

# Groton Daily Independent

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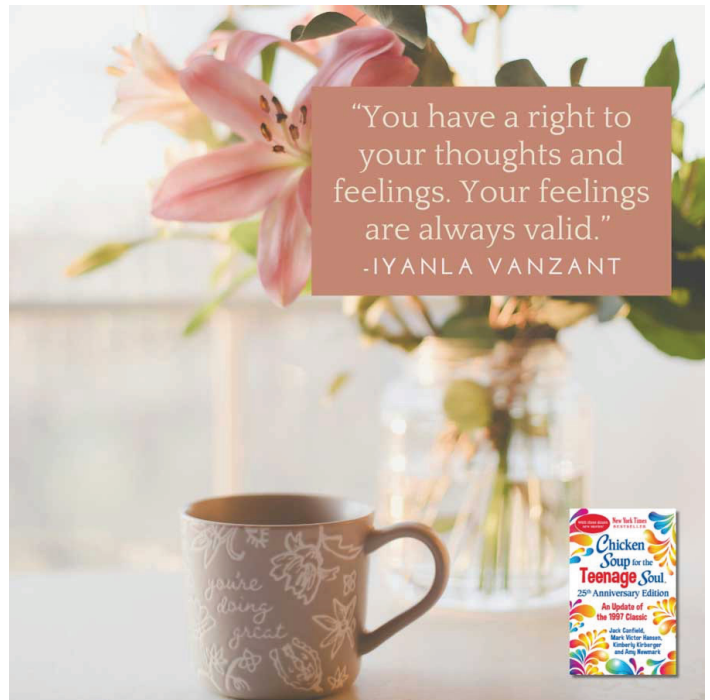
## Saturday, March 16

State BBB Tournament at Rapid City: 1 p.m. Central Time: Groton Area vs. Vermillion for 7th place  
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.

## Sunday, March 17

Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.  
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.  
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; No Sunday school, Choir, 6 p.m.  
St. John's Lutheran worship, 9 a.m.; Zion at 11 a.m.; Sunday school, at 9:45 a.m.  
United Methodist: Worship at Conde, 8:30 a.m., and at Groton, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; No Sunday school.

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



## Monday, March 18

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.  
School Lunch: Chicken patty, baked beans.  
Pantry Open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Cranberry meatballs, mashed potatoes, mixed vegetables, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.  
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.

## Tuesday, March 19

School Breakfast: Scones.  
School Lunch: Meatballs, roasted potatoes.  
Indoor track meet at Northern State University  
Thrift Store open 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.  
Food Pantry open 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.  
Senior Menu: Baked fish, au gratin potatoes, 3 bean salad, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.  
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.  
United Methodist: Spring Tea luncheon, 10:30 a.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

## Realtor Group Settles Suit

The National Association of Realtors, representing roughly 1.5 million real estate agents, has agreed to pay \$418M over the next four years to settle a group of cases nationwide accusing the association of artificially inflating their agents' commissions.

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

The settlement terms, if approved by a federal court, could alter how Americans buy and sell homes by eliminating a centuries-old commission structure. The standard commission typically ranges between 5% and 6% of the sale price of a home, which a home seller pays to their agent for listing the home on a multiple listing service, known as the MLS. The commission is then split between both the seller's and buyer's agents. But under the settlement, brokerage commissions would be opened up for negotiation with sellers, potentially opening the door for lower fees.

The legal agreement comes after the National Association of Realtors CEO Bob Goldberg resigned in November, following a jury decision finding the association and big residential brokers liable for \$1.8B in damages for conspiring to keep home sales commissions artificially high.

### **First humanitarian aid ship to use new sea route reaches Gaza Strip.**

A private ship carrying 200 tons of food and supplies arrived at Gaza's coast Friday as part of the first test of a new maritime corridor for humanitarian aid. Separately, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved a military plan for a ground operation in Gaza's southern city of Rafah near Egypt's border (no further details were given), while an Israeli delegation heads to Qatar to discuss Hamas' latest cease-fire and hostage-release proposal. See war updates here.

### **At least 20 killed, 70 injured in Russian missile strikes on Odesa, Ukraine.**

Officials said two missiles hit the same area in the southern Ukrainian port city, with the second missile killing some first responders who were trying to rescue people from the first attack. The attack is the third on Odesa in two weeks and came as Russians began voting in Russia's presidential election, which President Vladimir Putin is expected to win.

### **Special prosecutor in Georgia election interference case resigns.**

Nathan Wade, a special prosecutor who was working with Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis on the 2020 election interference case involving former President Donald Trump, resigned Friday. Wade's resignation came shortly after a judge ruled he had to step down for Willis to remain on the case. Willis was accused of hiring Wade while the pair carried on a secret romantic relationship. The judge was tasked with deciding whether to disqualify Willis from the case.

### **US Supreme Court clarifies when officials can block social media critics.**

The Supreme Court unanimously ruled Friday public officials who use personal social media accounts to make official statements cannot block users or delete comments and laid out a two-part test for determining when an official's online statements are attributable to the government. The ruling follows conflicting lower court decisions on the issue in two separate cases, one against school board members in California and one against a city manager in Michigan.

### **Los Angeles Rams star Aaron Donald announces retirement at age 32.**

Donald, a defensive tackle, played all 10 seasons of his NFL career with the Rams and won the Super Bowl in 2022. He was picked by the Rams in the first round of the 2014 NFL Draft and won the 2014

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Defensive Rookie of the Year award. He was selected as the AP Defensive Player of the Year three times, named an All-Pro eight times, and made the Pro Bowl every season. Donald will be eligible for the Pro Football Hall of Fame in five years.

## McDonald's system outage disrupts restaurants worldwide.

The system failure caused some McDonald's locations to temporarily suspend operations as customers were unable to place orders. The incident was not a result of a cybersecurity issue and has been fixed, the company said. McDonald's has roughly 40,000 restaurants globally.

## Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Alizah F. from Salt Lake City, Utah.

"Last week, I got the results back from one of my medical school exams and didn't pass the final by 0.08%. I was devastated because I spent weeks studying this material and had put in countless midnights in the library mastering the content. I felt shame and hopelessness associated with my failure and so it was hard for me to confide in my friend Daryl. When I finally told her what had happened, she immediately came to my aid and refused to entertain any doubts I had about my ability to become a doctor. She affirmed my identity, my knowledge, and my purpose in medicine. Sometimes, I think kindness is just believing in your friend even when they don't believe in themselves."

PROUD TO SUPPORT  
**NATIONAL  
AG DAY**



**MARCH 19 / #AGDAY24**



**Farm Credit  
Services  
of America**

**605.225.1030**  
4835 Sixth Avenue SE  
Aberdeen, SD 57401

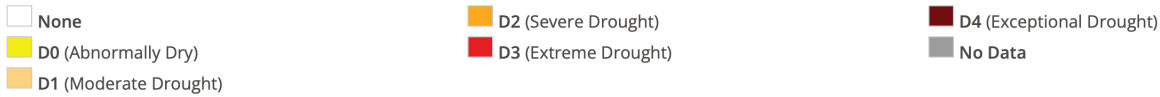
**Agriculture Works Here. > FCSAmerica.com**

## Groton City Help Wanted

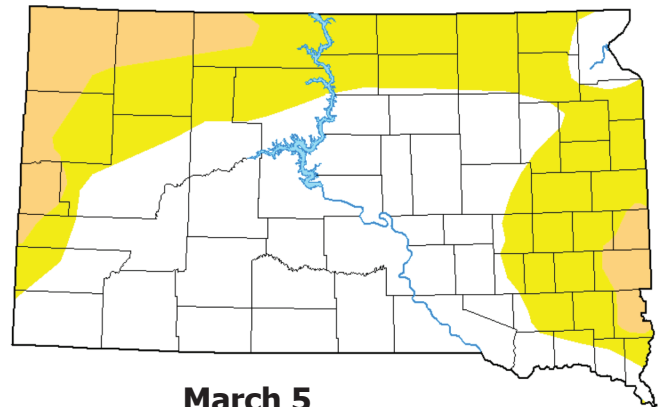
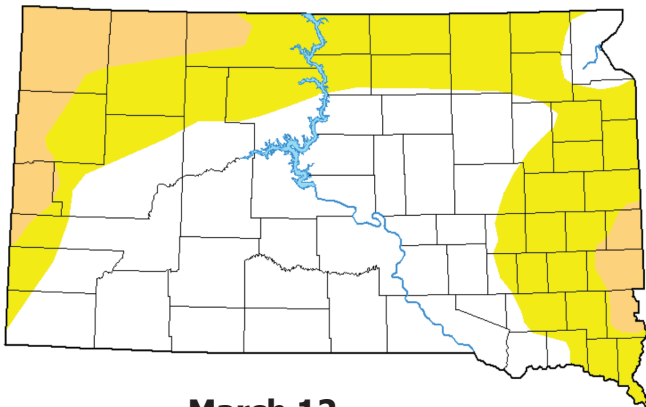
Position available for full-time Public Works Laborer. Formal training and/or experience preferred. Salary negotiable DOE. Benefits include medical insurance, life insurance, and SD State Retirement. Please send application and resume to the City of Groton, PO Box 587, Groton, SD 57445, or email to [city.doug@nvc.net](mailto:city.doug@nvc.net). Applications will be accepted until 5pm on April 16, 2024. Full job description and application may be found at <https://www.grotonsd.gov/o/grotoncity/page/employment-options>.

For more information, please call 605-397-8422. Equal opportunity employer.

### Drought Classification



## Drought Monitor



Eastern parts of the High Plains region were mostly warmer than normal this week, with temperatures 8-10 degrees above normal occurring in the eastern Dakotas. Colder-than-normal weather occurred in western Wyoming and parts of Colorado. Localized heavy rains from severe thunderstorms this week occurred in parts of central and southeast Kansas, leading to localized improvements to ongoing drought and abnormal dryness. In south-central and southwest Kansas, abnormal dryness developed where dry weather from the past couple of months combined with warm and windy conditions, similar to those experienced in northwest Oklahoma and parts of the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles. In southwest Nebraska, localized improvements were made to an area of abnormal dryness after a major snowstorm struck the area. Recent dry, warm and windy weather led to a small expansion of abnormal dryness in northeast Nebraska and far southeast South Dakota. In northeast Wyoming and adjacent southwest South Dakota, recent dry, warm and windy weather led to expansions of abnormal dryness and moderate and severe drought. Recent snowpack improvements in the Wyoming Range of west-central Wyoming and in the Never Summer and Medicine Bow Mountains of northern Colorado led to improvements to ongoing abnormal dryness in both areas.

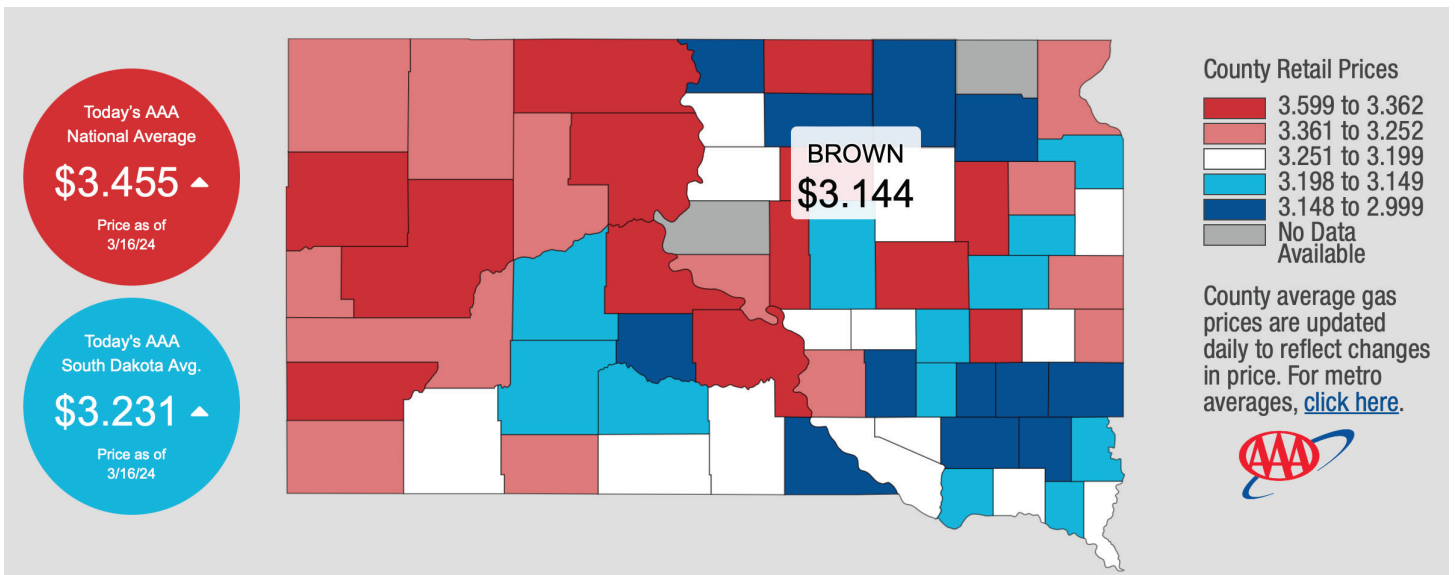
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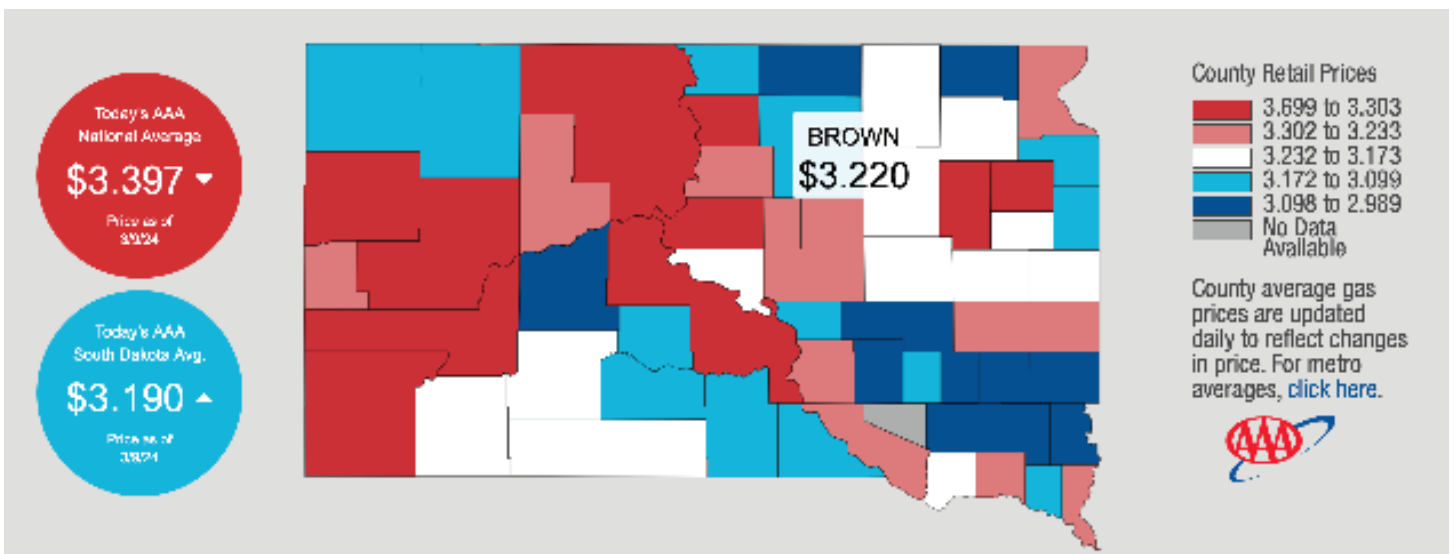
## South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.231	\$3.374	\$3.807	\$3.695
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.203	\$3.368	\$3.793	\$3.707
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.190	\$3.349	\$3.783	\$3.714
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.942	\$3.132	\$3.566	\$3.769
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.340	\$3.502	\$3.970	\$4.093

### This Week



### Two Weeks Ago



## NSU Wrestling

### **No. 4 Bahr and No. 2 Brossard Advance to Day Two of NCAA Championships**

Wichita, Kan. – The No. 13 Northern State University wrestling team sits 21st overall following the first day of competition from the NCAA Championships. The Wolves hold 12.5 team points and No. 4 Devin Bahr and No. 2 Seth Brossard are advancing to day two. With only eight competitors remaining in each weight class, Bahr and Brossard have earned the first NCAA Division II All-American honors of their career and will battle for podium placings tomorrow.

#### **HOW IT HAPPENED FOR BAHR**

Bahr opened his day with a 4-1 decision victory over Owen Zablocki from Indianapolis. In the 157-pound quarterfinal, he fell to No. 5 Guy Deleonardis from Glenville State in an 8-6 decision. The graduate student rallied back with a 4-2 decision win over Ben Durocher of Wisconsin Parkside in the consolation round.

#### **HOW IT HAPPENED FOR BLOOMQUIST**

Bloomquist battled in his NCAA Championships debut, falling to No. 1 David Hunsberger of Lander in a 4-1 decision. The junior battled back, notching a 4-1 sudden victory win over Brady Ross from Glenville State. He ultimately fell in the second consolation round to No. 7 Anthony Herrera of St. Cloud State, 4-1 in the tiebreaker round.

#### **HOW IT HAPPENED FOR BROSSARD**

The graduate student kicked off his day with a victory by fall at 1:38 over David Davis from Tiffin. Brossard led at the end of the first period in his quarterfinal match against No. 7 Trey Sizemore from Indianapolis, however dropped the bout in a 12-6 decision. He rallied back in the consolation round, defeating Brandon Matthews from Lander in a 12-0 major decision.

#### **UP NEXT**

Bahr and Brossard will continue their quest for third place finishes beginning at 10 a.m. Saturday morning from Hartman Arena. Bahr will face Bailey Gimbor of Kutztown in his opening match of the day; Gimbor holds a record of 22-3 and entered the Championships unranked. Brossard will take on No. 3 Cole Hernandez from Western Colorado to kick-off his Saturday; Hernandez is 32-3 this season.

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**The roof historic jail building at the corner of N Third Street and East 1st Avenue was being worked on this past week. The building is now under ownership of the Groton Historical Society.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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## 2024 SDHSAA State Boys Basketball, Thursday Recap

SDPB Radio | By Nate Wek

Published March 15, 2024 at 10:20 PM CDT

South Dakota state boys basketball action continued on Friday with the semifinal and consolation semifinal rounds. Here's a recap from Friday and the schedule for Saturday.

### Friday

#### Class AA Semifinals

##### No. 1 Mitchell 72 No. 5 Sioux Falls Washington 51

Top seeded Mitchell advanced to the championship game by defeating Washington 72-51 on Friday night. The Kernels shot 53% from the field, which included an impressive 47% from three-point range. Mitchell was led by Gavin Soukup, who scored 22-points and had eight assists. Markus Talley also put up 21-points. Washington's top scorer in the contest was Jhace Woods, who finished with 16-points.

##### No. 3 Brandon Valley 61 No. 2 Harrisburg 52

Brandon Valley defeated Harrisburg 61-52 on Friday in the semifinal round. Josh Olthoff had a big day for the Lynx, scoring 20-points and snagging seven rebounds. Aiden Zerr also scored 15-points and Heyde Anderson contributed 14-points for Brandon Valley. Harrisburg was led by Jacoby Mehrman, who finished with 15-points.

#### Consolation Semifinals

##### No. 8 Sioux Falls Jefferson 60 No. 4 Sioux Falls Roosevelt 38

Jefferson will play Saturday for the consolation championship after defeating Roosevelt 60-38 on Friday afternoon. The Cavaliers were led by Daniel Jones, who scored 12-points. Damaris Fields and Dawson Sechser each tallied 11-points as well for Jefferson. The Cavaliers shot 43% from the field. Naser Ismail led the scoring for Roosevelt with 12-points in the contest.

##### No. 7 Watertown 54 No. 6 Huron 51

Watertown squeaked past Huron on Friday 54-51 to advance to the consolation championship. A last second three by the Tigers didn't beat the buzzer, and the Arrows were victorious. Dylon Rawdon scored 20-points to lead Huron, ten of which came from the charity stripe. Huron was led by Blake Ellwein, who recorded 27-points and nine rebounds in the loss.

