they will safeguard protected health information, and the companies could face investigation and fines from the Department of Health and Human Services if they mess up.

Doctors interviewed for this article said they feel confident in the data security of the new products and that the information will not be sold.

Information shared with the new tools is used to improve them, so that could add to the risk of a health care data breach.

Dr. Lance Owens is chief medical information officer at the University of Michigan Health-West, where 265 doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners are using a Microsoft tool to document patient exams. He believes patient data is being protected.

"When they tell us that our data is safe and secure and segregated, we believe that," Owens said.

## **Biden and Trump are now their parties' presumptive nominees.**

### **What does that mean?**

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump have officially secured the requisite numbers of delegates to be considered their parties' presumptive nominees.

It was a foreseeable outcome. Biden faced token opposition in the Democratic primary. Several high-profile Republicans ran against Trump but didn't come close to knocking him off course in his third straight Republican bid.

Here is a look at what that means, what's changed, and what still needs to happen before Biden and Trump can drop "presumptive" and just be their parties' official standard-bearers:

'Presumptive nominee:' What does it mean?

The Associated Press only uses the "presumptive nominee" designation once a candidate has captured the number of delegates needed to win a majority vote at the national party convention this summer. For Republicans, that number this year is 1,215. On the Democratic side of things, it's 1,968.

The marker essentially ends the presidential primary season, though both Biden and Trump have been

largely focusing their energies on each other for months already.

Do the political parties function any differently?

Sort of.

Generally, the national Democratic and Republican parties start coordinating directly with their presumptive nominees once their status is clear, although there have been some exceptions.

Last week, the Republican National Committee ushered in new leadership handpicked by Trump, in the form of a new chairman, co-chair and party chief of staff. Trump's installed leaders then moved to fire dozens of RNC staff.

After Trump won both the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary — but still faced GOP opponents — an RNC member who is a longtime Trump ally floated a resolution that would have allowed the party to consider him its "presumptive nominee" and allowed some of that coordination earlier.

Trump actually spoke out against the measure — although he said it likely would have succeeded — which was ultimately withdrawn.

As for the Democratic National Committee, Biden is the de facto leader of the party, although any official leadership changes have to go through structured channels. During the 2020 campaign, the DNC shuffled its leadership and entered into a joint fundraising agreement with Biden in April, even though the candidate didn't clinch the Democratic nomination until June.

When do presumptive nominees become official?

A presidential candidate doesn't officially become the Republican or Democratic nominee until winning the vote on the floor of the nominating convention, which takes place this summer. Delegates' casting of votes is mostly a ceremonial procedure, but it hasn't always been this way.

Decades ago, presidential candidates might have run in primaries and caucuses, but the eventual nominees weren't known until delegates and party bosses hashed things out themselves at the conventions.

## **Putin is set to win 6 more years in power.**

### **Here's how it will affect the war and Russia's relations**

By The Associated Press undefined

Vladimir Putin is poised to sweep to another six-year term in this week's presidential election, even though Russians are dying in Ukraine in a war grinding through its third year and his country is more isolated than ever from the rest of the world.

The all-but-certain outcome comes through his rigid control of Russia established during his 24 years in power — the longest Kremlin tenure since Soviet leader Josef Stalin.

Putin, 71, has silenced virtually all dissent through harsh new laws that impose heavy fines or prison on independent voices. Critics have succumbed to unexplained deaths or fled abroad. The ballot features three other token candidates who publicly support his policies.

How is the war affecting the election?

Putin has focused his campaign on a pledge to fulfill his goals in Ukraine, describing the conflict as a battle against the West for the very survival of Russia and its 146 million people.

In a state-of-the-nation address last month, he charged that the U.S. and its NATO allies "need a dependent, waning, dying space in the place of Russia so that they can do whatever they want."

Putin has repeatedly argued that he sent in the troops in February 2022 to protect Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine and prevent Kyiv from posing a major security threat to Moscow by joining NATO. Ukraine and its allies describe the Russian invasion — the largest conflict in Europe since World War II — as an unprovoked act of aggression by the major nuclear power.

He says Russian forces have the upper hand after the failure of Ukraine's counteroffensive last year, arguing that Ukraine and the West will "sooner or later" have to accept a settlement on Moscow's terms. Putin praised his troops fighting in Ukraine and promised to make them Russia's new elite.

Ordinary Russians know little of their military's many setbacks in the war, with casualties out of view and

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state-run media carrying accounts only of Moscow's successes.

How is the economy affecting the election?