#### Class A Semifinals

##### No. 1 Sioux Falls Christian 50 No. 5 Dakota Valley 48

Sioux Falls Christian survived a near upset against Dakota Valley on Friday 50-48 to advance to the state title game. At one-point, the Panthers trailed by eleven. Dakota Valley had a look from beyond the arc with two-seconds to play, but the bucket hit back iron, and the Chargers celebration began. Griffen Goodbary had 20-points and nine rebounds for Sioux Falls Christian. Dakota Valley was led by Jaxson Wingert, who scored 20-points and had eight boards in the loss.

##### No. 2 Hamlin 62 No. 6 Rapid City Christian 45

For the first time since 1983, Hamlin will play for a boys state basketball title. The Chargers defeated Rapid City Christian 62-45 in the semifinal round on Friday night. Hamlin shot 45% from the floor. Tyson Stevenson and Easton Neuendorf both led the scoring for the Chargers with 17-points. The Comets were led in scoring by Simon Kieffer, who dropped 17-points in the contest.

#### Consolation Semifinals

##### No. 4 Pine Ridge 79 No. 8 Vermillion 63

Pine Ridge bounced back on Friday with a 79-63 win over Vermillion. As a team, the Thorpes shot 46% from the floor and 40% from beyond the arc. They also were +8 in the rebound category. Jaylin Rouillard finished with 26-points for Pine Ridge, while Marvin Richard III also contributed 19 in the scoring column and grabbed 13-rebounds for the Thorpes. Trey Hansen led Vermillion with 20-points and 11 boards.



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## No. 3 Sioux Valley 67 No. 7 Groton Area 58

Sioux Valley came into Friday coming off a double overtime quarterfinal loss to Rapid City Christian. The Cossacks defeated Groton Area in the consolation semifinals 67-58. Alec Squires finished with 31-points and 12 rebounds to lead Sioux Valley. On the other side, Ryder Johnson scored 19-points and grabbed seven rebounds for the Tigers.

## Class B Semifinals

### No. 5 Howard 48 No. 1 White River 42

Howard took down top seeded White River 48-42 in the semifinals on Friday night. Both teams shot 37% from the field. Howard won the rebound battle with a +14 differential. Carson Hinker led the scoring for Howard with 11-points. Taiden Hoyer, Luke Koepsell, and Kolt Koepsell all scored ten-points for Howard as well. Nicolas Marshall scored 20-points for White River in the contest.

### No. 2 De Smet 40 No. 3 Castlewood 37

De Smet edged past Castlewood 40-37 on Friday night, and the Bulldogs, the three-time defending state champs, are returning to the 'B' title game. Tom Aughenbaugh led De Smet with 12-points. George Jense, who was the hero in the quarterfinal game, dropped 11-points in the contest. Castlewood's leading scorer was Jamison Keszler, who finished with 14-points.

## Consolation Semifinals

### No. 4 Wessington Springs vs No. 8 Viborg-Hurley

Wessington Springs defeated Viborg-Hurley 52-39 on Friday afternoon in Aberdeen during the consolation semifinals. As a team, the Spartans shot 41% from the field in the contest. Parker Graff led Wessington Springs in scoring with 18-points. Blake Larson also contributed with 16-points for the Spartans in the win. Viborg-Hurley was led by Brady Schroedermeier, who scored 17-points. Nick Hanson also had 15-points for the Cougars and led the team in rebounds with nine.

### No.7 Gregory 65 No. 6 Leola/Frederick Area 64

After suffering a heartbreaking loss to De Smet in the quarterfinals, Gregory bounced back to defeat Leola/Frederick Area 65-64 on Friday. As a team, the Gorillas shot 49%. Danie Mitchell and Cruz Klundt both dropped 18-points for Gregory. The Titans were led in scoring by Brayd Sumpton, who scored 18-points and grabbed four rebounds.

## Saturday Schedule

### Class AA

7th: No. 4 Sioux Falls Roosevelt vs No. 6 Huron  
– 12 pm CT

5th: No. 7 Watertown vs No. 8 Sioux Falls Jefferson  
– 1:45 pm CT

3rd: No. 2 Harrisburg vs No. 5 Sioux Falls Washington  
– 6 pm CT

Championship: No. 1 Mitchell vs No. 3 Brandon Valley  
– 7:45 pm CT

### Class A

7th: No. 8 Vermillion vs No. 7 Groton Area – 12  
pm MT

5th: No. 4 Pine Ridge vs No. 3 Sioux Valley – 1:45  
pm MT

3rd: No. 5 Dakota Valley vs No. 6 Rapid City Christian  
– 6 pm MT

Championship: No. 1 Sioux Falls Christian vs No.  
2 Hamlin – 7:45 pm MT

### Class B

7th: No. 6 Leola/Frederick Area vs No. 8 Viborg-Hurley  
– 12 pm CT

5th: No. 4 Wessington Springs vs No. 6 Gregory  
– 1:45 pm CT

3rd: No. 1 White River vs No. 3 Castlewood – 6  
pm CT

Championship: No. 2 De Smet vs No. 5 Howard  
– 7:45 pm CT

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**Dinosaur Park is located at one of the highest points in Rapid City. You can see the Dinosaur from throughout the city. This time around, we went up to Dinosaur Park and took a photo of The Monument complex where the State A Boys Basketball Tournament is being played.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**The Groton Area cheerleaders were having a little fun with the fans at halftime as fans were throwing the pom poms to see if they could make a basket.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**The Groton Area cheerleaders were in perfect form during the playing of the school song.**

(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**The team were in a huddle prior to the start of the game.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

## State A Tournament

### Johnson had double-double in consolation loss to Sioux Valley

Ryder Johnson had a double-double in Groton Area's 67-58 loss to Sioux Valley in the consolation round of the State A Tournament.

The game was tied five times at 10, 12, 20 and 27 with the last time at 29 late in the second quarter. Groton Area did have a 17-16 lead early in the second quarter.

Sioux Valley's Alec Squires used his height to power in nearly half of the Cossack's points. Squires was 10 of 15 in shooting and was 11 of 13 from the line, scoring 31 points and had a double-double with 12 rebounds.

Groton Area came to within one at 51-50 with 4:51 left in the game, and had chances to take the lead. Sioux Valley led at the quarterstops at 14-12, 35-28 and 51-45.

Johnson led the Tigers with 19 points and 10 rebounds while Keegen Tracy had 17 points, Lane Tietz 11, Jacob Zak nine and Colby Dunker two.

Besides Squires, Maxwell Engebretson added 13 points for Sioux Valley with Jace Christensen having eight, Hudson Ruesink and Boden Schiller each had seven points and Brock Christopherson added one point.

In two-pointers, Groton Area was 11 of 24 for 46 percent while Sioux Valley was 20 of 31 for 65 percent. In three-pointers, Groton Area was seven of 26 for 27 percent and Sioux Valley was two of 13 for 15 percent. From the line, Groton Area was 15 of 17 for 88 percent off of Sioux Valley's 18 team fouls. Sioux Valley was 21 of 27 for 78 percent off of Groton Area's 24 team fouls with Ringgenberg and Sippel both fouling out.

Sioux Valley controlled the boards, 33-24. Groton Area had 15 turnovers with 12 of them being steals. Sioux Valley had 17 turnovers with 10 of them being steals, led by Tietz and Johnson with three each. Tietz had four of the team's nine assists. Gage Sippel had two blocks while Zak and Johnson each had one.

Groton Area will play for seventh place today against Vermillion at 1 p.m. central time.



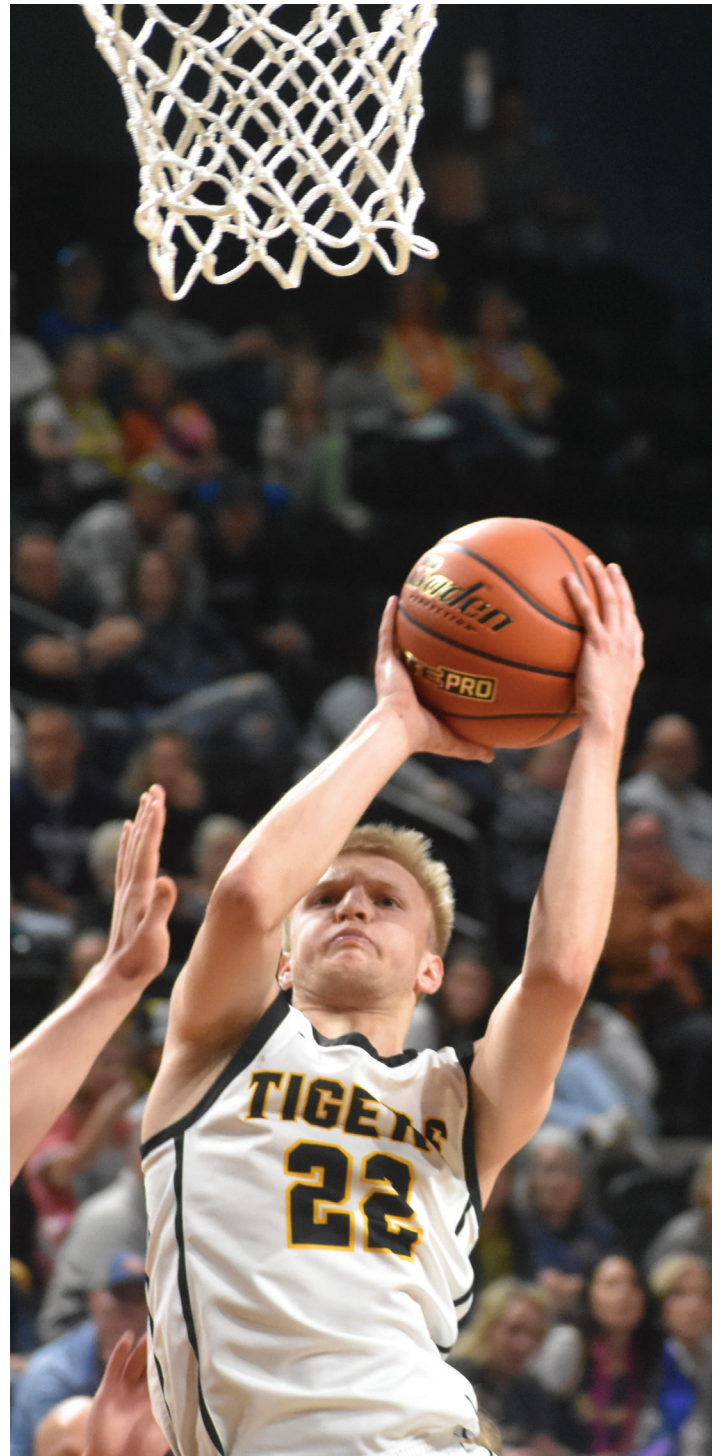
**Ryder Johnson fought for this basket among the tall Sioux Valley players.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Senior Jacob Zak directs traffic as the Tigers run the offense.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Senior Jacob Zak makes a quick move to the basket.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Senior Lane Tietz made this basket to give Groton Area its only lead of the game at 17-16 early in the second quarter. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



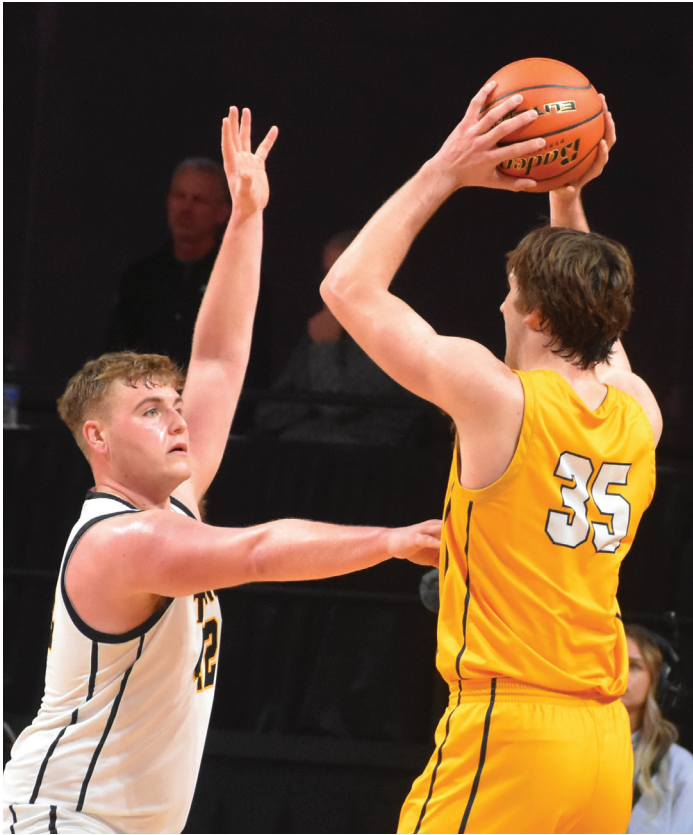
Senior Lane Tietz breaks away from his defender as he goes to the basket. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

Keegen Tracy looks to pass off the ball as his defender closes in on him. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**Senior Logan Ringgenberg tries to keep Sioux Valley's Alec Squires away from the basket.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Taylor Diegel gets ready to pass off the ball in front of Sioux Valley's Hudsyn Ruesink.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Gage Sippel looks to hand off the ball.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Gage Sippel and Teylor Diegel help Ryder Johnson off the floor after he took a fall on the floor.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**Despite being double teamed, senior Colby Dunker got past these defenders to score and tie the game at 10 early in the game.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Senior Logan Ringgenberg gets a hug after he fouled out from Coach Brian Dolan.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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**Kassen Keough**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Turner Thompson**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Coach Brian Dolan probably wishes he could pull a trick out of a hat.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Jayden Schwan**  
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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It was red, white and blue dress-up day for the Groton Area fans and they were necklaces that lite up. They were very visible during the introductions when the main lights were turned off. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

**Good Luck Tigers from . . .**  
**Allied Climate Professionals**  
**Avantara**  
**Bary Keith at Harr Motors**  
**Basekamp Lodge**  
**BK Custom Ts & More**  
**Blocker Construction**  
**Dacotah Bank**  
**Farmers Union Coop**  
**Fliehs Sales & Service**  
**Full Circle Ag**  
**Greg Johnson Construction**  
**Groton Ag Partners**  
**Groton American Legion**  
**Groton Chamber**

**Groton Chiropractic Clinic**  
**Groton Dairy Queen**  
**Hanlon Brothers**  
**Heartland Energy**  
**James Valley**  
**Telecommunications**  
**John Sieh Agency**  
**Jungle Lanes & Lounge**  
**Ken's Food Fair**  
**KR Body Shop**  
**Krueger Brothers**  
**Lavish Luxury Salon Suite**  
**Lori's Pharmacy**  
**Merry Lone Real Estate**  
**MJ's Sinclair**  
**Northeast Chiropractic Clinic**

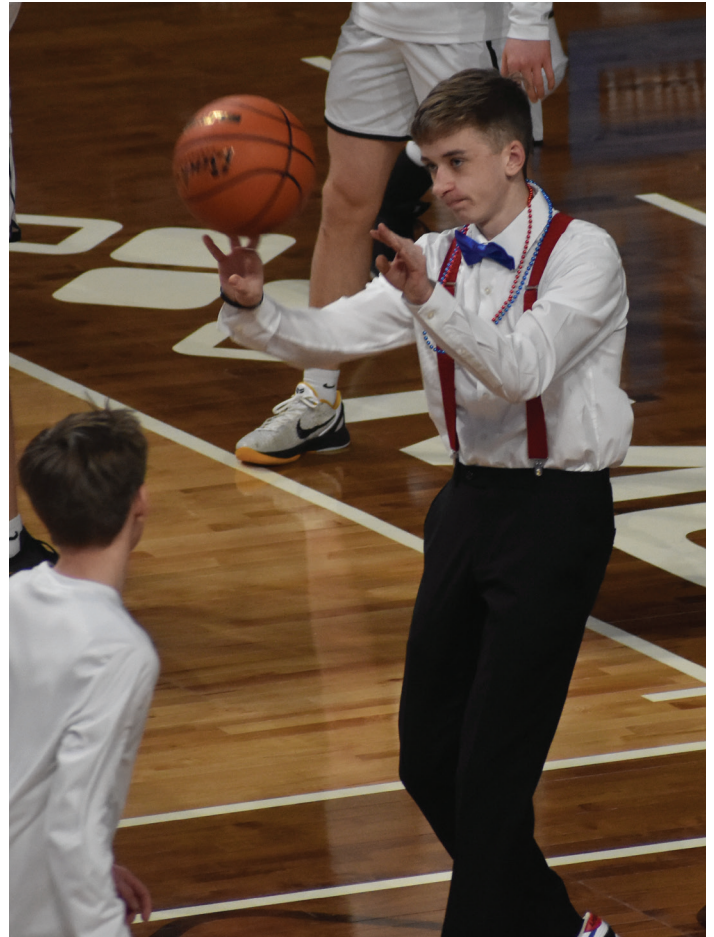
**Paetznick-Garness Funeral**  
**Chapel**  
**Poet**  
**Rix Farms/R&M Farms**  
**S & S Lumber**  
**Spanier Harvesting**  
**& Trucking**  
**Sun & Sea Travel Co.**  
**by Becah Fliehs**  
**The Groton Independent**  
**The Meat House of Andover**  
**Weber Landscaping**  
**Weismantel Insurance**  
**Agency**  
**Witte Exteriors LLC**

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**Lane Tietz doing his warm up drills.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Braxton Imrie helping with warmups.** (Photo by Paul Kosel)



**Emery Blackwood of Groton poises with her two favorite Tiger Basketball players at the State A post game get together in Rapid City. Lane Tietz on the left and Colby Dunker on the right.** (Photos by Bruce Babcock)



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Many fans showed up at the hospitality room after the Friday basketball game. The gathering was at the Minneluzahan Senior Center near The Monument. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



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**Groton 8th graders dress the "USA" theme for the 2nd round of the Boys State A Basketball Tournament. L-R Braden fliehs, Ryder Schelle, Alex ablen, Thomas schuster, John Bisbee, and Kason Oswald. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)**



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **New group aims to refer carbon pipeline law to voters**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 15, 2024 5:50 PM**

Voters could be asked to reject a new state law regulating carbon dioxide pipelines.

The law was passed during the recently concluded legislative session and signed by Gov. Kristi Noem. Supporters said it will implement new protections for landowners while providing a path forward for the pipeline project.

Opponents view it as a capitulation to the pipeline company. Some of those opponents announced Friday that they've organized an effort to refer the law to voters.

"What we're really concerned about here is the loss of the rights we are guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution as well as the state constitution," said Rick Bonander, whose property in rural Valley Springs would be crossed by the pipeline.

The bill came in response to an \$8 billion pipeline proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions, which is headquartered in Iowa. The pipeline would collect carbon dioxide from 57 ethanol plants in South Dakota and neighboring states and pipe it to North Dakota for underground storage.

The project would take advantage of up to \$18 billion in federal tax credits that incentivize the removal of heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Some ethanol backers have said the project is needed to reduce carbon emissions from ethanol production and keep the corn-based fuel viable in a future where governments and consumers are demanding lower climate impacts.

Summit plans to apply again for a permit in South Dakota after its initial application was denied by the Public Utilities Commission. The denial was partly due to conflicts with county ordinances that require minimum distances known as "setbacks" between pipelines and other features.

The project has faced opposition from some landowners concerned about property rights and safety, including health risks associated with potential leaks.

Bonander and others recently founded the South Dakota Property Rights and Local Control Alliance to seek a repeal of the recently adopted law. The alliance needs petition signatures from 17,508 registered South Dakota voters by May 7 to refer the law to the Nov. 5 general election.

#### **What the law says**

The law is the result of this past legislative session's Senate Bill 201. Bonander said the bill undermines local control by preempting local regulations. Additionally, he alleges the bill encompasses multiple subjects, violating a single-subject rule.

House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Fort Pierre, was the prime sponsor of the bill in the House. He said the legislation sticks to a single subject: pipeline regulations. He added that if opponents read the bill, they'll discover there's no "bogyman" in it.

"There are just solid landowner protections and some extra money for the counties and farmers," Mortenson said.

Senate Bill 201 allows counties to collect a pipeline surcharge of up to \$1 per linear foot, with at least half of the surcharge allocated for property tax relief for affected landowners. The remaining funds could be used at the county's discretion. Companies also must submit an agricultural impact mitigation plan and bury pipelines at least 4 feet deep.

The bill mandates public disclosure of modeling to gauge the impact of a pipeline rupture and ensures

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the pipeline companies, rather than landowners, are liable for damages caused by the projects.

In response to controversy about out-of-state contractors working for the pipeline company, one of the bills says a land agent must be a pipeline facility employee, a resident of the state, or a real estate agent licensed in the state.