The economy's resilience in the face of bruising Western sanctions is a big factor behind Putin's grip on power in Russia, a major player in the global energy sector. The economy is expected to grow 2.6% this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, compared with the 0.9% expansion predicted in Europe. Inflation is forecast at more than 7% but unemployment remains low.

Military industries have become a key growth engine, with defense plants churning out missiles, tanks and ammunition. Hefty payments to hundreds of thousands of men who signed contracts with the military have helped boost consumer demand, contributing to economic growth.

In his campaign, Putin has promised to extend cheap mortgages subsidized by the government to help young families, particularly those with children, boosting his popularity and energizing the booming construction sector.

He also pledged to pour more government funds into health care, education, science, culture and sports, while continuing efforts to eradicate poverty.

What impact is the crackdown having?

Putin has methodically tightened control on Russian politics since becoming president in 2000, pushing through constitutional changes that can keep him in power until 2036.

The Kremlin's crackdown on dissent reached unprecedented heights after the invasion of Ukraine, leaving a scorched-earth political landscape ahead of the vote.

A repressive new law approved days after the invasion criminalized any public criticism of the war, and protests have become effectively impossible with police swiftly dispersing unauthorized gatherings. The number of arrests, criminal cases and trials has soared, and long prison terms are more common.

Putin has denigrated opposition activists and war critics as spoiled Western stooges, once describing them as "foam washed away" by his "special military operation."

His biggest critic, Alexei Navalny, was serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges when he died at age 47 in an Arctic penal colony. Other leading opposition figures also got long prison terms comparable to those given to "enemies of the people" during Stalinist repressions. Prominent Kremlin foe, Vladimir Kara-Murza got the harshest sentence of 25 years on treason charges over an anti-war speech.

But even minor critics were muzzled. A St. Petersburg artist got seven years for replacing supermarket price tags with anti-war slogans, while a Moscow poet was sentenced to seven years for reciting verses against the war in public.

Most independent news outlets were shut and many moved their operations abroad, while the state-controlled media relentlessly hammered home the Kremlin's narratives.

How will Russia's policies be affected?

Putin will likely use his predictable victory as proof of overwhelming public support for the war.

Many observers expect him to toughen his course and escalate the war. Some say the Kremlin could launch another round of mobilizing reservists to swell the military's ranks and try to extend its gains in a big, new offensive.

The Kremlin is set to ramp up its war rhetoric, casting the country as a besieged fortress facing Western aggression. Repression against opposition activists and war critics is likely to expand, with authorities abandoning any semblance of decorum in their ruthless efforts to eradicate signs of dissent.

Moscow's foreign policy is likely to become even more aggressive, and Russian authorities may increasingly try to deepen divides in the West with disinformation and propaganda, as well as appealing to conservative circles in the West by promoting the image of Russia as a bulwark of traditional values.

In Moscow's relations with China, India and countries of the Global South, Putin's election victory will help cement existing alliances by reinforcing the message of his firm control over Russian politics.

## Europe's world-first AI rules get final approval from lawmakers. Here's what happens next

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — European Union lawmakers gave final approval to the 27-nation bloc's artificial intelligence law Wednesday, putting the world-leading rules on track to take effect later this year.

Lawmakers in the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Artificial Intelligence Act, five years after regulations were first proposed. The AI Act is expected to act as a global signpost for other governments grappling with how to regulate the fast-developing technology.

"The AI Act has nudged the future of AI in a human-centric direction, in a direction where humans are in control of the technology and where it — the technology — helps us leverage new discoveries, economic growth, societal progress and unlock human potential," Dragos Tudorache, a Romanian lawmaker who was a co-leader of the Parliament negotiations on the draft law, said before the vote.

Big tech companies generally have supported the need to regulate AI while lobbying to ensure any rules work in their favor. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman caused a minor stir last year when he suggested the ChatGPT maker could pull out of Europe if it can't comply with the AI Act — before backtracking to say there were no plans to leave.

Here's a look at the world's first comprehensive set of AI rules:

### HOW DOES THE AI ACT WORK?

Like many EU regulations, the AI Act was initially intended to act as consumer safety legislation, taking a "risk-based approach" to products or services that use artificial intelligence.

The riskier an AI application, the more scrutiny it faces. The vast majority of AI systems are expected to be low risk, such as content recommendation systems or spam filters. Companies can choose to follow voluntary requirements and codes of conduct.

High-risk uses of AI, such as in medical devices or critical infrastructure like water or electrical networks, face tougher requirements like using high-quality data and providing clear information to users.