## Setback language

The most controversial part of the new law is its perceived effect on the Public Utilities Commission and local setback laws. Prior state law allowed the commission to overrule counties' pipeline setbacks, although the commission has so far declined to do that.

The bill was amended several times. An early version would have taken setback authority away from counties and given it solely to the state. A later version left authority with counties but said the Public Utilities Commission "must," rather than "may" overrule any overly burdensome setbacks.

"It handcuffs the PUC," Bonander alleged. "It replaces the words like 'may,' with 'must.'"

The final, approved version of the legislation says the commission's permitting process overrules local setbacks and other local rules regarding pipelines, unless the commission requires compliance with any of those local regulations. That means local rulemaking still exists, and the decision to make a carbon pipeline company comply with those setbacks still rests with the Public Utilities Commission.

Finally, the bill codifies a "Landowner Bill of Rights" that includes references to rights in other state laws, including two other pipeline-related laws passed during the most recent legislative session.

## Bill's backers respond

The multi-year carbon pipeline debate has spawned a complex array of alliances and groups.

One group is the South Dakota Ag Alliance. Its co-founders, Rob Skjonsberg and Jason Glodt, are prominent figures in South Dakota politics.

The two lobbied for Senate Bill 201's passage during the recent legislative session. Soon after the South Dakota Property Rights and Local Control Alliance announced its intent to refer the law to voters, South Dakota Ag Alliance shared a press release calling the group an "ill-advised campaign committee."

"Senate Bill 201 is a major victory for landowners, but if a referendum is successful the landowners will ultimately lose and Summit Carbon will still win because pipelines already preempt county ordinances," Glodt said.

If the law is referred to voters, it would join two measures already on the ballot and up to eight others that petitioners are circulating.

## Johnson tells seniors that changes to Social Security and Medicare will be needed

### Congressman fields wide range of questions at town hall meeting

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MARCH 15, 2024 4:39 PM

SIOUX FALLS — Three changes should be considered to prevent Social Security and Medicare from running out of money, Republican U.S. Representative Dusty Johnson said Thursday during a town hall meeting at a retirement community.

Those changes are raising the age when future recipients can start getting benefits, raising the maximum amount of income that's taxed for Social Security and Medicare, and reducing future benefits for people who made higher incomes.

"If you're willing to be open-minded about how to turn those three dials in different ways, we can solve this problem," he told the crowd of seniors at Dow Rummel Village.

The Social Security program collects payroll taxes from workers and pays benefits to retirees, and to



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those who can't work due to a disability. Medicare is a federal health care insurance program for people 65 and over, and the disabled.

The Social Security Trustees Report indicates the program's funds will be depleted by 2034, reducing benefits to 78% of current levels due to a declining worker-to-beneficiary ratio. Similarly, Medicare's escalating costs threaten its sustainability.

"Most politicians won't tell you what I just told you," Johnson said. "Both of the guys running for president right now are saying they refuse to talk about doing those things, and I get it, that's the politically popular thing to say, but the plans that they have laid out, which is to change nothing, ever, guarantees — guarantees — insolvency of both Medicare and Social Security within the decade. Failing to act is a guaranteed failure, and I just can't accept that."

Johnson added that nobody in Congress wants to cut Social Security benefits for people receiving them today or anyone likely to receive them in the next 10 years.

"I think a lot of the controversy is manufactured," he said.

Johnson, 47, followed that up by adding he'd be comfortable raising the age when people start receiving benefits for his generation.

"I will likely live 20 years longer than my grandparents; I am not offended by the idea that I might need to work 18 more months to secure 18 more years of retirement," Johnson said. "That's the kind of adjustment to the math that can make a lot of actuarial problems go away."

Johnson has served as the state's lone U.S. representative since 2019 and is up for reelection in November.

The town hall meeting was attended by about 100 residents. Topics ranged from concerns about the nation's southern border to school shootings.

## Border security

"Legal immigration is a beautiful thing," Johnson said. "Legal immigration is the secret sauce that has powered American exceptionalism for 247 years. So anything I might say that is negative about illegal immigration, I'm not trying to run down legal immigration, which is a blessing to our country."

Johnson said reinstating the "Remain in Mexico" policy would reduce illegal border crossings by up to 80%. He said that was the reduction when it was enacted five years ago.

"It was like flipping a switch," he said.

The Remain in Mexico policy, initiated under former president and current candidate Donald Trump's administration, required asylum seekers at the border to wait in Mexico for their U.S. court proceedings.

Johnson said that there are things Biden should do differently, but he is frustrated to hear people calling for a president to act like "a dictator."

"Whether Republican or Democrat, Congress should be acting, rather than us constantly looking to presidents to use their pen to run this country with executive order," Johnson said.

He's optimistic Congress will pass some border legislation.

"If we don't get something done within the next four weeks, and I think there's a chance we will, shame on us," Johnson said.

A town hall attendee asked about the bipartisan immigration deal that failed in the Senate last month after Trump came out against it.

The bill would have raised the bar for migrants claiming asylum, clarified the White House's use of parole authority to temporarily grant protections to migrants, created a procedure to shut down the border at particularly active times, and ended the practice of allowing migrants to live in the United States while they wait for their cases to be heard by an immigration judge.

Johnson said the bill lacked some key provisions, such as fully reinstating the Remain in Mexico policy and building more wall along the border.

"And so, it really got trapped into this negative feedback loop where people really struggled to see whether or not that plan was good enough," he said. "And as a result, it's not going anywhere, we need a different plan, and we do need a plan."

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## Ukraine aid

Johnson said for only 5% of the U.S. military's annual budget, and with no American soldiers on the ground, the U.S. can help Ukraine hold back Russia's invasion.

However, he said that as long as the U.S. southern border is in crisis, it will remain difficult to get enough Republican members to support further Ukraine aid.

"People were rightly concerned about just blank checks rolling out of the federal treasury to another country," he said. "But what I still think we should be able to get a broad, bipartisan consensus in this country on is the idea of providing lethal aid, bullets, munitions, missiles to people who are trying to defend their own country from a literal invader."

The Senate has passed a \$95 billion aid package for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, with South Dakota Republican Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds both voting yes. Johnson said he hopes the House will vote on it.

"Anybody who thinks Vladimir Putin is a good guy is profoundly, deeply, dangerously wrong," he said. "Vladimir Putin means our country ill will."

## Vote against infrastructure bill

As of May 2023, the \$13 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Law had allocated \$1.5 billion in funding to South Dakota with over 215 projects identified for funding.

Johnson voted no, but not because he thinks infrastructure is unimportant.

"Rather than continue our country's responsible history of paying for infrastructure, we set up a fiscal cliff, whereby we scooped up a bunch of unspent COVID dollars, that was fine, but rather than use those one-time dollars for one-time things, we put them into the base of infrastructure funding," Johnson said.

## School shootings

When asked how he is helping to prevent school shootings, Johnson said there is something profoundly wrong with the country. He said the family unit and churches are weakened institutions.

"I know that when we see 12 people killed, in any venue, sporting venue, music venue, education, it hollows us out," he said. "And I do want to care about those 12 people, those are lives that should have never been lost. But I'm starting to tell you, the carnage is bigger than that."

Johnson pointed to the combined toll of fatal drug overdoses and suicides, which he estimated at 200,000. The U.S. had 109,000 drug overdose deaths and 50,000 suicides in 2022.

"The carnage is not 12, the carnage is 200,000, year in and year out," he said. "And by all means, let's talk about solutions that impact the 12, but let's also make sure that we're talking about solutions that save the 200,000."

In 2023, school shootings in the U.S. led to 21 deaths, of which 15 were students and six were employees. Additionally, 42 people were injured. Throughout the year, there were 38 school shootings.

Johnson said the nation needs to invest more federal funding into substance abuse and mental health programs.

## TikTok

Johnson recently voted yes when the House passed a bill that would require the Chinese owner of TikTok to sell the American version of the app or face a national ban.

He said there is a stark contrast between the content available on TikTok in China versus that accessible to American audiences, particularly children.

Johnson said Chinese students "are fed content that is virtuous; about, 'you should be doing your homework, you should be eating well, you should be getting exercise.' American kids are fed content about why they should distrust their government."

Johnson said the app is controlled by a foreign adversary.

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"We would never have allowed the Soviets to purchase the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, the Wall Street Journal, WNAX Radio, and the CBS Evening News," he said. "We would not have allowed it."

## Get things done

Johnson said the narrative that Congress accomplishes nothing is false, and driven by media that emphasizes conflict over day-to-day governing.

"We get that, it's conflict that makes for a good story," Johnson said. "But every single week when we're out in Washington, D.C., there are bills that pass out of the U.S. House with a couple of hundred Democratic votes and a couple of hundred Republican votes."

Johnson added that he thinks Congress should accomplish more, but wanted to make the point so the residents "don't lose too much faith in our government."

He said politicians are uncomfortable criticizing their party, but in certain cases it's necessary.

"I think getting rid of the speaker of the House, allowing eight people of my party to work with everybody in the other party to throw out the Republican speaker, was a big mistake," he said. "I voted against it. I think it put us in a terrible disarray. I think it caused us to stop some of the momentum we were making on the kinds of issues we've all been talking about."

## Pipeline protest trial ends, ruling still months out

State, federal authorities at odds over \$38 million in costs

BY: MARY STEURER - MARCH 15, 2024 10:30 AM

There was no answer to the \$38 million question as a four-week trial over the cost of Dakota Access Pipeline protests ended Thursday.

No closing arguments were presented. A ruling from U.S. District Court Judge Dan Traynor is still months away, and will follow additional summary documents from attorneys.

Attorneys for North Dakota argue the actions of federal agencies escalated and extended the length of the protests, while also withholding resources from state and local law enforcement.

The state is asking for \$38 million from the United States as compensation for costs it claims were incurred policing the demonstrations.

The United States has argued that North Dakota is exaggerating those costs, that the federal government responded to the demonstrations the best it could and its actions did not intensify the protests.

The trial closed with the recorded deposition of Scott Davis, who at the time of the protests was the executive director of the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission and a Mandan city commissioner.

Protesters descended on south central North Dakota in 2016 and 2017 in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, which opposed the pipeline out of concerns it infringed on tribal land and would endanger the tribe's water supply.

Davis described the difficulty of trying to coordinate protest response with tribal leadership, police officials and the pipeline company, Energy Transfer Partners.

"There were times where the pipeline didn't want to hear what law enforcement had to say," he said.

Davis said, at the request of law enforcement leaders, he asked Energy Transfer Partners to temporarily pause construction of the pipeline.

Police didn't have the resources to ensure the safety of protesters and construction workers, he said. They hoped delaying work on the project would keep the protests manageable until more law enforcement personnel were available.

According to Davis, the pipeline company didn't go for it.

"I'm sure they were on a timeline to build and so forth, I get that," Davis said. "But public safety-wise, people are going to get hurt."

During the demonstrations, there were times Davis personally approached protesters and tried to convince them to go home. He got the sense they felt a sense of purpose at the camps — something that

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may have been difficult for them to leave behind, he said.

"I would assume that a lot of them really strongly felt that by staying here, seeing this through and not giving up, that ultimately this pipeline would never be constructed," Davis said.

The pipeline, completed in 2017, carries oil from North Dakota's Bakken oilfield to Illinois.

The head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs law enforcement arm testified also this week for the United States that the agency's response to the Dakota Access Pipeline protests was largely limited by jurisdiction.

Darren Cruzan, who led the BIA's Office of Justice Services at the time of the protests, said officers did not have jurisdiction north of the Standing Rock Reservation. The largest encampment of pipeline opponents was north of the Cannonball River, just outside the boundary for the reservation.

Witnesses for the state involved in North Dakota's handling of the DAPL protests claimed the state went to great lengths to recruit more federal law enforcement support, but were mostly unsuccessful. Several raised questions about the level of attention and resources federal agencies, including the BIA, devoted to addressing the demonstrations.

About 25% of the 20 BIA law enforcement positions at Standing Rock were vacant at the time of the protest, Cruzan testified this week. BIA officers from other areas were brought in to help, but at most the staffing was 40 to 45 officers, he said, adding that they also had responsibility for the entire reservation, which straddles the border of North Dakota and South Dakota.

The agency's role included staffing checkpoints on Highway 1806 at the request of state officials to gather information about the number of people and what was going into the camp.

From Feb. 6, 2017, through March 12, 2017, additional Department of Interior law enforcement officials from the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and other Interior agencies deployed staff to assist with the protests, Cruzan testified. That added an additional 50 to 60 officers, he said.

Attorneys from North Dakota highlighted an email from a Department of Justice employee that Cruzan received and expressed confusion about, according to the exhibit.

The Department of Justice conciliation specialist wrote in September 2016 that she had conducted self marshal training in the protest camp and she was asking for equipment for security volunteers in the camp. She listed the needs of the volunteers including all-weather outerwear, walkie-talkies, boots and other equipment.

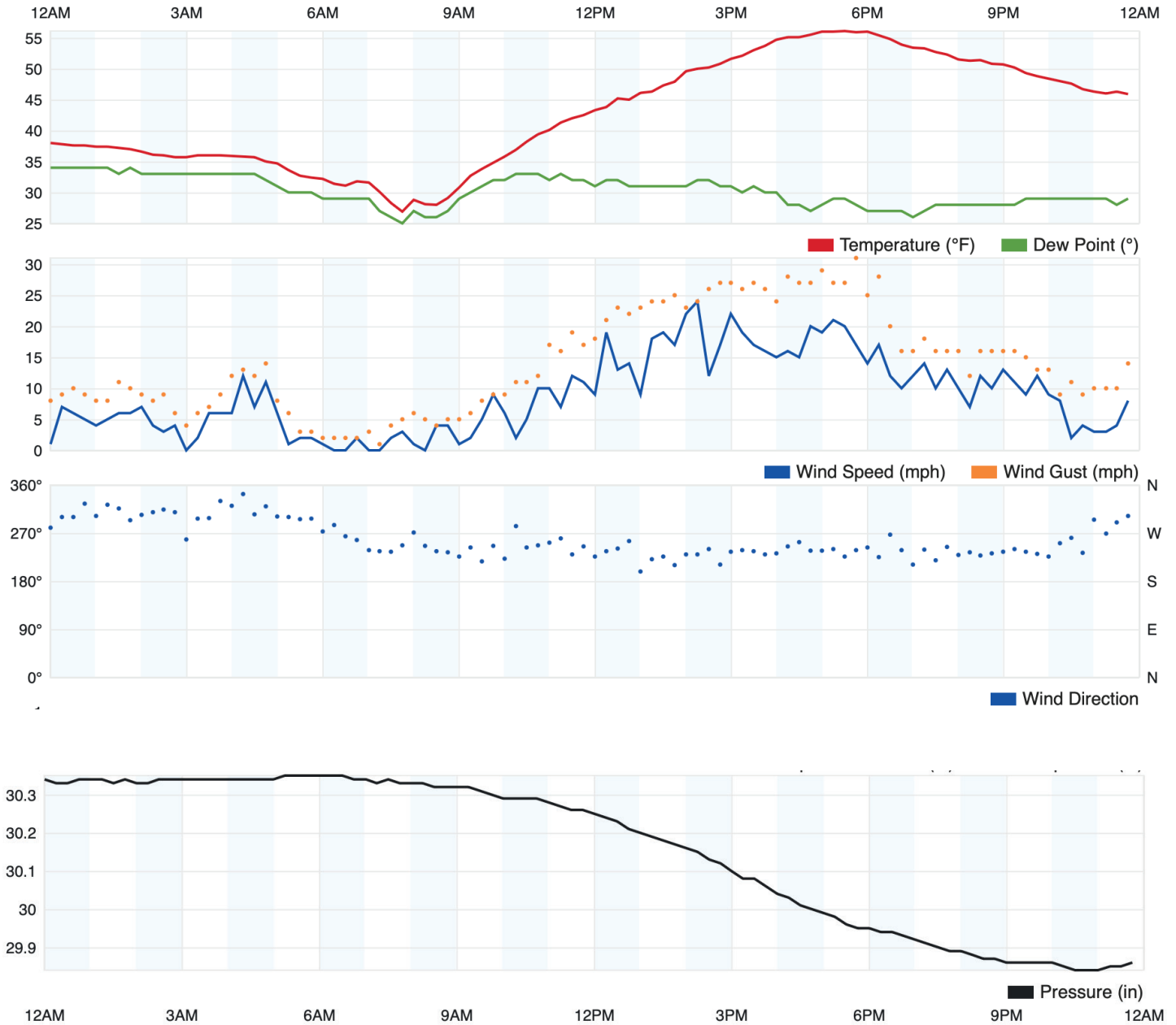
Traynor questioned why someone at the Department of Justice was taking people's shoe sizes during the protest and referred to the email as "absurdity."

This story was originally published by the North Dakota Monitor. Like South Dakota Searchlight, it's part of States Newsroom, a nonprofit news network supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. North Dakota Monitor maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor Amy Dalrymple for questions: [info@northdakotamonitor.com](mailto:info@northdakotamonitor.com). Follow North Dakota Monitor on Facebook and Twitter.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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**Today**





20%

Slight Chance  
Rain/Snow and  
Breezy

**High: 45 °F**

**Tonight**




20%

Slight Chance  
Snow and  
Blustery

**Low: 20 °F**


**Sunday**



Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy

**High: 33 °F**


**Sunday  
Night**



Mostly Clear


**Low: 13 °F**

**Monday**



Sunny then  
Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy


**High: 51 °F**



## Fire Danger Threats Today


March 16, 2024  
3:24 AM

**Today**  
*Low to Upper 40s*  
Northwest Winds  
30 - 40 mph




**Sunday Morning**  
*Around 20 Degrees*

**Sunday**  
*Upper 20s to Upper 30s*  
Northwest Winds  
25 - 35 mph



Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	3/16 Sat					
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	31	36	35	35	35	26
Britton	32	37	38	39	36	29
Brookings	25	33	35	35	32	24
Chamberlain	25	33	36	36	31	22
Clark	33	36	36	37	33	28
Eagle Butte	31	33	37	39	39	28
Ellendale	33	40	43	41	39	30
Eureka	35	39	40	40	39	29
Gettysburg	33	35	37	39	38	28
Huron	28	32	35	37	33	26
Kennebec	25	35	39	40	37	25
Milbank	31	32	33	35	31	26
Miller	26	33	35	37	36	25
Mobridge	32	35	38	38	37	29
Murdo	24	36	38	40	39	25
Pierre	21	29	32	37	36	24
Redfield	29	35	35	36	35	26
Sisseton	38	35	36	37	33	30
Watertown	32	33	33	35	33	26
Webster	38	39	39	41	38	33
Wheaton	31	33	36	37	32	28



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Despite cooler temperatures, the fire weather threat continues thanks to northwest winds of 30 to 40mph. This push of cold air continues into Sunday which will be the coldest day during this snap, with milder temperatures coming back next week.

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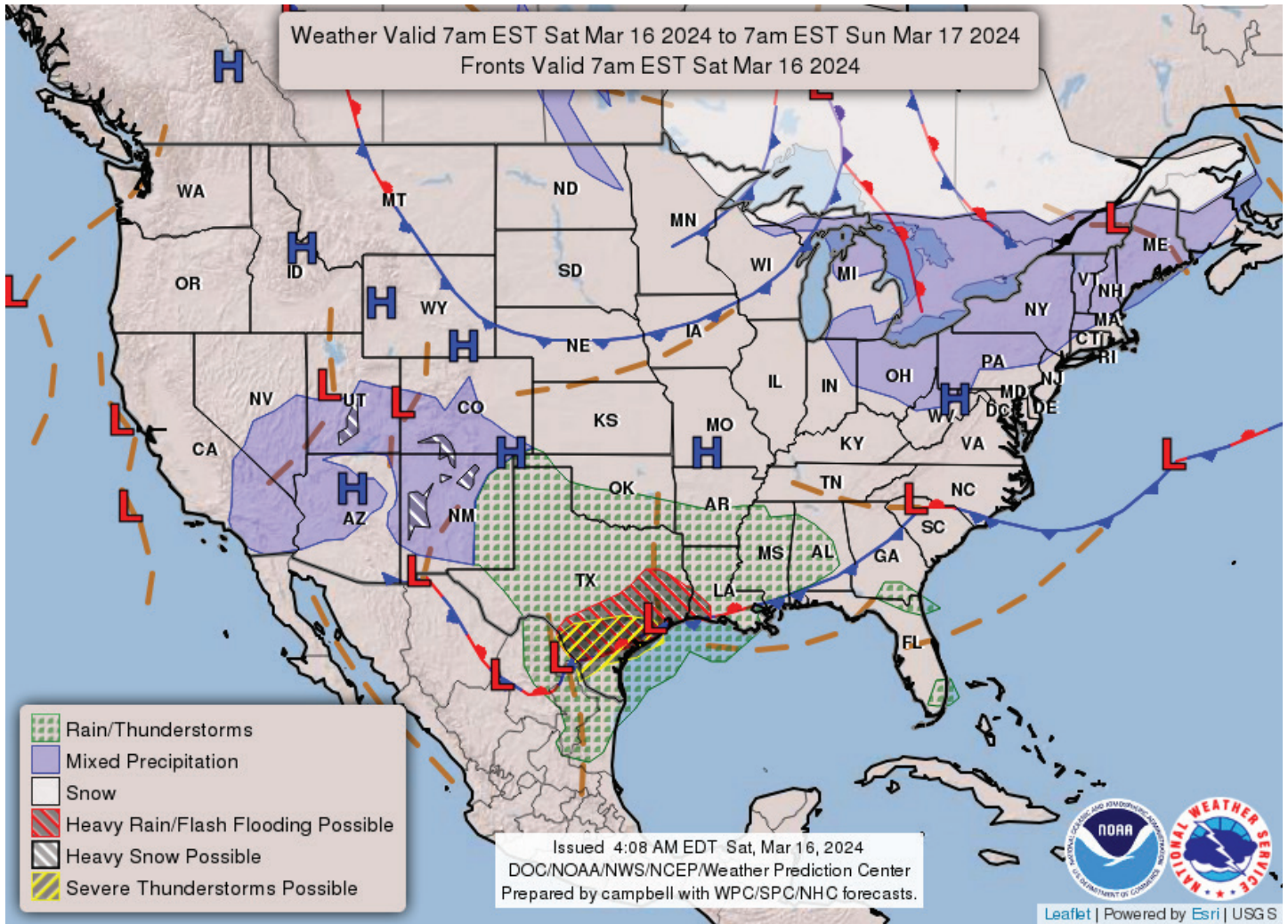
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 56 °F at 5:13 PM**  
**Low Temp: 26 °F at 7:40 AM**  
**Wind: 31 mph at 5:45 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 12 hours, 01 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 81 in 2012  
Record Low: -17 in 1906  
Average High: 42  
Average Low: 20  
Average Precip in March.: 0.40  
Precip to date in March: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 1.57  
Precip Year to Date: 0.07  
Sunset Tonight: 7:41:41 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:38:00 am



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## Today in Weather History

March 16, 2012: Temperatures reaching eighty degrees or higher in March across central and northeast South Dakota is a rare occurrence, and for this to occur in mid-March is exceedingly rare. On March 16th, several locations across the area set record highs by topping the 80-degree mark, including Aberdeen, Mobridge, and Pierre. Sisseton and Watertown also set records for March 16th. Aberdeen topped out at 81 degrees, Mobridge reached 83 degrees, with 86 degrees at Pierre.

1885: On this date through the 21st, Pointe-des-Monts, Quebec Canada, received 98 inches of snowfall.

1942: A deadly tornado outbreak occurred over the Central and Southern US on March 16-17th. The tornado outbreak killed 153 people and injured at least 1,284. The best estimate indicates this event contained 13 F3 tornadoes, 6 F4s, and one F5. The F5 tornado occurred north of Peoria, Illinois, in the towns of Alta, Chillicothe, before crossing the Illinois River and striking the town of Lacon. A quarter of the homes in Lacon were destroyed, and debris was carried for 25 miles.

1975 - A single storm brought 119 inches of snow to Crater Lake, O,R establishing a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A small but rare tornado touched down perilously close to Disneyland in Anaheim CA. (Storm Data)

1987 - Softball size hail caused millions of dollars damage to automobiles at Del Rio TX. Three persons were injured when hailstones crashed through a shopping mall skylight. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - A winter storm produced heavy snow in the Central Rockies. Winds gusted to 80 mph at Centerville UT. Eighteen cities in the southeastern U.S. reported new record low temperatures for the date, including Tallahassee FL with a reading of 24 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - A winter storm brought heavy snow and high winds to the southwestern U.S. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Lovelock NV, Salt Lake City UT, and Fort Carson CO. Snow fell at a rate of three inches per hour in the Lake Tahoe area of Nevada. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail and damaging winds from northwest Florida to western South Carolina. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 75 mph at Floridatown FL. Sixteen cities across the northeastern quarter of the nation reported record high temperatures for the date. The afternoon high of 78 degrees at Burlington VT smashed their previous record for the date by 23 degrees. New York City reported a record high of 82 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### ACCIDENTS OR APPOINTMENTS

A rough-and-ready cowboy applied for a large life insurance policy. Worried about his lifestyle, the agent was careful and cautious to ask questions to make sure that the cowboy would not take any foolish chances.

"Have you had any accidents?" asked the agent.

"No, not really," he answered. "Come to think of it, though, a rattlesnake bit me and a horse kicked me once."

"Well," questioned the agent, "aren't those accidents?"

"Oh no," he responded. "They did it on purpose!"

There are no accidents in the life of the Christian - only appointments from God to let us know He is with us and working out His will in our lives. Fortunately, God is always working in "everything," not as though He is bored and wants something to do, but because of His love for us. Many things that happen to us are not good in themselves, but are good for us. Though not obvious at the time things "happen," they ultimately bring us closer to God.

God, through His power and love, is able to take every event and turn it into an experience that will fulfill His purpose for our lives. Wherever we are and whatever occurs in our lives is because of one singly, significant fact: Christ is in us preparing us for that time when we will be with Him. We need a heavenly "mindset" that enables us to see beyond the moment and into our future with Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to develop an eternal vision that allows us to see beyond what is: You are always active in our lives, preparing us for life with You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Romans 8:28



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: 03.15.24

13 25 50 51 66 6

MegaPlier: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$875,000,000**

NEXT DRAW:

[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: 16 Hrs 23 Mins 8  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.15.24

13 16 18 19 34 5

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 38 Mins 8  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

3 18 31 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$21,000**

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 38 Mins 7  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 03.13.24

2 25 64 65 67 5

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 7  
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: 17 Hrs 7 Mins 8  
Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

## Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

SDHSAA State Playoffs

Class AA

Consolation Semifinal

Sioux Falls Jefferson 60, Sioux Falls Roosevelt 38

Watertown 54, Huron 51

Semifinal

Brandon Valley 61, Harrisburg 52

Mitchell 72, Sioux Falls Washington 51

Class A

Consolation Semifinal

Pine Ridge 79, Vermillion 63

Sioux Valley 67, Groton 58

Semifinal

Hamlin 62, Rapid City Christian 45

Sioux Falls Christian 50, Dakota Valley 48

Class B

Consolation Semifinal

Gregory 65, Leola-Frederick High School 64

Wessington Springs 52, Viborg-Hurley 39

Semifinal

DeSmet 40, Castlewood 37

Howard 48, White River 42

## Arizona legislation to better regulate rehab programs targeted by Medicaid scams is moving forward

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — A Navajo state senator said Friday she's hoping for final approval of her bill to tighten regulations for rehab facilities amid widespread fraud that has bilked hundreds of millions in Arizona Medicaid dollars and scammed hundreds of Native Americans seeking help for addictions.

Senate Bill 1655, sponsored by Sen. Theresa Hatathlie, was unanimously approved by the Senate this week and sent to the House, where it received a first reading and was assigned to the Health and Human Services Committee.

Hathalie said she anticipates a vote by the full House could come as soon as Thursday, adding that she urges constituents to voice their support for the legislation.

"This bill will ensure checks and balances. This issue has been going on long before the pandemic, and Native people have been largely affected," said Hatathlie, a Democrat from Coal Mine Mesa on the Navajo Nation who represents Arizona's 6th District. "Passage of Senate Bill 1655 will start a measure of resiliency and healing. It will most importantly communicate to criminals they are not welcome in Arizona!"

The legislative effort comes the same week that relatives of two Native American men who died while in Phoenix rehab programs sued Arizona's Medicaid program and Department of Health Services, alleging insufficient oversight.

The Attorney General's Office said it would not comment on the pending civil action as it continues to

prosecute scores of cases against those programs.

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs and Attorney General Kris Mayes announced in May that they were stepping up an investigation of alleged fraudulent Medicaid billing that began before they took office in 2023.

The charges were submitted mostly through the American Indian Health Program, a Medicaid health plan that allows providers to bill directly for reimbursement of services rendered to Native Americans and Alaska Natives.

Mayes told Navajo leaders in a report this year that 72 individuals and entities had been indicted so far, 44 of them since she took office, and over \$90 million in property and vehicles relating to those cases were seized.

The Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System has instituted tighter controls, including a six-month moratorium for enrolling new behavioral health clinics for Medicaid billing. The scams' far-reaching consequences became better known through warnings sounded by state and tribal governments outside Arizona.

Hatathlie's proposed law would increase the civil penalty per incidence of noncompliance at rehab facilities from up to \$500 to at least \$1,500 daily.

It would also require that patients' family members be notified when they arrive at a facility for an evaluation. Employees of residential facilities would have to undergo fingerprint and background checks.

Crystalyn Curley, speaker of the Navajo Nation Council, showed her support for Hatathlie's bill the day the Senate approved it.

Reva Stewart, a Navajo activist in Phoenix who helps Native Americans return to their reservations after leaving fraudulent rehab programs, said she worries the legislation may not go far enough to shut down the worst unlicensed facilities because it largely focuses on licensed ones.

"We all want a solution to this problem," Stewart said. "I just want to make sure this solution works."

During early Senate hearings, representatives of assisted living and nursing homes and other facilities that could be affected worried that the penalties may be too high for smaller operations.

Hatathlie said facilities will have a 30-day grace period to bring any violations into compliance. The legislation has gone through many revisions in recent weeks and more adjustments are possible, she added.

"This is a big deal; this is a big problem in Arizona," Republican Senate President Warren Petersen said after Tuesday's vote. "If you're a state agency and you're doing something wrong, don't mess with Senator Hatathlie."

## **A new front opens over South Dakota ballot initiatives: withdrawing signatures from petitions**

By JACK DURA Associated Press

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has signed a bill to allow signers of ballot initiative petitions to revoke their signatures — a move opponents decry as a jab at direct democracy and a proposed abortion rights initiative, which would enable voters to protect abortion rights in the state constitution.

The Republican governor signed the bill on Friday. The Republican-led Legislature overwhelmingly passed the bill brought by Republican Rep. Jon Hansen, who leads a group seeking to defeat the proposed initiative. Hansen said he brought the bill to counter misleading or fraudulent initiative tactics, alleging "multiple violations of our laws regarding circulation."

"Inducing somebody into signing a petition through misleading information or fraud, that's not democracy. That's fraud," Hansen said in an interview last month. "This upholds the ideal of democracy, and that is people deciding, one or the other, based on the truth of the matter."

Republican lawmakers have grumbled about South Dakota's initiative process, including Medicaid expansion, which voters approved in 2022.

Democrats tabbed Hansen's bill as "changing the rules in the middle of the game," and called it open to potential abuse, with sufficient laws already on the books to ensure initiatives are run properly.

Opponents also decry the bill's emergency clause, giving it effect upon Noem's signature, denying the opportunity for a referendum. Rick Weiland, who leads the abortion rights initiative, called the bill "another

attack on direct democracy.”

“It’s pretty obvious that our legislature doesn’t respect the will of the voters or this long-held tradition of being able to petition our state government and refer laws that voters don’t like, pass laws that the Legislature refuses to move forward on, and amend our state constitution,” Weiland said.

South Dakota outlaws all abortions but to save the life of the mother.

The bill is “another desperate attempt to throw another hurdle, another roadblock” in the initiative’s path, Weiland said. Initiative opponents have sought to “convince people that they signed something that they didn’t understand,” he said.

If voters approve the proposed initiative, the state would be banned from regulating abortion in the first trimester. Regulations for the second trimester would be allowed “only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman.”

Dakotans for Health has until May 7 to submit about 35,000 valid signatures to make the November ballot. Weiland said they have more than 50,000 signatures, 44,000 of them “internally validated.”

It’s unclear how the new law might affect the initiative. Weiland said he isn’t expecting mass revocations, but will see how the law is implemented.

The law requires signature withdrawal notifications be notarized and delivered by hand or registered mail to the secretary of state’s office before the petition is filed and certified.

## **Colorado man died from pet Gila monster’s venomous bite, autopsy shows**

GOLDEN, Colo. (AP) — A Colorado man who was placed on life support after he was bitten by his pet Gila monster died of complications from the desert lizard’s venom, an autopsy report obtained by The Associated Press on Friday confirmed.

The report also found that heart and liver problems were significant contributing factors in Christopher Ward’s death.

Ward, 34, was taken to a hospital shortly after being bitten by one of his two pet Gila monsters on Feb. 12. His death less than four days later is believed to be the first from a Gila monster in the U.S. in almost a century.

The autopsy, conducted by the Jefferson County Coroner’s Office on Feb. 18, said Ward was bitten for four minutes and wavered in and out of consciousness for about two hours before seeking medical attention. He suffered multiple seizures and acute respiratory failure at the hospital.

Ward’s girlfriend handed over the lizard named Winston and another named Potato to an animal control officer and other officers in the Denver suburb of Lakewood the day after the bite. She told police she had heard something that “didn’t sound right” and entered a room to see Winston latched onto Ward’s hand, according to the animal control officer’s report.

She told officers Ward “immediately began exhibiting symptoms, vomiting several times and eventually passing out and ceasing to breathe,” according to the report. She also said she and Ward bought Winston at a reptile exhibition in Denver in October and Potato from a breeder in Arizona in November. Told that Gila monsters were illegal in Lakewood, the woman told officers she wanted them out of her house as soon as possible, according to the report.

Officers working with the Colorado Department of Natural Resources sent the lizards to Reptile Gardens outside Rapid City, South Dakota. Twenty-six spiders of different species also were taken from the home to a nearby animal shelter.

Gila monsters are venomous reptiles that naturally inhabit parts of the southwestern U.S. and neighboring areas of Mexico. Their bites can cause intense pain and make their victims pass out but normally aren’t deadly.

They are legal to own in most states, easily found through breeders and at reptile shows, and widely regarded for their striking color patterns and typically easygoing personality.

Colorado requires a permit to keep a Gila (pronounced HE-la) monster. Only zoological-type facilities are

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issued such permits, however, and Ward apparently didn't have one for his lizards, Colorado Parks and Wildlife spokesperson Kara Van Hoose said.

Winston may have slipped through the cracks of state enforcement because the lizard was sold at a reptile show. Colorado Department of Natural Resources agents sometimes attend shows to make sure illegal animals aren't for sale.

Before Ward, the last person to die of a Gila monster bite, around 1930, may have had cirrhosis of the liver, said Arizona State University professor Dale DeNardo, a Gila monster enthusiast who has studied the reptiles for decades.

## Cease-fire talks with Israel and Hamas expected to restart

By SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Stalled talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in the war between Israel and Hamas are expected to restart in earnest in Qatar as soon as Sunday, according to Egyptian officials.

The talks would mark the first time both Israeli officials and Hamas leaders joined the indirect negotiations since the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. International mediators had hoped to secure a six-week truce before Ramadan started earlier this week, but Hamas refused any deal that wouldn't lead to a permanent cease-fire in Gaza, a demand Israel rejected.

In recent days, however, both sides have made moves aimed at getting the talks, which never fully broke off, back on track.

Hamas gave mediators a new proposal for a three-stage plan that would end the fighting, according to two Egyptian officials, one who is involved in the talks and a second who was briefed on them. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to reveal the contents of the sensitive discussions.

The first stage would be a six-week cease-fire that would include the release of 35 hostages — women, those who are ill and older people — being held by militants in Gaza in exchange for 350 Palestinian prisoners being held by Israel.

Hamas would also release at least five female soldiers in exchange for 50 prisoners, including some serving long sentences on terror charges, for each soldier. Israeli forces would withdraw from two main roads in Gaza, let displaced Palestinians return to north Gaza, which has been devastated by the fighting, and allow the free flow of aid to the area, the officials said.

Nearly one in three children under 2 years old in the isolated north are suffering acute malnutrition, the U.N. children's agency UNICEF reported Friday.

In the second phase, the two sides would declare a permanent cease-fire and Hamas would free the remaining Israeli soldiers held hostage in exchange for more prisoners, the officials said.

In the third phase, Hamas would hand over the bodies it's holding in exchange for Israel lifting the blockade of Gaza and allowing reconstruction to start, the officials said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the proposal "unrealistic." However, he agreed to send Israeli negotiators to Qatar for more talks.

Those talks were expected to resume Sunday afternoon, though they could get pushed to Monday, the Egyptian officials said.

Netanyahu's government has rejected calls for a permanent cease-fire, insisting it must first fulfill its stated goal of "annihilating Hamas." Netanyahu's office also said Friday he approved military plans to attack Rafah, the southernmost town in Gaza where some 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

The United States and other countries have warned such an operation could be disastrous, but Israel says it plans to push ahead to destroy Hamas battalions stationed there.

Many Palestinians fled to Rafah when Israel began attacking Gaza following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and left another 250 hostage in Gaza.

Netanyahu's office said the Rafah operation would involve the evacuation of the civilian population, but did not give details or a timetable. The military said Wednesday it planned to direct civilians to "humani-

tarian islands" in central Gaza.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Friday: "We have to see a clear and implementable plan" to safeguard innocent people in Rafah from an Israeli incursion.

"We have not seen such a plan," he said.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed over 31,000 Palestinians and driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza's population is starving, according to the United Nations.

## **Russian officials say Ukrainian shelling kills 2 in a border city and drones target an oil refinery**

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian shelling of the Russian city of Belgorod, close to the border with Ukraine, killed two people, Russian officials said Saturday.

A man and a woman died in the attack and three other people were wounded, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram. It was the latest in exchanges of long-range missile and rocket fire in Russia's war on Ukraine.

Five people were also wounded when a Ukrainian drone hit a car in the village of Glotovo, some 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) from the Ukrainian border, Gladkov said.

Also on Saturday, a Ukrainian drone attack caused a fire at an oil refinery belonging to Russian oil giant Rosneft in the Samara region, regional Gov. Dmitry Azarov said. He said an attack on another refinery was thwarted. No casualties were reported.

The attacks come a day after a Russian assault on the Ukrainian port city of Odesa killed at least 21 people. The ballistic missile attack blasted homes in the southern city Friday, followed by a second missile that targeted first responders who arrived at the scene, officials said.

More than 50 people are still in the hospital following the attacks, Odesa Deputy Mayor Svitlana Bedreha said Saturday, according to Ukrainian state media.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy promised a "just response" to the attack in a video address Friday evening.

Saturday's attacks occurred as Russians entered the second day of voting in a presidential election that is all but certain to extend Vladimir Putin's rule by another six years after he crushed dissent.

## **A warming island's mice are breeding out of control and eating seabirds. An extermination is planned**

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Mice accidentally introduced to a remote island near Antarctica 200 years ago are breeding out of control because of climate change, and they are eating seabirds and causing major harm in a special nature reserve with "unique biodiversity."

Now conservationists are planning a mass extermination using helicopters and hundreds of tons of rodent poison, which needs to be dropped over every part of Marion Island's 115 square miles (297 square kilometers) to ensure success.

If even one pregnant mouse survives, their prolific breeding ability means it may have all been for nothing.

The Mouse-Free Marion project — pest control on a grand scale — is seen as critical for the ecology of the uninhabited South African territory and the wider Southern Ocean. It would be the largest eradication of its kind if it succeeds.

The island is home to globally significant populations of nearly 30 bird species and a rare undisturbed habitat for wandering albatrosses — with their 10-foot wingspan — and many others.

Undisturbed, at least, until stowaway house mice arrived on seal hunter ships in the early 1800s, introducing the island's first mammal predators.

The past few decades have been the most significant for the damage the mice have caused, said Dr. Anton Wolvaardt, the Mouse-Free Marion project manager. He said their numbers have increased hugely,



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mainly due to rising temperatures from climate change, which has turned a cold, windswept island into a warmer, drier, more hospitable home.

"They are probably one of the most successful animals in the world. They've got to all sorts of places," Wolfaardt said. But now on Marion Island, "their breeding season has been extended, and this has resulted in a massive increase in the densities of mice."

Mice don't need encouragement. They can reproduce from about 60 days old and females can have four or five litters a year, each with seven or eight babies.

Rough estimates indicate there are more than a million mice on Marion Island. They are feeding on invertebrates and, more and more, on seabirds — both chicks in their nests and adults.