Some AI uses are banned because they're deemed to pose an unacceptable risk, like social scoring systems that govern how people behave, some types of predictive policing and emotion recognition systems in school and workplaces.

Other banned uses include police scanning faces in public using AI-powered remote "biometric identification" systems, except for serious crimes like kidnapping or terrorism.

### WHAT ABOUT GENERATIVE AI?

The law's early drafts focused on AI systems carrying out narrowly limited tasks, like scanning resumes and job applications. The astonishing rise of general purpose AI models, exemplified by OpenAI's ChatGPT, sent EU policymakers scrambling to keep up.

They added provisions for so-called generative AI models, the technology underpinning AI chatbot systems that can produce unique and seemingly lifelike responses, images and more.

Developers of general purpose AI models — from European startups to OpenAI and Google — will have to provide a detailed summary of the text, pictures, video and other data on the internet that is used to train the systems as well as follow EU copyright law.

AI-generated deepfake pictures, video or audio of existing people, places or events must be labeled as artificially manipulated.

There's extra scrutiny for the biggest and most powerful AI models that pose "systemic risks," which include OpenAI's GPT4 — its most advanced system — and Google's Gemini.

The EU says it's worried that these powerful AI systems could "cause serious accidents or be misused for far-reaching cyberattacks." They also fear generative AI could spread "harmful biases" across many applications, affecting many people.

Companies that provide these systems will have to assess and mitigate the risks; report any serious incidents, such as malfunctions that cause someone's death or serious harm to health or property; put cybersecurity measures in place; and disclose how much energy their models use.



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DO EUROPE'S RULES INFLUENCE THE REST OF THE WORLD?

Brussels first suggested AI regulations in 2019, taking a familiar global role in ratcheting up scrutiny of emerging industries, while other governments scramble to keep up.

In the U.S., President Joe Biden signed a sweeping executive order on AI in October that's expected to be backed up by legislation and global agreements. In the meantime, lawmakers in at least seven U.S. states are working on their own AI legislation.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has proposed his Global AI Governance Initiative for fair and safe use of AI, and authorities have issued "interim measures" for managing generative AI, which applies to text, pictures, audio, video and other content generated for people inside China.

Other countries, from Brazil to Japan, as well as global groupings like the United Nations and Group of Seven industrialized nations, are moving to draw up AI guardrails.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The AI Act is expected to officially become law by May or June, after a few final formalities, including a blessing from EU member countries. Provisions will start taking effect in stages, with countries required to ban prohibited AI systems six months after the rules enter the lawbooks.

Rules for general purpose AI systems like chatbots will start applying a year after the law takes effect. By mid-2026, the complete set of regulations, including requirements for high-risk systems, will be in force.

When it comes to enforcement, each EU country will set up their own AI watchdog, where citizens can file a complaint if they think they've been the victim of a violation of the rules. Meanwhile, Brussels will create an AI Office tasked with enforcing and supervising the law for general purpose AI systems.

Violations of the AI Act could draw fines of up to 35 million euros (\$38 million), or 7% of a company's global revenue.

This isn't Brussels' last word on AI rules, said Italian lawmaker Brando Benifei, co-leader of Parliament's work on the law. More AI-related legislation could be ahead after summer elections, including in areas like AI in the workplace that the new law partly covers, he said.

## House GOP launches new probe of Jan. 6 and tries shifting blame for Capitol attack away from Trump

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are launching a vast reinvestigation of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, seeking to push the blame away from Donald Trump, who has been indicted over his actions or his supporters in the mob siege trying to overturn the 2020 election.

As Trump campaigns to return to the White House, the House Administration subcommittee on oversight held the first of what is expected to be regular public hearings revisiting the official account, which had aired in great detail in 2022 by the House's Select Committee on Jan. 6.

Chairman Barry Loudermilk, R-Ga., called Jan. 6 a "dark day" in U.S. history as he opened Tuesday's hearing to delve into the investigation of pipe bombs that were left outside Republican and Democratic party headquarters that day. But, he said, "we still have many unanswered questions."

The panel's work comes as Trump and President Joe Biden are galloping toward a 2020 rematch this fall, and Republicans, some once skeptical of Trump's return to the White House, have quickly been falling in line to support the former president. The House GOP's high-profile impeachment inquiry into Biden has stalled without a clear path forward.

Speaker Mike Johnson said House Republicans intend to release a final report on Jan. 6 "to correct the incomplete narrative" advanced by the previous work of the Select Committee on the Jan. 6 attack.