A single mouse will feed on a bird several times its size. Conservationists snapped a photo of one perched on the bloodied head of a wandering albatross chick.

The phenomenon of mice eating seabirds has been recorded on only a handful of the world's islands.

The scale and frequency of mice preying on seabirds on Marion has risen alarmingly, Wolfaardt said, after the first reports of it in 2003. He said the birds have not developed the defense mechanisms to protect themselves against these unfamiliar predators and often sit there while mice nibble away at them. Sometimes multiple mice swarm over a bird.

Conservationists estimate that if nothing is done, 19 seabird species will disappear from the island in 50 to 100 years, he said.

"This incredibly important island as a haven for seabirds has a very tenuous future because of the impacts of mice," Wolfaardt said.

The eradication project is a single shot at success, with not even a whisker of room for error. Burgeoning mice and rat populations have been problematic for other islands. South Georgia, in the southern Atlantic, was declared rodent-free in 2018 after an eradication, but that was a multi-year project; the one on Marion could be the biggest single intervention.

Wolfaardt said four to six helicopters will likely be used to drop up to 550 tons of rodenticide bait across the island. Pilots will be given exact flight lines and Wolfaardt's team will be able to track the drop using GPS mapping.

The bait has been designed to not affect the soil or the island's water sources. It shouldn't harm the seabirds, who feed out at sea, and won't have negative impacts for the environment, Wolfaardt said. Some animals will be affected at an individual level, but those species will recover.

"There's no perfect solution in these kinds of things," he said. "There is nothing that just zaps mice and nothing else."

The eradication project is a partnership between BirdLife South Africa and the national Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, which designated Marion Island as a special nature reserve with the highest level of environmental protection. It has a weather and research station but is otherwise uninhabited and dedicated to conservation.

The department said the eradication of mice was "essential if the unique biodiversity of the island is to be preserved."

Wolfaardt said the amount of planning needed means a likely go-ahead date in 2027. The project also needs to raise around \$25 million — some of which has been funded by the South African government — and get final regulatory approvals from authorities.

Scientists have tried to control the mice of Marion in the past.

They were already a pest for researchers in the 1940s, so five domestic cats were introduced. By the 1970s, there were around 2,000 feral cats on the island, killing half a million seabirds per year. The cats were eliminated by introducing a feline flu virus and hunting down any survivors.

Islands are critical to conservation efforts, but fragile. The Island Conservation organization says they are "extinction epicenters" and 75% of all species that have gone extinct lived on islands. About 95% of those were bird species.

"This really is an ecological restoration project," Wolfaardt said. "It's one of those rare conservation opportunities where you solve once and for all a conservation threat."

## With Navalny dead, his allies keep fighting to undermine Putin's grip on power

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Alexei Navalny's team is used to working independently. The most potent foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin was frequently absent for long stretches after being arrested, assaulted, poisoned, or imprisoned.

But when Navalny died suddenly in February at age 47 in a remote Arctic prison, his team was left with a monumental challenge: sustaining an opposition movement against Putin — who is all but assured to be reelected — without the living example of their defiant and charismatic leader.

After the initial shock wore off, Navalny's closest allies returned to the work that cost his freedom and his life: undermining Putin's iron-fisted grip on power.

A significant test will come Sunday, the last of three days that voters can go to the polls in an election that is widely viewed as more of a formality than an exercise in democracy.

That's when Navalny's team — with the endorsement of his widow, Yulia Navalnaya — is calling for a protest dubbed "Noon Against Putin." They are asking Russians to flock to polling stations Sunday at noon local time across the country's 11 time zones to demonstrate their discontent with Putin's rule and his war against Ukraine.

"It is a very simple and safe action, it can't be banned," Navalnaya said in a video address. "It will help millions of people to see their like-minded allies and to realize that we are not alone, we're surrounded by people who are also against the war, against corruption and against lawlessness."

Navalny's followers have expressed a wide mix of emotions in the weeks since his death, from renewed inspiration to a sense of defeat.

Maria Obukhova of Moscow, who paid tribute to Navalny on Wednesday at the Borisovskoye Cemetery, said the crowds she saw at his funeral — which numbered in the thousands — were motivational.

"It was a huge surprise for me, because it seemed before like everything had died here, that Russia is no longer, that it had died," said Obukhova, who placed white daisies at Navalny's gravesite.

Valery, another Muscovite at the cemetery, who withheld his last name for security reasons, said he had little hope for the future and that after Navalny's death, that "something has really broken" inside of him.

Just several days after her husband's death, Navalnaya expressed determination to keep his mission alive.

In the past month, she has addressed the European Parliament, met with United States President Joe Biden, and urged Western countries not to recognize the results of Russia's election. She has also called on the West to impose more sanctions on those close to Putin.

Leading up to the election, Navalny's team urged supporters to cast their ballots for any candidate other than Putin, or to invalidate them by choosing two or more candidates. They also had dozens of volunteers call ordinary Russians to ask them about their grievances and try to turn them against Putin.

The phone campaign was announced by Navalny over the summer, and since then "tens of thousands" of calls were made, Leonid Volkov, Navalny's top strategist, said a video. "We will not stop doing that," he vowed.

Volkov also gave a video address shortly after Navalny's death in an effort to rally supporters, and perhaps tap into his longtime ally's spirit of persistence. "It will be a monument to Alexei's cause if you and I live to see how this regime disintegrates before Putin's eyes," he said.

Still, the Putin opposition's uphill battle has only gotten steeper with its leaders in exile.

"(Putin's) regime pushes people out of the country because it understands very well that the possibilities of influencing political processes in Russia from abroad are minimal," said Nikolay Petrov, a visiting researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.

Sunday's "Noon Against Putin" protest will be a test of how much Navalny's team can do in Russia from abroad, said Sam Greene, a director at the Center for European Policy Analysis in Washington.

"One part of what they want to do is to send a message to those who remain in Russia that you're not alone, that the opposition in exile has their back to a certain extent and will support them," said Greene.

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"But then the question is, how do they support them?"

Efforts are underway to disrupt the protest. Navalny's team said fake emails have been sent around purporting to be from them telling Putin opponents to show up at the polls at 5 p.m. instead of noon.

Russia's independent election watchdog, Golos, reported that officials in at least one region are being instructed to report large gatherings near polling stations to the police.

On Thursday night, the Prosecutor's Office in Moscow warned that unauthorized rallies near polling stations "may prevent citizens from freely exercising their voting rights and the work of election commissions," a criminal offense punishable by up to five years in prison.

The personal risks for Putin's opponents remain high.

On Tuesday, Volkov was attacked near his home in Lithuania. Assailants smashed a window of his car, sprayed tear gas into his face and beat him with a hammer, according to Navalny's team.

Volkov was taken to a hospital, and upon release said his arm was broken and his leg was injured so much it was painful to walk.

He accused "Putin's henchmen" of the attack and said it was an attempt to intimidate the team ahead of the "Noon Against Putin" protest.

With Navalny gone, some of his supporters are recalibrating their expectations.

Valery, one of many people who visited Navalny's grave in southeastern Moscow in recent weeks, said he is less optimistic about the opposition's prospects going forward.

"Even though Yulia, his wife — his widow — has picked up the baton, I'm not sure that it is going to be the same as it was when Alexei was alive," he said.

## Abortion story from wife of Nevada Senate hopeful reveals complexity of issue for GOP candidates

By GABE STERN Associated Press/Report for America

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Last month, when the wife of a Republican U.S. Senate candidate from Nevada talked candidly about the abortion she had before the two met — and the long journey of regret and healing that followed — many Republicans welcomed it as a more compassionate approach to an issue that has hurt GOP candidates at the ballot box.

But with Democrats nationally eyeing abortion rights as key to their prospects in the November election, from the presidency all the way down the ballot, Sam Brown's evolving tone on abortion, particularly in choosing to publicly revisit his wife Amy's story and oppose a national abortion ban, hints at just how complicated the fight over abortion rights could become for GOP candidates this fall.

In Nevada, the Browns' story could be a factor in a competitive June 11 primary for a seat that Republicans view as a pivotal pickup opportunity. It also shows how abortion could be decisive in determining which party controls the U.S. Senate, where Democrats now hold a 51-49 majority but have many more seats on the line this year.

Some Nevada Republicans say the story demonstrates Brown's deeper understanding of the complexities of reproductive healthcare in a state where voters guaranteed the right to abortion through a referendum. They also hope it illuminates a gray area that many Republican women feel extends beyond "yes" or "no" answers on abortion rights.

"I really resent people immediately putting all Republicans in one big basket," said Pauline Ng Lee, president of the Nevada Republican Club.

She said Nevada Republicans have no desire to overturn the state's existing protections, unlike in Republican-led states like Texas and South Carolina. She also hopes the Browns' announcement helps move abortion access, largely a winning issue for Democrats, "off the table" in the Senate race.

Brown, sitting beside his wife, Amy, as she told her story to NBC News, used the moment to lay out his position that questions about abortion are best left to the states. If elected to the Senate, he said, he would oppose a federal abortion ban while supporting Nevada's current law that protects the right to an abortion up to 24 weeks — roughly the standard nationally when Roe v. Wade was in effect.

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Brown also called for more compassion, support and education for women who are faced with difficult decisions — a plea he said was largely informed by his wife's experience in Texas as a woman in her 20s, 16 years ago.

But Brown, now locked in a crowded contest in Nevada's GOP Senate primary in June, never said how he reconciles the tension between the story that helped inspire his policy stance and its implications in today's landscape. When left to the states, women in Texas facing the same circumstances today would not have the options his wife had in the state in 2008.

In Texas, where the two met and lived before Nevada, nearly all abortions are banned, with narrow exceptions. Similar bans at all stages of pregnancy have been enacted in 14 Republican-led states since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion almost two years ago.

This is not the first time Sam Brown has adjusted his tone on abortion rights, a topic he often dodged before the interview last month. In July 2021, his campaign website declared it was "in our American interest that we protect the lives of unborn babies just as we would protect the life of any other American."

But that unequivocal stand has since been removed.

Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen, the incumbent Brown is hoping to unseat, repeatedly references Brown's support for Texas' 20-week abortion ban while running for a seat in the Texas Legislature in 2014. The ban did not include exceptions for rape or the mother's health — exceptions Brown told NBC he would support.

Rosen's campaign points specifically to a questionnaire from Brown's 2022 Senate run in Nevada, where his campaign said abortion should be banned in all cases except when a mother's life is at risk. Brown's campaign said a staffer created the questionnaire without authorization.

And in a 2022 primary Senate debate against former Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt, he maintained that abortion should be left to the states, but added, "if there was any sort of legislation that would come forward, I would want to see that specific language."

On his website, Brown maintains he is "personally pro-life" and would work to confirm judges "who understand the importance of protecting life." He is against federal funding for abortion, late-term abortions and abortions without parental consent.

Brown's campaign declined an interview request from The Associated Press, saying the NBC interview was difficult for him and his wife. He did not respond to a question asking what he would say to women in the same position that Amy was in years ago in Texas, where an abortion can now lead to a felony charge.

His view, he said in a statement, has been shaped not only by Amy's difficult decision but his own experience of nearly being killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan. Both occurred shortly before they met in a San Antonio medical center where she was working as an Army dietitian.

"Amy and I met each other in the darkest moments of our lives, but we found the light within each other. We found our strength and renewed outlooks on life through Christ, prayer, and relying on each other," he said in the statement. "I have consistently stated that this issue should be decided at the state level, and the people of Nevada have made their decision."

Rebecca Gill, an associate professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, said Brown's recalibrated stance sounded like an example of a politician "fishing out some ideas, and seeing if there's anything that doesn't cost them votes."

"It definitely gives you the impression that they have some empathy about this situation and that they don't want to be the ones to substitute their beliefs about this for the judgment of the person who's pregnant," Gill said. "But they're willing to let other people substitute their beliefs for the judgment of the people who are pregnant."

Lindsey Harmon, a spokesperson for Planned Parenthood Nevada, which has endorsed the Democrat Rosen, said she doesn't believe Brown would keep his promise to oppose a national ban. She added that "we were called hysterical" when sounding the alarm during Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing to the Supreme Court that Roe v. Wade could be overturned.

But some Republicans felt a personal connection to Amy Brown's story and said they hoped it moved a complicated conversation along.

Republican Assemblywoman Danielle Gallant often avoids her own personal experiences when talking with colleagues in Nevada's capital of Carson City — like the unplanned pregnancy she decided to see through in 2020, or how that pregnancy ended in a miscarriage during a home birth that nearly ended her life.

She doesn't think the labels "pro-choice" and "pro-life" do justice to her feelings about abortion. She's agitated both by Republican men who portray women who receive abortions as "just using it as birth control" and Democrats who refuse to acknowledge the bond a woman can have with a fetus.

Gallant said she felt relief that Amy Brown shared her story and that Sam Brown's stance on a national abortion ban aligns him with a majority of Republican women in Nevada who are somewhere in the middle on abortion but often don't speak up.

Gallant, who voted with her party against strengthening Nevada's existing abortion protections, also hopes the Browns' announcement helps neutralize the issue in his bid to topple Rosen.

"There is no home for where I stand on abortion, politically," she said. "Because personally, I have been challenged. And I tested my belief and stuck to my belief. But I don't believe that I should be telling somebody else how to make their choices."

## The Hur interview transcript offers a window into the life of 'frustrated architect' Joe Biden

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden was returning from church a week ago when he stepped out of his armored SUV onto the driveway of his Wilmington, Delaware, home on an important mission: He wanted to inspect the landscaping.

The sprawling home on a manmade pond, three miles or five kilometers from downtown, has a special place — some might call it an obsession — in his heart.

When he met special prosecutor Robert Hur to talk about the sensitive documents he'd improperly kept after his vice presidency, Biden offered a confession. Three times over the five hours, Biden told Hur he is a "frustrated architect."

He allowed that his wife, Jill, once offered to send him to architecture school if he'd only stop running for the Senate. It was not to be. But he still seems to have architectural design in his blood. And he's mused privately about redesigning elements of the home after his presidency.

The house is central in the controversy over Biden's handling of classified documents. FBI agents and the president's lawyers identified at least 28 items there that contained classified information or markings from his time as vice president. Hur this past week defended his assessment that there was not sufficient evidence to charge Biden with willfully retaining the classified information.

In a transcript of Hur's interview, conducted in the fall and released on the day a House committee heard the special counsel's testimony, Biden lays out in meticulous detail the specifications of his home, prompting Hur to comment on his "photographic" recall even as he had questioned the president's memory on other fronts.

When Biden hopped out to inspect the landscaping, the area had just been replanted after a roughly yearlong project by the Secret Service to improve security at the president's compound. The work included new fencing and vehicle barriers, bulletproof windows and extensive modifications to the home demanded by the agency to make it more secure.

Satellite imagery from last year showed construction crews had dismantled the second-floor balcony and the sunroom overlooking the pond as part of the renovations to the south side of the 7,000-square-foot (650-square-meter) home and the grounds.

Ceiling fans from the sunroom were stored in Biden's cluttered garage alongside his beloved Corvette in January 2023, when FBI agents spent nearly 13 hours doing a top-to-bottom search of the house looking for classified documents.

Referred to by Biden aides as the "lake house," the home has been at the center of Biden's life since he moved there in 1998. It has been the scene of meetings with aides and the occasional lawmaker for

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decades and the site of the makeshift basement studio from which he ran much of his 2020 presidential campaign during the pandemic.

Biden regularly spends his weekends at the Wilmington house, often staying from Friday to Monday. One bonus: It's a quick hop to the Philadelphia area, the Democratic base in a critical swing state as Biden campaigns for reelection.

His Wilmington visits are something of a continuation of the commuting schedule he kept as vice president. During his three-decade Senate tenure before that, Biden commuted from Delaware to Washington daily on Amtrak.

The Delaware home is more than a gathering spot for members of his family and a few of his close friends or a respite from the prying eyes of the White House. Biden aides say he feels grounded in Wilmington, where his interactions with parishioners at church, his neighbors and even his gardener often form the basis of policy questions he asks his team when he gets back to Washington.

The construction project, which was under way when FBI agents searched his home, lasted more than a year, much to Biden's chagrin.

"The FBI knows my house better than I do," Biden quipped to Hur. A month earlier, he complained to reporters that, "I have no home to go to" during the construction.

Aides said Biden was exasperated with the pace of the renovations — a common experience for many homeowners — and being unable to go there to see the changes for months at a time made the process even more stressful. He wants to reverse some of those changes out of office.

The home was carefully laid out by the president after he and his wife purchased the property in 1996.

"I mean, I'm a frustrated architect, and if you went through, you probably saw all those significant number of house plans that I've drawn," Biden told Hur, referring to one set of drawers opened by investigators.

Biden did some of the work on the home himself, sometimes with the help of his sons Hunter and the late Beau, and his brother Jimmy. The other changes he supervised with a careful eye for detail.

"There's so damn many different contractors I've used," he said, mentioning roofers, among others. "They busted their ass for three years to build the house."

Biden furnished the home with a plenty of sentimental items, from the desk he used while serving in the Senate to knickknacks picked up over decades in public life. He's got dozens of three-by-two photographs of moments from his years in office.

"I have them hanging on the walls all over the downstairs, the television room, and some in the library," Biden told Hur.

A cottage at the top of the driveway now serves as a secure operations center for Secret Service agents and military officials. But it was home to Biden's mother before she died in 2010 at age 92.

In subsequent years, as vice president, Biden collected \$2,200 a month in rent payments for the guest house from the Secret Service.

Biden's wood-paneled library is a particular point of pride in the home, with its chandelier and overstuffed leather sofas. It was there that investigators found his personal notebooks documenting key meetings from his time as vice president.

"I just wanted you to know I picked out the walnut tree that got cut down," Biden told investigators. Some of that walnut ended up inside the home. "I picked out the craftsman to come do this — this room cost one third of the entirety of my entire home. Swear to God."

"It looks like it," Hur replied. "It's very impressive."

Pointing to seven different pieces of molding photographed by the FBI in the room, he added, "I got a little carried away."

## TikTok creators warn of economic impact if app sees ban, call it a vital space for the marginalized

By LEAH WILLINGHAM Associated Press

Alex Pearlman shut the door on dreams of a standup comedy career almost a decade ago, pivoting from the stage to an office cubicle where he worked a customer service job.

Then he started posting random jokes and commentary about pop culture and politics on TikTok. Just over 2.5 million followers later, he quit his nine-to-five and recently booked his first nationwide tour.

Pearlman is among the many TikTok creators across the U.S. outraged over a bipartisan bill passed by the House of Representatives on Wednesday that would lead to a nationwide ban of the popular video app if its China-based owner, ByteDance, doesn't sell its stake. The bill still needs to go through the Senate, where its prospects are unclear.

Content creators say a ban would hurt countless people and businesses that rely on TikTok for a significant portion of their income, while also arguing TikTok has become an unrivaled platform for dialogue and community.

Pearlman, who lives outside Philadelphia, said TikTok has transformed his life, allowing him to live a dream, provide for his family and spend the first three months of his newborn son's life at home. His customer service job only offered paternity leave equivalent to three weeks off, with two weeks paid.

"I don't take a day for granted on this app, because it's been so shocking," said Pearlman, 39. "In reality, TikTok has been the driver of American social media for the last four years. Something will step into that place if TikTok vanishes tomorrow. Whether or not that will be better or worse, Congress has no way of knowing."

TikTok, which launched in 2016, has skyrocketed in popularity, growing faster than Instagram, YouTube or Facebook. The push to remove the app from Chinese authority follows concerns from lawmakers, law enforcement and intelligence officials about the insecurity of user data, potential suppression of content unfavorable to the Chinese government and the possibility that the platform could boost pro-Beijing propaganda, all of which TikTok denies.

To date, the U.S. government hasn't provided any evidence showing TikTok shared U.S. user data with Chinese authorities.

The move comes as the pandemic saw huge growth in digital marketing as people were stuck at home consuming — and creating — content at levels not seen before.

Jensen Savannah, a 29-year-old from Charlotte, began making TikToks of her travels around the Carolinas during the pandemic. Now a full-time influencer, she has tripled her income since leaving her telecommunications sales job.

"Social media Influencer' is almost to be looked at as the new print and the new form of radio and TV advertising," she said. "It's going to bring your dollar much farther than it is in traditional marketing."

Some creators describe it as a digital equalizer of sorts, providing a platform for people of color and other marginalized groups to get opportunities and exposure.

"I've always had Twitter, I've had Facebook, I've had Instagram. But TikTok was the first one where, if you want to find somebody who looks like yourself and represents you in any type of way, you can find it," said Joshua Dairen, a Black, 30-year-old content creator in Auburn, Alabama. Dairen makes videos about his state's ghost stories, urban legends and history.

Growing up, he loved researching everything paranormal, but he didn't see a lot of Black representation in the field. Exposure on TikTok has led to jobs writing freelance pieces and contributing to documentaries about paranormal occurrences and unsolved mysteries. The app also gave Dairen the flexibility and confidence to open his own coffee shop, where he gets visits at least once a day from fans of his work.

He thinks banning TikTok sets "a dangerous precedent about how much power our highest levels of government can wield."

Others say the app is both a financial and social safety net.

Chris Bautista, a food truck owner in Los Angeles catering to television and movie sets, started using

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TikTok during the pandemic to connect with members of the LGBTQ+ community and show support for those who might be having a hard time.

Bautista, 37, grew up in a conservative Christian community outside LA and didn't come out until his late 20s. As a young person, he struggled with his mental health and considered suicide. He wanted to create a platform he could have used as a teenager, one showing that someone like him could go to that dark place and come out the other side a "well-adjusted, confident person."

"I just find the corners of TikTok that I find myself in to be so wildly important and profound," according to Bautista, who said it would be "heartbreaking" if the app was banned.

Bautista didn't start posting with the intention of monetizing the experience, but money from projects tied to the app came at the right time: If it wasn't for the extra income he earned through TikTok during the pandemic and then the Hollywood strikes last year, his business would have shut down.

Almost since its inception, concerns have been raised about the addictive nature of the app, especially for young audiences whose minds are still developing. Marcus Bridgewater, a former private school teacher and administrator who owns his own business and posts TikTok gardening videos, wants Congress to be focused on those issues, and not whether the app is Chinese-owned.

"Social media is a powerful tool," said Bridgewater, who lives in Spring, Texas. "And powerful tools are just that: They are capable of helping us transcend ourselves, but in their transcendence, they're also capable of completely severing us from those we love."

Pearlman said he has long feared politicians would come after TikTok. He compared the experience of finding out about the House vote to finally getting the call that an ailing loved one has died.

"The part that's disturbing to me is, I feel like for a lot of Americans, TikTok and social media in general is a release valve — it's kind of become a default complaint box," he said. "So to many people, it feels like they're trying to ban the complaint box instead of dealing with the complaint."

## From 4-leaf clovers to some unexpected history, all you need to know about St. Patrick's Day

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — If it's March, and it's green, it must be St. Patrick's Day.

The day honoring the patron saint of Ireland is a global celebration of Irish heritage. And nowhere is that more so than in the United States, where parades take place in cities around the country and all kinds of foods and drinks are given an emerald hue.

In fact, it was among Irish American communities that the day became the celebration it is, from its roots as a more solemn day with a religious observance in Ireland.

But even in America, it was about more than a chance to dye a river green (looking at you, Chicago) or just bust out a favorite piece of green clothing, it was about putting down roots and claiming a piece of the country's calendar.

WHO IS ST. PATRICK AND WHY DOES HE EVEN HAVE A DAY?

Patrick was not actually Irish, according to experts. Born in the late fourth century, he was captured as an adolescent and ended up enslaved in Ireland. He escaped to another part of Europe where he was trained as a priest and returned to Ireland in the fifth century to promote the spread of Christianity.

Several centuries later, he was made a saint by the Catholic Church and like other saints had a day dedicated to him, which was March 17th. He became Ireland's patron saint, and even when religious strife broke out between Catholics and Protestants, was claimed by both, says Mike Cronin, historian and academic director of Boston College Dublin.

HOW DID AN IRISH SAINT'S DAY BECOME AN AMERICAN THING?

The short answer: Irish people came to America and brought their culture with them. St. Patrick's Day observances date back to before the founding of the U.S., in places like Boston and New York City. The first parade was held in Manhattan in 1762.



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While the day was marked with more of a religious framing and solemnity in Ireland until well into the 20th century, in America it became the cultural and boisterous celebration it is today, marked by plenty of people without a trace of Irish heritage.

It was because people in Ireland started seeing how the day was marked in the U.S. that it became more of a festival in the country of its origin rather than strictly a religious observance, Cronin says, pointing to the parades, parties and other festivities that are held.

Oh, and by the way, for those who like to shorten names: Use St. Paddy's Day, not St. Patty's Day. Paddy is a nickname for Pádraig, which is the Irish spelling of Patrick.

**WHY IS IT SUCH A BIG DEAL TO CELEBRATE A HOLIDAY LIKE THIS?**

Holidays aren't simply days to watch bands go by, or wear a specific outfit or costume.

Being able to mark a holiday, and have others mark it, is a way of "putting down roots, showing that you've made it in American culture," says Leigh Schmidt, professor in the Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University. "You've made your claim on that American calendar, in American civic life, by having these holidays widely recognized."

The spread of St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the U.S. was a way for Irish immigrant communities, who in the 19th century faced discrimination and opposition, to stake that ground, he says: "It's a kind of immigrant Irish way of combating nativist antagonism against them."

**WHAT'S WITH FOUR-LEAF CLOVERS, ANYWAY?**

A popular sight around the holiday is the shamrock, or three-leaf clover, linked to Ireland and St. Patrick.

The lucky ones, though, come across something that's harder to find: a four-leaf clover. That's because it takes a recessive trait or traits in the clover's genetics for there to be more than the normal 3 leaves, says Vincent Pennetti, a doctoral student at the University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. He has been fascinated by the plants since high school.

Four-leaf clovers "are real. They are rare," he says.

That doesn't mean they can't be found. People just have to keep their eyes open and "get really good at noticing patterns and breaks in the patterns, and they just start jumping out at you," he says.

Katie Glerum finds them. The 35-year-old New York City resident says it's not unheard of for her to be somewhere like Central Park and see one. She usually scoops it up and often gives it to someone else, to a positive response.

"If it happened every day, then I probably would be less excited about it," she says. "But yeah, when it happens, it is exciting."

## Venezuelan opposition leader faces deadline for standing down in race against Maduro

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — It's her choice — but one on which the hopes of millions of Venezuelans fighting to restore their democracy depends.

Barred from running for office, opposition leader María Corina Machado is facing pressure from foreign leaders and fellow government opponents to abandon her dead-end presidential candidacy ahead of a March 25 candidate registration deadline and make space for a substitute to take on the entrenched incumbent, Nicolás Maduro.

It's an impossible choice that underlines Venezuela's increasingly authoritarian tilt. The last election widely recognized as meeting international standards took place almost a decade ago, when the opposition swept control of the National Assembly in 2015. But the opposition's boycotting of subsequent races has only strengthened Maduro's grip on power.

Machado, a former lawmaker, rose to the top of the opposition leadership in 2023, filling a void left when other leaders went into exile. Her courage and principled attack on government corruption and Maduro's mismanagement of the oil-dependent economy rallied millions of Venezuelans to overwhelmingly vote for

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her in an October opposition primary that the government tried to outlaw.

Success made her a target though. In January, in defiance of an electoral agreement Maduro signed with an opposition coalition, which earned him relief from U.S. economic sanctions, Venezuela's rubber-stamping high court affirmed Machado's ban on holding office.

Maduro's government has since also accused Washington of conspiring to assassinate him, arrested more political opponents and expelled the staff of the U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Taken together, the actions indicate Maduro has no interest in a competitive race and is looking only to extend his decade-long rule, said Michael McKinley, who served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, Brazil, Colombia and Peru.

"We're no longer dealing with an imperfect electoral process," McKinley said. "It's a complete shutdown of all meaningful challenges to Maduro. In that context, it's hard to argue that the opposition participating in elections without Machado and with a token candidate somehow advances a democratic opening."

Polling suggests that Venezuelans overwhelmingly want to go to the polls and would trounce Maduro if given half a chance. And while Machado is their preferred candidate, a majority of opposition supporters want her to yield to someone else rather than have the opposition essentially sit out the race in which Maduro will be seeking a third six-year term.

"We're with Maria Corina until the end," retiree Sonia Alfonzo said, echoing Machado's campaign slogan of "Hasta el final" — Until the end. "But if she can't run, she must have an ace up her sleeve."

Machado has repeatedly rejected the idea of renouncing her candidacy, but she has not explained her strategy to overcome the ban. Gerardo Blyde, who negotiated the opposition's electoral agreement with Maduro's representatives, told a radio station Friday "that there is still time" for the government to rectify and "allow our candidacy without obstructions."

But other allies are already floating a plan B. Two-time opposition presidential candidate Henrique Capriles this week urged fellow Maduro opponents to get "a sense of realism" and rally behind an alternative. Capriles, who exited the primary as support for Machado increased during the campaign, asked them to put Venezuelans and "the country above all else."

The pressure is coming from outside Venezuela as well. (backslash)Brazil's leftist president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, recently held up his own inability to run for president in 2018 while he was fighting corruption charges from jail as an example for Machado to follow.

"Instead of crying, I appointed another candidate," said Lula, who was later cleared of criminal wrongdoing.

Machado's meteoric rise as opposition leader last year was aided by careful messaging that softened her image as an elitist hardliner and allowed her to connect with skeptics. But throughout 2023, ruling-party leaders made clear she would never face off with Maduro.

There has been bad blood for decades between Machado and the disciples of Maduro's mentor and predecessor, the late fiery leader Hugo Chávez.

Machado, a free-market conservative, once dared to interrupt Chávez as he gave a speech before the National Assembly, calling the expropriation of businesses theft. "An eagle does not hunt a fly," he responded.

The Biden administration has tried to walk a fine line between expressing support for Machado — for years more closely aligned with Republicans in Washington — and keeping alive hopes for some sort of electoral participation.

A senior U.S. official said the Biden administration has not asked Machado to stand down and will respect whatever decision she makes. But the U.S. is stressing the need for the opposition to unite behind a common strategy, one that reflects the will of regular Venezuelans to cast ballots, said the official, who insisted on not being quoted by name to discuss the sensitive matter.

A key milestone in that delicate dance comes in April, when temporary sanctions relief that arose from the electoral agreement signed last year in Barbados expires and the White House must decide whether to reimpose restrictions blamed for a worsening humanitarian crisis that has led 7.4 million Venezuelans to abandon the country.

"As imperfect as the elections will be, they represent a huge opportunity for Venezuelans to mobilize and express their voice in ways they haven't for a decade," said Christopher Sabatini, a research fellow

at the Chatham House in London. The group this month organized two days of closed door discussions on Venezuela attended by U.S. officials, international diplomats, human rights activists and members of the opposition.

Maduro's government insists Machado's ban is a done deal that cannot be revisited. After officials said election day would be July 28 — Chávez's birthday — the government announced it would send invitations to international electoral observers like the European Union and the Carter Center, whose participation is part of the Barbados agreement. However, so far, the invitations haven't been sent.

Entrenched, authoritarian leaders sometimes overestimate their strength and lose even heavily skewed elections. That's what happened in Nicaragua in 1990, when Sandinista rebel leader Daniel Ortega was defeated after a decade in power, as well when Chileans in a 1988 referendum ousted dictator Augusto Pinochet.

But those examples have less relevance in a world where democracy is on the defensive and the United States' ability to shape events is declining, said McKinsley, the former U.S. ambassador.

He said it's more likely Maduro is looking for inspiration to the presidential election in Russia, where Vladimir Putin is competing against a slate of candidates handpicked by the Kremlin, to dismantle Venezuela's democracy even further.

"It's hard to think Maduro isn't watching Putin's electoral example and believes he can follow suit," he said.

## How Texas' plans to arrest migrants for illegal entry would work if allowed to take effect

By VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas (AP) — Texas' plan to arrest migrants who cross the U.S.-Mexico border illegally is on hold while the Supreme Court considers a challenge to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's latest move over immigration.

The nation's highest court put the law on pause over a lawsuit led by the Justice Department, which argues that Texas is overstepping the federal government's immigration authority. Under the law, any police officer in Texas could arrest migrants for illegal entry and a judge could order them to leave the U.S.

Justice Samuel Alito has ordered a stay until Monday at 5 p.m. EDT, when the law could potentially take effect.

A federal judge in Texas had blocked the law in a sweeping rejection last month, calling it a violation of the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Texas swiftly appealed the ruling and argued that it has a right to take action over what Abbott has described as an "invasion" of migrants on the border.

Here's what to know:

### WHO CAN BE ARRESTED?

The law Abbott signed in December allows any Texas law enforcement officer to arrest people suspected of entering the country illegally. Once in custody, migrants could either agree to a Texas judge's order to leave the U.S. or be prosecuted on misdemeanor charges of illegal entry. Migrants who don't leave could face arrest again under more serious felony charges.

Arresting officers must have probable cause, which could include witnessing the illegal entry themselves or seeing it on video.

The law cannot be enforced against people lawfully present in the U.S., including those who were granted asylum or who are enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

Critics, including Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, have said the law could lead to racial profiling and family separation. American Civil Liberties Union affiliates in Texas and some neighboring states issued a travel advisory warning of a possible threat to civil and constitutional rights when passing through Texas.

Abbott has rejected concerns over profiling. While signing the bill, he said troopers and National Guard members at the border can see migrants crossing illegally "with their own eyes."

### WHERE WILL THE LAW BE ENFORCED?

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The law can be enforced in any of Texas' 254 counties, including those hundreds of miles from the border. But Republican state Rep. David Spiller, the author of the law, has said he expects the vast majority of arrests will occur within 50 miles (80 kilometers) of the U.S.-Mexico border. Texas' state police chief has expressed similar expectations.

Some places are off-limits. Arrests cannot be made in public and private schools; places of worship; or hospitals and other health care facilities, including those where sexual assault forensic examinations are conducted.

Under the law, migrants ordered to leave would be sent to ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border, even if they are not Mexican citizens.

Amrutha Jindal, executive director at Lone Star Defenders Office, said her organization expects the law will be enforced in border counties. Her office already represents migrants who have been arrested since 2021 under a more limited Texas operation that has charged thousands of migrants with trespassing on private property.

## IS THE LAW CONSTITUTIONAL?

The Justice Department, legal experts and immigrant rights groups have said the measure is a clear conflict with the U.S. government's authority to regulate immigration.

U.S. District Judge David Ezra, an appointee of former President Ronald Reagan, agreed in a 114-page order. He added that the law could hamper U.S. foreign relations and treaty obligations.

Opponents have called the measure the most dramatic attempt by a state to police immigration since a 2010 Arizona law — denounced by critics as the "Show Me Your Papers" bill — that was largely struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court. Ezra cited the Supreme Court's 2012 Arizona ruling in his decision.

Texas has argued that the law mirrors federal law instead of conflicting with it.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE BORDER?

Arrests for illegal crossings along the southern border fell by half in January from record highs in December. Border Patrol officials attributed the shift to seasonal declines and heightened enforcement by the U.S. and its allies.

Tensions remain between Texas and the Biden administration, though. In the border city of Eagle Pass, Texas, National Guard members have prevented Border Patrol agents from accessing a riverfront park.

Other Republican governors have expressed support for Abbott, who has said the federal government is not doing enough to enforce immigration laws. Other measures implemented by Texas include a floating barrier in the Rio Grande and razor wire along the border.

## **Bernie Sanders wants the US to adopt a 32-hour workweek. Could workers and companies benefit?**

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

The 40-hour workweek has been standard in the U.S. for more than eight decades. Now some members of Congress want to give hourly workers an extra day off.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, the far-left independent from Vermont, this week introduced a bill that would shorten to 32 hours the amount of time many Americans can work each week before they're owed overtime.

Given advances in automation, robotics and artificial intelligence, Sanders says U.S. companies can afford to give employees more time off without cutting their pay and benefits.

Critics say a mandated shorter week would force many companies to hire additional workers or lose productivity.

Here's what to know about the issue:

What would Sanders' proposal do?

The bill Sanders introduced Wednesday in the Senate would reduce the standard workweek from 40 hours to 32 hours. Employers would be prohibited from reducing their workers' pay and benefits to match their lost hours.

That means people who currently work Monday through Friday, eight hours per day, would get to add

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an extra day to their weekend. Workers eligible for overtime would get paid extra for exceeding 32 hours in a week.

Sanders says the worktime reductions would be phased in over four years. He held a hearing on the proposal Thursday in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, of which Sanders is the chairman.

How would a shorter workweek affect employees and productivity?

One recent study of British companies that agreed to adopt a 32-hour workweek concluded that employees came to work less stressed and more focused while revenues remained steady or increased.

In 2022, a team of university researchers and the nonprofit 4 Day Week Global enlisted 61 companies to reduce working hours for six months without cutting wages. Afterward, 71% of the 2,900 workers said they were less burned out and nearly half reported being more satisfied with their jobs.

Meanwhile, 24 of the participating companies reported revenue growth of more than 34% over the prior six months. Nearly two dozen others saw a smaller increase.

"The majority of employees register an increase in their productivity over the trial. They are more energized, focused and capable," Juliet Shor, a Boston College sociology professor and a lead researcher on the UK study, told Sanders' Senate committee.

Critics say a 32-hour workweek might work for companies where employees spend most of their time at computers or in meetings, but could be disastrous for production at manufacturing plants that need hands-on workers to keep assembly lines running.

"These are concepts that have consequences," Roger King, of the HR Policy Association, which represents corporate human resource officers, told the Senate committee. "It just doesn't work in many industries."

What's the response in Washington?

With considerable opposition from Republicans, and potentially some Democrats, don't expect Sanders' proposal to get very far in the Senate. A companion bill by Democratic Rep. Mark Takano of California is likely doomed in the GOP-controlled House.

GOP Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana said paying workers the same wages for fewer hours would force employers to pass the cost of hiring more workers along to consumers.

"It would threaten millions of small businesses operating on a razor-thin margin because they're unable to find enough workers," said Cassidy, the ranking Republican on the committee. "Now they've got the same workers, but only for three-quarters of the time. And they have to hire more."

Sanders has used his platform as the committee's chairman to showcase legislation aimed at holding big corporations more accountable to workers. He blamed greedy executives for pocketing extra profits as technology has boosted worker productivity.

"Do we continue the trend that technology only benefits the people on top, or do we demand that these transformational changes benefit working people?" Sanders said. "And one of the benefits must be a lower workweek, a 32-hour workweek."

How did we decide a 40-hour workweek was the standard?

The Fair Labor Standards Act, signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938, restricted child labor and imposed other workplace protections that included limiting the workweek to 44 hours. The law was amended two years later to make it a 40-hour week.

The landmark law followed a century of labor-union efforts seeking protections for the many overworked people in the U.S., said Tejasvi Nagaraja, a labor historian at Cornell University's School of Industry and Labor Relations.

"The issue of time was always as important, or more important, than money for labor unions and labor advocates," Nagaraja said.

In the 1830s, coal miners and textile workers began pushing back against workdays of up to 14 hours. After the Civil War, the abolition of slavery caused those in the U.S. to take a fresh look at workers' rights. Unions rallied around the slogan: "Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what you will."

The federal government took tentative steps toward limiting working time. In 1869, President Ulysses S. Grant ordered an eight-hour workday for government employees. In 1916, Congress mandated the same

for railroad workers.

Other reforms came from private industry. In 1926, Henry Ford adopted a 40-hour week for his automobile assembly workers more than a decade before Congress mandated it.

Ford wrote: "It is high time to rid ourselves of the notion that leisure for workmen is either lost time or a class privilege."

## Tornadoes kill 3 and leave trails of destruction in the central US

By JOSHUA A. BICKEL and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

LAKEVIEW, Ohio (AP) — Blaine Schmidt sifted through the broken glass and splintered wood throughout his Ohio home Friday, salvaging a guitar and a bundle of diapers.

His couch and a crib had been ripped apart by one of many tornadoes that tore through the central U.S., killing three people and injuring dozens more. The storm peeled open his living room wall, but at least the house was standing. The one next door was flattened.

"I'm lucky to be alive," Schmidt said hours after he and his roommate took shelter in a bathtub, using the shower curtain to protect them from flying window glass.

Thursday night's storms left trails of destruction across parts of Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and Arkansas. About 40 people were injured and dozens of homes were damaged in one Indiana community. Tornadoes were also reported in Illinois and Missouri.

The Indian Lake area in Ohio's Logan County was one of the hardest hit. Three people died in the county northwest of Columbus, said Sheriff Randy Dodds.

Much of the damage was in the villages of Russells Point and Lakeview, where Schmidt lives. The villages are dotted with cottages owned by people who come for fishing and boating.

Search crews and cadaver dogs didn't find any more victims Friday after going into neighborhoods that had been blocked by gas leaks and fallen trees overnight, Dodds said.