With newly released testimony and an 80-plus page report of initial findings, the House Administration subcommittee has outlined a roadmap ahead for its probe — including revisiting key testimony from White House aide Cassidy Hutchinson, who delivered a bombshell account of Trump's actions that day.

The panel's report draws on many of the conspiracy theories circulating about Jan. 6 — from the formation

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of the Select Committee by then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to newer questions about the unidentified people who erected the hangman's scaffolding outside the Capitol.

"Democrats wasted no time before pointing fingers at President Trump for the events of January 6, 2021," the initial findings of the report said.

At the first hearing, Republicans grilled the U.S. Capitol Police about why a bomb-sniffing K9 unit did not initially detect the pipe bombs found outside party headquarters and why police didn't respond faster to seal off the area.

U.S. Capitol Police Assistant Chief Sean Gallagher told the panel it was "chaotic" that day as the mob of Trump supporters descended on the Capitol.

"I want to be upfront and honest, U.S. Capitol Police haven't shied away from the failures of that day," Gallagher said about the well-documented leadership problems spelled out in their own report.

He described the fighting on the West and East fronts of the Capitol as police tried to hold back the mob — "our officers were suffering injuries" — and calls coming in, including a pick-up truck loaded with Molotov cocktails, machetes, rifles, handguns and ammunition parked nearby.

Five people died in the riot and its immediate aftermath, including a police officer, and other officers died later by suicide. More than 1,200 people have been charged in the riot, with hundreds convicted.

"For context, I would gladly give up a perimeter not being perfect to be able to get officers responding to help their brothers and sisters who were calling for help at the U.S. Capitol," Gallagher testified.

Rep. Norma Torres of California, the panel's ranking Democrat and a former 911 dispatcher, questioned the premise of the hearing, particularly as federal investigations are underway: "What exactly is it that we're doing here?"

"Maybe it is to peddle crazy right-wing conspiracy theories about the Jan. 6 pipe bombs spreading in the dark corners of the Internet?" she asked.

"Or maybe we are here so this subcommittee can once again try to muddle our history, villainize law enforcement and undo the efforts of the bipartisan Jan. 6 Select Committee," she said, "all to distract from the simple fact that the former president and Republican nominee for president orchestrated a corrupt scheme to overturn the results of a free and fair election."

Trump, who exhorted his supporters to "fight like hell" before they swarmed the Capitol, has been indicted on federal charges of conspiracy to defraud Americans and obstruction of an official proceeding over Jan. 6. The Supreme Court is considering his claim of immunity.

House Republicans criticize the Select Committee and they claim it didn't turn over all aspects of its work.

On Tuesday, a previously undisclosed transcript of the Select Committee's interview with an unnamed Secret Service officer who drove the presidential SUV on Jan. 6 provided new information about Trump's actions that day. It was obtained by The Associated Press.

That transcript of the presidential limo driver contradicted some of Hutchinson's testimony but corroborated other aspects of her account, including Trump's attempt to join the mob scene at the Capitol.

Trump had told his supporters during the Jan. 6 "Stop the Steal" rally at the Ellipse near the White House to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol, and said he would be right there with them, as Congress was certifying the 2020 election and Biden's victory.

But his security detail refused to take him there and instead took him back to the White House.

Hutchinson, who at the time was an aide to Mark Meadows, then the White House chief of staff, had testified in June 2022 that she was told by another official that Trump fought for control of the presidential SUV and demanded to be taken to the Capitol as the insurrection began.

Hutchinson testified that she was told that Bobby Engel, the head of security in the car with him, had grabbed Trump's arm to prevent him from gaining control of the armored vehicle, and Trump then used his free hand to lunge at Engel. She worked inside the White House, and said that when she was told of the altercation immediately afterward, Engel was in the room and didn't dispute the account at the time.

In the newly obtained transcript, the driver confirms: "The President was insistent on going to the Capitol."

The driver explained that Trump and Engel got in the car after the rally, and Trump started asking Engel

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about going to the Capitol. When Engel suggested they couldn't do that, Trump kept pushing.

"Certainly his voice was raised," the driver testified, "but it did not seem to me like he was irate, certainly not — certainly didn't seem as irritated or as agitated as he had on the way to the Ellipse."

The driver said, "The thing that sticks out most was he kept asking why we couldn't go?"

But the driver said he did not see the altercation that Hutchinson described.