"When you see this damage, you'll be surprised it was only three," the sheriff said.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, who assessed the damage and met with residents, said it was fortunate the storm did not hit on a summer weekend.

Sandy Smith took shelter with her family in a laundry room of their Lakeview home after hearing the storm sirens. Seconds later, they heard debris batter the house. Her husband watched the garage blow away.

She went upstairs to rescue their cat who was trapped under a bookshelf. As soon she came back down, the roof collapsed.

A campground, an RV park and a laundromat were among the many businesses damaged. The storm produced fires in some spots and draped power lines through home windows, said Amber Fagan, president of the local chamber of commerce.

About 25 people were treated for mostly broken bones and internal injuries at the nearest hospital in Bellefontaine, said Laura Miller, a spokesperson for Mary Rutan Hospital.

About a half-dozen residents in Lakeview who were interviewed by The Associated Press said they heard tornado sirens 10 minutes before the storm hit, after they went off earlier.

Weather officials were assessing damage and confirming the tornadoes, counting at least five that touched down in Ohio alone.

In Indiana, a tornado injured 38 people in Winchester, where the mayor said some 130 homes and a Taco Bell restaurant were damaged or destroyed. Three people were in critical condition, but their injuries were not life-threatening, authorities said.

Residents, who said they got plenty of warning to take shelter, picked tree branches and sheet metal from their yards. Shingles littered streets and fields in the town northeast of Indianapolis.

Carey Todd, 55, said the tornado looked like "a bunch of black birds."

Across from a church that was destroyed, a hymnal was blown open to No. 118, "Shelter in Time of Storm."

Mayor Bob McCoy said he and his wife hunkered in a closet.

"I've never heard that sound before; I don't want to hear it again," McCoy said.

West of Winchester, officials said as many as half the structures in the town of Selma, population 750,

might have been damaged. Only minor injuries were reported, emergency officials said in a news release.

Gov. Eric Holcomb praised first responders in Indiana, saying: "By the grace of God, everyone has lived through it all."

Storms also damaged homes and trailers in the Ohio River communities of Hanover and Lamb in Indiana.

In Milton, Kentucky, two people were injured when their car was hit by debris from a tornado that damaged as many as 100 homes and businesses, said Trimble County Emergency Management Director Andrew Stark.

In Arkansas, a tornado struck the retirement community of Hot Springs Village, southwest of Little Rock, but there were no reports of fatalities or injuries, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Erik Green.

## Prosecutor leaves Georgia election case against Trump after relationship with district attorney

By KATE BRUMBACK and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A special prosecutor who had a romantic relationship with Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis formally withdrew Friday from the Georgia election interference case against Donald Trump after a judge ruled he had to leave or Willis couldn't continue to pursue the charges.

Attorney Nathan Wade's resignation allows Willis to remain on the most sprawling of four criminal cases against the presumptive Republican nominee in the 2024 presidential election.

But the long-term damage to the public perception of the prosecution remains unclear, particularly in light of Trump's relentless barrage of attacks on the pair who pledged to hold Trump accountable but found their own actions under a public microscope.

Wade offered his resignation in a letter to Willis, saying he was doing so "in the interest of democracy, in dedication to the American public and to move this case forward as quickly as possible."

"I am sure that the case, and the team, will be in good hands moving forward and justice will be served," Wade wrote.

Willis complimented Wade's "professionalism and dignity" in a letter accepting his resignation, effective immediately. She said he had endured threats against himself and his family, as well as "unjustified attacks" in the media and in court on his reputation as a lawyer.

"I will always remember — and will remind everyone — that you were brave enough to step forward and take on the investigation and prosecution of the allegations that the defendants in this case engaged in a conspiracy to overturn Georgia's 2020 Presidential Election," Willis wrote.

Trump's team felt differently.

In a social media post, Trump said the "Fani Willis lover" had "resigned in disgrace," and Trump repeated his assertion that the case is an effort to hurt his campaign to reclaim the White House in November. Trump has denied doing anything wrong and pleaded not guilty.

An attorney for the former president said they respected the court's decision but believe the judge "did not afford appropriate significance to the prosecutorial misconduct of Willis and Wade."

"We will use all legal options available as we continue to fight to end this case, which should never have been brought in the first place," Trump attorney Steve Sadow said.

Defense attorneys could try to appeal the ruling, but they would need the judge's permission to do so.

In a separate criminal case against Trump in New York, a judge agreed Friday to delay the trial related to hush-money payments during Trump's 2016 campaign until at least mid-April. The trial was supposed to begin later this month, but Trump's lawyers said they needed more time to sift through evidence they only recently obtained from a previous federal investigation into the matter.

In Georgia, Wade's resignation came hours after Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee said he had to be removed or Willis must step aside from the case. McAfee did not find that Willis' relationship with Wade amounted to a conflict of interest but said the allegations created an "appearance of impro-

priety" that infected the prosecution team.

"As the case moves forward, reasonable members of the public could easily be left to wonder whether the financial exchanges have continued resulting in some form of benefit to the District Attorney, or even whether the romantic relationship has resumed," the judge wrote.

"Put differently, an outsider could reasonably think that the District Attorney is not exercising her independent professional judgment totally free of any compromising influences. As long as Wade remains on the case, this unnecessary perception will persist."

Friday's extraordinary developments underscored the extent to which the case that began with allegations that a former president tried to undermine the will of the people who voted him out of the White House had become consumed by talk of the love lives of its top prosecutors. In accepting Wade's resignation, Willis made clear her determination to turn the page from weeks of embarrassing headlines about romantic getaways, sex and stashes of cash that have dominated coverage of the case.

Willis hired Wade in 2021 to lead the team to investigate and ultimately prosecute Trump and 18 others on charges that they illegally tried to overturn his narrow loss to Democrat Joe Biden in Georgia in 2020. 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.

Willis and Wade testified at a hearing last month that they had engaged in a romantic relationship, but they rejected the idea that Willis improperly benefited from it, as lawyers for Trump and some of his co-defendants alleged. Willis and Wade insisted they didn't begin dating until after he became special prosecutor, though a former friend and employee of Willis' testified that she saw the pair hugging and kissing before he was hired.

Willis and Wade said the relationship ended in the summer of 2023. They both said that Willis either paid for things herself or used cash to reimburse Wade for travel expenses.

McAfee wrote that there was insufficient evidence that Willis had a personal stake in the prosecution. And he said he was unable to "conclusively establish by a preponderance of the evidence" whether Willis and Wade began dating before or after he was hired as special prosecutor.

"However, an odor of mendacity remains," the judge wrote. He said "reasonable questions" about whether Willis and Wade testified truthfully about the timing of their relationship "further underpin the finding of an appearance of impropriety and the need to make proportional efforts to cure it."

Even so, he said, dismissal of the case was not the appropriate remedy to "adequately dissipate the financial cloud of impropriety and potential untruthfulness found here."

An attorney for co-defendant Michael Roman was the first to ask McAfee to dismiss the indictment and prevent Willis and Wade and their offices from continuing to prosecute the case. The attorney, Ashleigh Merchant, alleged that Willis paid Wade large sums for his work and then improperly benefited from the prosecution of the case when Wade used his earnings to pay for vacations for the two of them.

Merchant said in a statement Friday that while Roman's team maintains that the judge should have disqualified Willis' office entirely, the judge clearly agreed with the defense that there is a "risk to the future of this case" if Willis "doesn't quickly work to cure her conflict."

## Law enforcement should have seized man's guns weeks before he killed 18 in Maine, report finds

By PATRICK WHITTLE, STEVE LeBLANC and NICK PERRY Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Law enforcement should have seized a man's guns and put him in protective custody weeks before he committed Maine's deadliest mass shooting, a report found Friday.

An independent commission has been reviewing the events that led up to Army reservist Robert Card killing 18 people at a bowling alley and a bar in Lewiston on Oct. 25, as well as the subsequent response.

The commission criticized Sgt. Aaron Skolfield, who responded to a report five weeks before the shooting that Card was suffering from some sort of mental health crisis after he'd previously assaulted a friend and threatened to shoot up the Saco Armory.



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The commission found Skolfield, of the Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Office, should have realized he had probable cause to start a so-called "yellow flag" process, which allows a judge to temporarily remove somebody's guns during a psychiatric health crisis.

Leroy Walker, whose son Joseph was killed in the shootings, said the commission's finding that the yellow flag law could have been implemented but wasn't reflected what victims' families have known all along.

"The commission said it straight out — that they could have done it, should have done it," said Walker, an Auburn City Council member. "What something like this really does is it brings up everything ... It just breaks the heart all over again."

Maine State Police and the sheriff's office did not immediately respond to calls seeking comment.

Commission Chair Daniel Wathen said their work wasn't finished and that the interim report was intended to provide policymakers and law enforcement with key information they had learned.

"Nothing we do can ever change what happened on that terrible day, but knowing the facts can help provide the answers that the victims, their families, and the people of Maine need and deserve," Wathen said in a statement.

Ben Gideon, an attorney representing the victims, said he felt the report focused heavily on the actions of the sheriff's office while ignoring the broader issue of access to guns by potentially dangerous people in the state. Elizabeth Seal, whose husband Joshua was killed in the shootings, said she felt the focus of the report was "narrow."

"I'm in agreement with the committee's findings as far as they go, and I do think it's a legitimate point that the Sagadahoc Sheriff's Office could have done more to intervene," Gideon said. "I was a little disappointed that the committee didn't take a wider view of the issues that start as far back as May."

He also said he hoped the report would make the shooter's health records available to victims and the public, which it did not.

Led by a former chief justice of Maine's highest court, the commission also included a former U.S. attorney and the former chief forensic psychologist for the state. It was assembled by Democratic Gov. Janet Mills and Attorney General Aaron Frey.

It has held seven sessions starting in November, hearing from law enforcement, survivors and victims' family members and members of the U.S. Army Reserve as it explored whether anything could have been done to prevent the tragedy and what changes should be made going forward.

The commission plans to schedule more meetings. Spokesperson Kevin Kelley said a final report was due in the summer.

Mills said the panel's work is of "paramount importance for the people of Maine." She said she would "carefully review" the report.

Card, who was found dead by suicide after a two-day search, was well-known to law enforcement, and his family and fellow service members had raised flags about his behavior, deteriorating mental health and potential for violence before the shootings.

In May, relatives warned police that Card had grown paranoid, and they expressed concern about his access to guns. In July, Card was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for two weeks after shoving a fellow reservist and locking himself in a motel room. In August, the Army barred him from handling weapons while on duty and declared him nondeployable. And in September, a fellow reservist texted an Army supervisor about his growing concerns about Card, saying, "I believe he's going to snap and do a mass shooting."

Law enforcement officials told commission members that Maine's yellow flag law makes it difficult to remove guns from potentially dangerous people.

"I couldn't get him to the door. I can't make him open the door," Skolfield said of his visit to Card's home for a welfare check in September. "If I had kicked in the door, that would've been a violation of the law."

In later testimony, those involved in the search for Card in the shooting's aftermath acknowledged potential missed opportunities to find him and end the search that locked down the community and terrified residents. Some of the most emotional testimony came from family members who tearfully described scenes of blood, chaos and panic followed by unfathomable loss.

Rachael Sloat, who was engaged to be married to shooting victim Peton Berwer Ross, told the committee that her heart breaks every time their 2-year-old daughter asks for her daddy.

"Where are you?" she said. "Every politician, every member of law enforcement, every registered voter in the country — I want you to hear those words. 'Where are you?' Because my fellow Americans, where are you? We failed my little girl."

## What to know about judge's ruling allowing Fani Willis to stay on Trump's Georgia election case

By KATE BRUMBACK and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER undefined

ATLANTA (AP) — Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis can prosecute Donald Trump on charges that he interfered with Georgia's 2020 election now that a special prosecutor with whom she had a romantic relationship has withdrawn from the case.

But the long-term impacts of allegations of impropriety that have roiled the case for weeks remain to be seen, with Trump and his allies certain to continue to attack the legitimacy of the prosecution against the former president and 18 others.

Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee ruled Friday that Willis could stay if special prosecutor Nathan Wade left. That was a partial victory for Willis, whom defense attorneys had pushed to have removed from the case over her relationship with Wade.

But the judge also rebuked Willis for her "tremendous" lapse in judgment and questioned the truthfulness of Wade's and her testimony about the timing of their relationship.

It's an extraordinary decision in a case that in recent weeks has taken on a soap opera atmosphere as the prosecutors who pledged to hold Trump accountable had their own personal lives thrust into the spotlight.

Here are some major takeaways from the judge's ruling:

### THE JUDGE PUT THE BALL IN WILLIS' COURT

The judge's ruling threw it to Willis to decide whether she — and her entire office — would step aside or whether Wade would withdraw from the case. The judge said the prosecution couldn't move forward until one of those two actions was taken.

Several hours after the ruling came down, Wade offered his resignation and Willis accepted it.

If Willis had instead opted to step aside, the case would have been referred to the Prosecuting Attorneys' Council — a nonpartisan association of Georgia district attorneys — to be assigned to a different prosecutor.

That could have upended the entire prosecution. Another prosecutor could have continued on the track that Willis has taken, could have chosen to pursue only some charges or could have dropped the case altogether.

### FINANCIAL CONCERNS

The defense attorney who first revealed the romantic relationship, Ashleigh Merchant, alleged that Willis paid Wade large sums for his work and then improperly benefited from the prosecution of the case when Wade used his earnings to pay for vacations for the two of them.

Willis and Wade argued that the district attorney received no financial benefit from the relationship and that she either paid for things herself or used cash to reimburse Wade for travel expenses.

Judge McAfee called it "concerning" that there were no documents to corroborate Willis' claim that she paid Wade back. But he said Willis' testimony "withstood direct contradiction" and was corroborated by other evidence, including her purchase of a flight for two in 2022. That led the judge to conclude that the claim "was not so incredible as to be inherently unbelievable."

The judge said there was no way to know for sure that Willis and Wade's expenses were split evenly — and Willis "may well have received a net benefit of several hundred dollars." But, McAfee said the defendants didn't provide sufficient evidence to prove that Willis financially benefited from hiring Wade.

Furthermore, McAfee concluded that enriching herself through her relationship with Wade was not a motivating factor in Willis' decision to bring the case.

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The judge noted that Willis was not "financially destitute throughout this time or in any great need," but was making more than \$200,000 per year. He also said there was no indication she was trying to prolong the case to rake in more money, noting that prosecutors had initially wanted the case to go to trial less than six months after they brought the indictment.

## WILLIS' PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Attorneys for Trump and others said Willis' public statements about the case veered into the realm of misconduct, saying she expressed her belief in the guilt of the defendants.

McAfee noted that he had to consider whether the remarks were "part of a calculated plan" to prejudice the defendants in the minds of future jurors. He said the comments must be "egregiously" improper to justify disqualification.

The judge found that statements Willis made describing the charges in the indictment, her office's conviction rates and personal anecdotes were not disqualifying. That extended to her "unorthodox decision" to speak on the record to authors of a book about the special grand jury investigation that preceded the indictment, he wrote.

A speech she gave at a historic Black church in Atlanta less than a week after the allegations of her relationship with Wade surfaced was a different matter, the judge wrote. Willis complained in those remarks that people had questioned her decision to hire Wade and questioned his qualifications, seeming to suggest the criticism arose from the fact that she and Wade are Black.

McAfee noted that the speech did not mention any defendant by name and did not address the merits of the charges in the case or disclose any sensitive or confidential evidence. He said he didn't find that it crossed the line to the point that the defendants couldn't have a fair trial.

"But it was still legally improper," he wrote. "Providing this type of public comment creates dangerous waters for the District Attorney to wade further into."

He noted that it may well be time for an order preventing prosecutors from mentioning a case in public to prevent prejudicial pretrial publicity, but he said that was not the issue currently before him.

McAfee has recently made his own public statements about the case.

He said in an interview on WSB Radio last week that he'd had a rough draft of his ruling ready before he knew that anyone planned to challenge him in a May election and that "the result is not going to change because of politics." When a WSB-TV reporter snagged him on the sidelines of a Rotary Club lunch Thursday, McAfee said the ruling would be out Friday and that "no ruling of mine is ever going to be based on politics."

McAfee was appointed to his seat by Georgia's Republican governor and faces two challengers in a May election. The race is nonpartisan, but Fulton County is a Democratic stronghold.

## LACK OF CANDOR

Wade was questioned on the stand about statements he had made in his divorce case that he hadn't been romantically involved with anyone other than his wife during their marriage. His "patently unpersuasive explanation" for those inaccuracies "indicates a willingness on his part to wrongly conceal his relationship with the District Attorney," McAfee wrote.

McAfee also found himself unable to determine the answer to a central question in the evidentiary hearing: whether Willis and Wade began their romantic relationship before she hired him. Neither side provided sufficient evidence to make a conclusive determination, he wrote.

But he said, "an odor of mendacity remains." He wrote that "reasonable questions" about whether Willis and Wade testified truthfully about that timing "further underpin the finding of an appearance of impropriety and the need to make proportional efforts to cure it."

## Brazil military leaders told police Bolsonaro plotted to remain in power despite election defeat

By MAURICIO SAVARESE and ELÉONORE HUGHES Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — Two top Brazilian military leaders declared to police that former President Jair Bolsonaro presented them a plan for him to remain in power after the 2022 election he lost, but both refused and warned him they would arrest him if he tried it, according to judicial documents released Friday.

The testimonies of Bolsonaro's former Army and Air Force commanders to police, and released by the Supreme Court, include the first direct mentions of the right-wing leader as actively participating in a conspiracy to ignore the results of the October 2022 election won by his rival, current President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The statements by military commanders during Bolsonaro's term add to his legal woes as prosecutors seek to find links between the far-right leader and the Jan. 8, 2023 riots that trashed government buildings in the capital Brasilia one week after Lula's inauguration.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, a frequent target of Bolsonaro and the chairman of the investigation, authorized the release of the documents.

A federal police report said former army commander Marco Antônio Freire Gomes testified that he and other top military leaders attended several last-minute and unscheduled meetings at the presidential palace after the second round of the elections "in which then-President Jair Bolsonaro offered possibilities of using legal tools... regarding the electoral process."

Gen. Freire Gomes told federal police that in one of the gatherings Bolsonaro told the three commanders of his military and his then-Defense Secretary Paulo Sergio Nogueira he wanted to create a commission to "investigate the confirmation and the legality of the electoral process." He added other tools could be used, such as issuing a decree to declare a state of siege.

Freire Gomes said he rejected the idea from the start and told Bolsonaro that such a move "could end in the legal responsibility of the then-president," according to the federal police document.

The Brazilian general also declared to police he "always made it clear to the then-president that, under the conditions at the time, there was no possibility of reversing the result of the elections from a military standpoint."

Former Air Force commander Brig. Carlos de Almeida Baptista Júnior also told federal police he rejected Bolsonaro's electoral moves. He added that he believes that Gen. Freire Gomes' rebuke was key to stopping Bolsonaro from seeking to reverse the elections result.

"If the commander (Freire Gomes) had agreed, possibly, a coup d'état attempt would have taken place," the federal police document quotes Baptista Jr. as saying.

"Gen. Freire Gomes said that if such move was attempted he would have to arrest the president," the police document reads.

Baptista Jr. also told the federal police that Fleet Admiral Almir Garnier, the former commander of Brazil's Navy, "said he would put his troops at Jair Bolsonaro's disposal," according to the document.

Bolsonaro has denied that he and his supporters attempted a coup when rioters assaulted government buildings a year ago.

"What is a coup? It is tanks on the streets, weapons, conspiracy. None of that happened in Brazil," he said during a demonstration last month.

Bolsonaro's lawyer, Fabio Wajngarten, said on X, formerly Twitter, he never heard about any plot to keep the former president in office or threats from military commanders to put him in jail if he tried.

Without naming the former commanders, Wajngarten said: "They are friends of whoever holds power. Their insignificance is their biggest and best trait. Sycophants. Dazzled by microphones, waiters and drivers. Mediocre."

Bolsonaro started raising unfounded questions about Brazil's electronic voting process years before the vote, and those efforts to sow doubts accelerated in the lead up to the election that catapulted Lula back to the office he held between 2003-2010.

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Gleisi Hoffmann, the chairwoman of Lula's Workers' Party, said the revelations by military leaders proved that "the president's victory was fundamental to keep democracy" in Brazil.

"We are on the right side of history," Hoffmann said on her social media channels.

Some Bolsonaro allies in Congress have spoken about a bill to pardon those involved in the Jan. 8 riots. A few of them belong to his Liberal Party, whose chairman Valdemar Costa Neto also spoke to federal police. Neto claimed, according to the documents, he only questioned electoral results because he was under pressure from the former president.