"He never grabbed the steering wheel. I didn't see him, you know, lunge to try to get into the front seat at all," the driver testified.

"You know, what stood out was the irritation in his voice more than — more than his physical presence, which would have been pretty obvious if he was trying to insert himself between the two front seats," the driver said.

The driver said he told other colleagues at the White House what had happened as he waited outside with the vehicles.

## Today in History: March 14

### Albert Einstein is born and Stephen Hawking dies

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, March 14, the 75th day of 2024. There are 292 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 14, 1879, Albert Einstein, who would revolutionize physics and the human understanding of the universe, was born in Ulm, Germany.

On this date:

In 1794, Eli Whitney received a patent for his cotton gin, an invention that revolutionized America's cotton industry.

In 1939, the republic of Czechoslovakia was dissolved, opening the way for Nazi occupation of Czech areas and the separation of Slovakia.

In 1951, during the Korean War, United Nations forces recaptured Seoul.

In 1962, Democrat Edward M. Kennedy officially launched in Boston his successful candidacy for the U.S. Senate seat from Massachusetts once held by his brother, President John F. Kennedy. (Edward Kennedy served in the Senate for nearly 47 years.)

In 1964, a jury in Dallas found Jack Ruby guilty of murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy, and sentenced him to death. (Both the conviction and death sentence were overturned, but Ruby died before he could be retried.)

In 1967, the body of President John F. Kennedy was moved from a temporary grave to a permanent memorial site at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In 1980, a LOT Polish Airlines jet crashed while attempting to land in Warsaw, killing all 87 people aboard, including 22 members of a U.S. amateur boxing team.

In 1990, the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies held a secret ballot that elected Mikhail S. Gorbachev to a new, powerful presidency.

In 1995, American astronaut Norman Thagard became the first American to enter space aboard a Russian rocket as he and two cosmonauts blasted off aboard a Soyuz spacecraft, headed for the Mir space station.

In 2011, Neil Diamond, Alice Cooper, Tom Waits, Darlene Love, Dr. John and Leon Russell were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 2015, Robert Durst, a wealthy eccentric linked to two killings and his wife's disappearance, was arrested by the FBI in New Orleans on a murder warrant a day before HBO aired the final episode of a serial documentary about his life. (Durst would be convicted in the shooting death of his friend, Susan Berman; he died in January 2022 while serving a life sentence in California.)

In 2018, Stephen Hawking, the best-known theoretical physicist of his time, died at his home in Cam-

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bridge, England, at the age of 76; he had stunned doctors by living with the normally fatal illness ALS for more than 50 years.

In 2021, female performers including Beyoncé and Taylor Swift swept the top honors at the Grammy Awards; Beyoncé's 28th win made her the most decorated woman in Grammy history.

In 2022, country music legend Dolly Parton announced she was pulling out of the nominations for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, saying she hadn't "earned that right." (She would later reverse course and accept induction into the hall.)

Today's Birthdays: Michael Caine is 91. Composer-conductor Quincy Jones is 91. Actor Raymond J. Barry is 85. Country singer Michael Martin Murphey is 79. Rock musician Walt Parazaider (payr-ah-ZAY'-dur) (formerly with Chicago) is 79. Actor Steve Kanaly is 78. Comedian Billy Crystal is 76. Actor-writer-comedian-radio personality Rick Dees is 73. Country singer Jann Browne is 70. Actor Adrian Zmed is 70. Prince Albert II, the ruler of Monaco, is 66. Actor Laila Robins is 65. Actor Tamara Tunie (tuh-MAH'-ruh TOO'-nee) is 65. Producer-director-writer Kevin Williamson is 59. Actor Elise Neal is 58. Actor Gary Anthony Williams is 58. Actor Megan Follows is 56. Rock musician Michael Bland is 55. Country singer Kristian Bush is 54. Actor Betsy Brandt is 51. Actor Grace Park is 50. Actor Daniel Gillies is 48. Actor Corey Stoll is 48. Actor Jake Fogelnest is 45. Actor Chris Klein is 45. Actor Ryan Cartwright (TV: "Kevin Can Wait") is 43. Actor Kate Maberly is 42. Singer-musician Taylor Hanson (Hanson) is 41. Rep. Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, is 40. Actor Jamie Bell is 38. Rock musician Este Haim (HY'-uhm) (Haim) is 38. NBA star Stephen Curry is 36. Actor Ansel Elgort is 30. Olympic gold medal gymnast Simone Biles is 27. Actor James Freedson-Jackson (Film: "The Strange Ones") is 22.