Top figures in the military giving lengthy testimonies to Federal Police is an ominous omen for Bolsonaro. "It's one of the first big signs that Bolsonaro is going to stand alone and lose much of the military support he had," said Sérgio Praça, a political scientist from the Rio de Janeiro-based Getulio Vargas Foundation, a think tank and university.

But the testimonies are unlikely to have a significant impact on public opinion, said Manoel Galdino, a political scientist at the University of Sao Paulo.

Bolsonaro loyalists will not be swayed by new evidence, while many others are already convinced that the former president was involved in plotting a coup.

"There has been no major new revelation to the point of changing Bolsonaro's status or the role he will play in the October municipal elections, for example," said Galdino.

Bolsonaro is barred from running for office until 2030 due to two convictions of abuse of power, but he remains active in Brazilian politics as the main adversary for left-of-center Lula. As this year's mayoral elections loom, candidates have split between the two leaders.

According to Brazil's Penal Code, attempting a coup carries a sentence of minimum four years and a maximum of 12. Some of Bolsonaro's advocates argue he never tried to do that, and claim there are no documents signed by him with orders that ultimately would have led to keeping him in office.

Cezar Ziliotto, a constitutional law attorney, said the testimonies of the two former military commanders are the most relevant pieces yet to determine Bolsonaro's role prior to the riots. He believes their statements will be part of the likely charges against the former president to be delivered to the Supreme Court within months.

"These are two people who were high up and suggest that he had the intent, possible leadership, a role in the coordination and a clear participation in questioning the results of the election," Ziliotto said. "But now there is some confirmation that there was a plot."

Even though Bolsonaro never issued a decree to put tanks in the streets, he is still in serious legal jeopardy because of all the other evidence against him, Ziliotto added.

"If he had signed a decree that would have been biggest possible evidence Bolsonaro was linked to it. But this about much more than a draft being signed or not. There's planning, preparatory acts, a lot of evidence to look at," the attorney said.

## Judge delays Trump's hush-money criminal trial until mid-April, citing last-minute evidence dump

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's New York hush-money criminal trial was delayed Friday until at least mid-April as the judge seeks answers about a last-minute evidence dump that the former president's lawyers said has hampered their ability to prepare their defense.

Manhattan Judge Juan Manuel Merchan agreed to a 30-day delay starting Friday and scheduled a hearing for March 25 after Trump's lawyers complained that they only recently started receiving more than 100,000 pages of documents from a previous federal investigation into the matter.

The trial had been scheduled to start on March 25. The delay means the trial would start no earlier than April 15. Prosecutors had said they wouldn't object to a short delay. Trump's lawyers have requested a three-month delay as well as asking for the case to be thrown out.

In a statement Friday, the Trump campaign continued to argue that the case "has no basis in law or

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fact, and should be dismissed.”

In a letter Friday, Merchan told Manhattan prosecutors and Trump’s defense team that he wanted to assess “who, if anyone, is at fault for the late production of the documents,” whether it hurt either side and whether any sanctions are warranted.

The judge demanded a timeline of events detailing when the documents were requested and when they were turned over. He also wants all correspondence between the Manhattan district attorney’s office, which is prosecuting Trump, and the U.S. attorney’s office, which previously investigated the matter in 2018.

The Manhattan district attorney’s office declined comment. Trump lawyer Todd Blanche also declined comment.

Merchan’s decision upended what had been on track to be the first of Trump’s four criminal indictments to go to trial. Trump, the presumptive 2024 Republican presidential nominee, has fought to delay all of his criminal cases, arguing that he shouldn’t be forced into a courtroom while he should be on the campaign trail.

Trump’s lawyers raised the evidence issue last week, though their court filing wasn’t made public until Thursday. In their motion, they made multiple requests. Among them, they asked for a 90-day delay, which would push the start of the trial into the early summer; that certain witness testimony be precluded; and that Trump’s charges be dismissed.

Prosecutors said they were ready to proceed to trial on March 25, but were OK with a 30-day adjournment “in an abundance of caution and to ensure that defendant has sufficient time to review the new materials.”

“Trial on this matter is adjourned for 30 days from the date of this letter on consent of the People,” Merchan wrote, referring to the prosecution. “The Court will set the new trial date, if necessary, when it rules on Defendant’s motion following the hearing.”

Merchan said his prior directive that the parties, including Trump, “not engage or otherwise enter into any commitment pending completion of this trial” remains in effect.

Trump’s lawyers said they have received tens of thousands of pages of evidence in the last two weeks from the U.S. attorney’s office in Manhattan, which investigated the hush money arrangement while Trump was president.

The evidence includes records about former Trump lawyer-turned-prosecution witness Michael Cohen that are “exculpatory and favorable to the defense,” Trump’s lawyers said. Prosecutors said most of the newly turned over material is “largely irrelevant to the subject matter of this case,” though some records are pertinent.

The hush money case centers on allegations that Trump falsified his company’s records to hide the true nature of payments to Cohen, who paid porn actor Stormy Daniels \$130,000 during the 2016 presidential campaign to suppress her claims of an extramarital sexual encounter with Trump years earlier.

Trump pleaded not guilty last year to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records and has denied having a sexual encounter with Daniels. His lawyers argue the payments to Cohen were legitimate legal expenses and were not part of any cover-up.

Prosecutors contend Trump’s lawyers caused the evidence problem by waiting until Jan. 18 — a mere nine weeks before the scheduled start of jury selection — to subpoena the U.S. attorney’s office for the full case file.

District Attorney Alvin Bragg’s office said it requested the full file last year but the U.S. attorney’s office only turned over a subset of records. Trump’s lawyers received that material last June and had ample time to seek additional evidence from the federal probe, the district attorney’s office said.

Short trial delays because of issues with evidence aren’t unusual, but any delay in a case involving Trump would be significant, with trial dates in his other criminal cases up in the air and Election Day less than eight months away.

The defense has also sought to delay the trial until after the Supreme Court rules on Trump’s presidential immunity claims, which his lawyers say could apply to some of the allegations and evidence in the hush money case. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral arguments April 25.

Trump has repeatedly sought to postpone his criminal trials while he campaigns to retake the White House. "We want delays," Trump told reporters as he headed into a Feb. 15 hearing in New York. "Obviously I'm running for election. How can you run for election if you're sitting in a courthouse in Manhattan all day long?"

## Real estate lawsuit settlement upends decadeslong policies that helped set agent commissions

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

A powerful real estate trade group has agreed to do away with policies that for decades helped set agent commissions, moving to resolve lawsuits that claim the rules have forced people to pay artificially inflated costs to sell their homes.

Under the terms of the agreement announced Friday, the National Association of Realtors also agreed to pay \$418 million to help compensate home sellers across the U.S.

Home sellers behind multiple lawsuits against the NAR and several major brokerages argued that the trade group's rules governing homes listed for sale on its affiliated Multiple Listing Services unfairly propped up agent commissions. The rules also incentivized agents representing buyers to avoid showing their clients listings where the seller's broker was offering a lower commission to the buyer's agent, they argued.

As part of the settlement, the NAR agreed to no longer require a broker advertising a home for sale on MLS to offer any upfront compensation to a buyer's agent. The rule change leaves it open for individual home sellers to negotiate such offers with a buyer's agent outside of the MLS platforms, though the home seller's broker has to disclose any such compensation arrangements.

The trade group also agreed to require agents or others working with a homebuyer to enter into a written agreement with them. That is meant to ensure homebuyers know going in what their agent will charge them for their services.

The rule changes, which are set to go into effect in mid-July, represent a major change to the way real estate agents have operated going back to the 1990s, and could lead to homebuyers and sellers negotiating lower agent commissions.

Currently, agents working with a buyer and seller typically split a commission of around 5% to 6% that's paid by the seller. This practice essentially became customary as home listings included built-in offers of "cooperative compensation" between agents on both sides of the transaction.

But the rule changes the NAR agreed to as part of the settlement could give home sellers and buyers more impetus to negotiate lower agent commissions.

"It may take some time for the changes to impact the marketplace, but our hope and expectation is that this will put a downward pressure on the cost of hiring a real estate broker," said Robby Braun, an attorney in a federal lawsuit brought in 2019 in Chicago on behalf of millions of home sellers.

Analysts with Keefe, Bruyette & Woods also anticipate that the NAR rule changes will lead to lower agent commissions and could persuade some homebuyers to skip using an agent altogether.

"In our view, the combination of mandated buyer representation agreements and the prohibition of blanket compensation offers made by listing agents and sellers should result in significant price competition for buyer agent commissions," the analysts wrote in a research note Friday.

While setting the stage for homebuyers to negotiate a more competitive price for their agent's services, the rule changes mean home shoppers will have to factor in how to cover their agent's compensation.

Homebuyers could still ask a prospective home seller for a concession that includes money to help cover the buyer's agent compensation. However, a home seller with multiple offers, for example, could refuse such a request, or opt to go with a bid from a different buyer who isn't asking for such a concession.

"The real solution is for the industry to work to remove regulatory barriers that make it difficult for buyers to include this compensation in their mortgages," said Stephen Brobeck, senior fellow at the Consumer Federation of America.

The NAR faced multiple lawsuits over the way agent commissions are set. In late October, a federal jury

in Missouri found that the NAR and several large real estate brokerages conspired to require that home sellers pay homebuyers' agent commissions in violation of federal antitrust law.

The jury ordered the defendants to pay almost \$1.8 billion in damages — and potentially more than \$5 billion if the court ended up awarding the plaintiffs treble damages.

The settlement, if approved by the court, resolves that and similar suits faced by the NAR. It covers over one million of the NAR's members, its affiliated Multiple Listing Services and all brokerages with a NAR member as a principal that had a residential transaction volume in 2022 of \$2 billion or less.

"Ultimately, continuing to litigate would have hurt members and their small businesses," Nykia Wright, NAR's interim CEO, said in a statement. "While there could be no perfect outcome, this agreement is the best outcome we could achieve in the circumstances."

The settlement does not include real estate agents affiliated with HomeServices of America and its related companies.

Last month, Keller Williams Realty, one of the nation's largest real estate brokerages, agreed to pay \$70 million and change some of its agent guidelines to settle agent commission lawsuits.

Two other large real estate brokerages agreed to similar settlement terms last year. In their respective pacts, Anywhere Real Estate Inc. agreed to pay \$83.5 million, while Re/Max agreed to pay \$55 million.

## **Prosecutors say New York subway shooting may have been self defense**

NEW YORK (AP) — A man who shot and critically wounded another passenger on a New York City subway train may have acted in self-defense and will not immediately be charged with any crime, prosecutors said Friday.

"Yesterday's shooting inside a crowded subway car was shocking and deeply upsetting. The investigation into this tragic incident is ongoing but, at this stage, evidence of self-defense precludes us from filing any criminal charges against the shooter," said Oren Yaniv, a spokesperson for Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez.

The shooting during Thursday's rush hour came a week after Gov. Kathy Hochul sent the National Guard into the subway system to help police search people for weapons, citing a need to make people feel safer after a series of headline-making crimes in recent months.

Video taken by a bystander and posted on social media showed a confrontation that began with one passenger berating another and repeatedly threatening to beat him up. The two men squared off and fought before they were separated by another rider.

Then the belligerent rider who had started the confrontation pulled a gun from his jacket and cocked it. Passengers fled and covered at the far end of the car, some screaming, "Stop! Stop!" The shooting isn't seen, but gunshots can be heard as passengers flee from the train as it arrives at a station.

Police said that the 36-year-old man who had pulled the gun lost control of it during the altercation. The other man, 32, got possession and shot him.

The man who was shot was hospitalized in critical condition. Police have not identified either man.

Michael Kemper, the Police Department's chief of transit, said at a briefing late Thursday that witnesses had reported that the man who was shot was being "aggressive and provocative."

New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a former transit police officer, said he believes the man who was shot was suffering from "mental health illness."

"When you look at that video, you'll see the nexus between someone who appears, from what I saw, to be dealing with severe mental health illness, sparking a dispute on our subway system," Adams said on radio station 77 WABC.

Adams urged state lawmakers to give New York City more authority to remove mentally ill people from the streets and the subway system involuntarily.

NYPD Chief of Department Jeffrey Maddrey said at a briefing Friday that the man who was shot had entered through an open emergency door without paying the \$2.90 subway fare and suggested that the shooting highlights the need to crack down on fare evasion.



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"It is important that the NYPD enforces quality of life," Maddrey said. "It's important that we enforce that service and people who are not paying the fare, oftentimes we see people enter the subway station looking to cause harm and they never pay the fare."

Violence in the New York City subway system is rare, but serious incidents such as a passenger's slashing of a subway conductor in the neck last month, and a shooting on a Bronx subway platform, have attracted attention.

## Florida rivals ask courts to stop online sports gambling off tribal lands

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The state of Florida and the Seminole Tribe of Florida will be raking in hundreds of millions of dollars from online sports betting this decade, thanks to a compact between the tribe and Gov. Ron DeSantis that gave the tribe exclusive rights to run sports wagers as well as casino gambling on its reservations.

But are these online wagers on the outcome of sporting events legally on tribal land, when really only the computer servers are located there, accepting bets made using mobile phones and computers from anywhere in Florida?

That's a question two of the tribe's gaming competitors are hoping the U.S. Supreme Court will take up soon and answer with a definitive "no."

A decision by the nation's highest court would be of "massive importance" for the future of online gaming across the U.S., since leaving in place an appellate ruling in the tribe's favor would set a precedent for other end-runs around state prohibitions against gaming off tribal lands, said the firms, West Flagler Associates and Bonita-Fort Myers Corporation, which operate racetracks and poker rooms in Florida.

The companies sued Deb Haaland, secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior, which oversees tribal gambling.

The U.S. Supreme Court accepts a tiny percentage of such petitions each year.

The two pari-mutuel firms say the compact signed by the governor and the tribe in 2021 gives the tribe a sports gambling monopoly and creates a "backdoor" way out of the state's requirement, passed by voters in 2018 as an amendment to the Florida Constitution, that a citizens initiative is needed to expand casino gambling outside tribal land.

"Through this artifice, the Compact transparently attempts to get around the Florida Constitution," the firms' attorneys said. "The whole point of the Compact is to provide a hook for dodging Florida's constitutional requirement of a popular referendum to approve off-reservation sports betting."

A lot of money is at stake. The tribe launched its online sports betting operation late last year, and Florida's share of 2024 revenues is already more than \$120 million. State economic forecasters predict the revenue sharing from tribal gaming could total \$4.4 billion through the end of this decade.

The pari-mutuel firms also sued DeSantis and leaders of the Florida Legislature, which authorized the compact, in a case pending before the Florida Supreme Court. The tribe argued the legislature has the authority to decide where online gambling is initiated and the amendment doesn't change that.

"The 2021 Compact is an historic agreement between the Tribe and State that settled years of disputes," the Seminole Tribe said in a court filing.

The tribe now counts about 5,000 members, descended from the Native Americans who survived in the Florida Everglades, resisting federal efforts to remove them in the 19th century. The sovereign tribe operates seven casinos across Florida and owns the Hard Rock Hotel & Casinos business, with locations in 76 countries.

Attorneys for DeSantis and the legislative leaders argue sports betting is different from casino gambling and therefore isn't prohibited by the amendment. They also note that rivals can get in on the action — and get paid a revenue share — by allowing their customers to make online bets from their properties to the tribe's servers.

"As an important source of revenue for both the Seminole Tribe and the State — and even the Tribe's

competitors — the 2021 compact serves the public interest and has been upheld in federal court,” attorneys for DeSantis and the legislative leaders told the state justices.

The pari-mutuel firms’ latest petition before the U.S. Supreme Court was filed Feb. 8, after an appellate panel reversed a federal district court decision in their favor. If the justices don’t weigh in, Florida’s example could inspire other states to allow tribes to expand online gaming, Daniel Wallach, a South Florida attorney and sports betting law expert said in a high court brief.

## **The first ship to use a new sea route delivers aid to Gaza, Israeli military says**

By WAFSA SHURAFSA Associated Press

WADI GAZA, Gaza Strip (AP) — A ship delivered 200 tons of humanitarian supplies, food and water to Gaza on Friday, the Israeli military said, inaugurating a sea route from Cyprus for aid to help ease the humanitarian crisis brought by Israel’s 5-month-old offensive in the enclave.

Israel has been under increasing pressure to allow more aid into Gaza, especially in the Palestinian territory’s isolated north where hunger is at its worst, with many people reduced to eating animal feed and weeds. The United States has joined other countries in airdropping supplies into northern Gaza and has announced separate plans to construct a pier to get aid in.

Aid groups said the airdrops and sea shipments are far less efficient than trucks in delivering the massive amounts of aid needed. Instead, the groups have called on Israel to guarantee safe corridors for truck convoys after land deliveries became nearly impossible because of military restrictions, ongoing hostilities and the breakdown of order after the Hamas-run police force largely vanished from the streets.

The ship, operated by the Spanish aid group Open Arms, left Cyprus on Tuesday towing a barge laden with food, including rice, flour, lentils, beans, tuna and canned meat. The food was sent by World Central Kitchen, the charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés, which operates kitchens providing free meals in Gaza.

Throughout the day Friday, the ship could be seen off Gaza’s coast. In the evening, the military said its cargo had been unloaded onto 12 trucks. Grainy footage released by the military showed a truck on a pier approaching the barge.

The food is to be distributed in the north, the largely devastated target of Israel’s initial offensive in Gaza, where up to 300,000 Palestinians are believed to remain, mostly cut off by Israeli forces since October.

The delivery is intended to pave the way for larger shipments. A second vessel will head to Gaza once the supplies on the first ship are distributed, Cyprus’ Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos said. Its timing depends in part on whether the Open Arms delivery goes smoothly, he said.

The Israel-Hamas war was triggered by Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and resulted in another 250 being taken into Gaza as hostages. Israel’s offensive in Gaza has killed over 31,000 Palestinians and driven most of Gaza’s 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza’s population is starving, according to the United Nations.

The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza accused Israeli forces late Thursday of attacking Palestinians waiting for an aid convoy at a distribution point in northern Gaza, killing at least 20 people and wounding 155. At Shifa Hospital, doctors said the casualties were mostly hit by live fire, with some showing signs of being crushed.

The Israeli military denied its forces fired at civilians or the convoy. In a statement, it said Palestinian gunmen opened fire among the crowd and that some were run over by the trucks. Aerial footage released by the military appeared to show only one man pushing and shoving people.

Bloodshed surrounding an aid convoy on Feb. 29 killed 118 Palestinians in northern Gaza, when the Israeli military said its forces fired at people in the crowd who were advancing toward them and that tanks fired warning shots to disperse them. Witnesses and hospital officials said many of the casualties were from bullet wounds.

Military officials initially blamed many of the deaths on a stampede; a later military command review said only that the stampede caused “significant harm” without addressing the cause of the deaths.

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After that, plans for the sea route took shape, and the United States and other countries joined Jordan in dropping aid into the north by plane.

But people in northern Gaza say the airdrops cannot meet the vast need. Many can't access the aid because people are fighting over it, said Suwar Baroud, 24, who was displaced by the fighting and is now in Gaza City. Some people hoard it and sell it in the market, she said.

A recent airdrop that malfunctioned plummeted from the sky and killed five people.

Another landed in a sewage and garbage dump, said Riham Abu al-Bid. Men ran in but were unable to retrieve anything, she said.

"I wish these airdrops never happened and that our dignity and freedom would be taken into consideration, so we can get our sustenance in a dignified way and not in a manner that is so humiliating," she said.

On average, around 115 supply trucks a day have entered Gaza over the entire course of the war, according to figures released by the Israeli prime minister's office — far below the average of 500 a day before Oct. 7 — though on some days the number spikes to above 200.

This week, Israel began allowing trucks to enter directly into the north, a step aid groups have long called for. The military has also been arranging private commercial convoys and says more than 300 trucks — mainly private — have entered the north since the beginning of February.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Friday that at least 31,490 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

International mediators have been working to broker a cease-fire, though hopes were thwarted for one before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which started this week.

Hamas put forward a new cease-fire proposal calling for a three-stage process, according to a report by Al Jazeera television that was confirmed to The Associated Press by a Palestinian official.

The first six-week stage would bring a partial Israeli pullback in Gaza and the release of all female hostages held by the militants in exchange for the release of dozens of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. In the second stage, a permanent cease-fire would be declared, and Hamas would release all Israeli soldiers being held. In the third stage, reconstruction of Gaza would begin, and the Israeli blockade of Gaza would be lifted.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the proposal "unrealistic," but said Israel would send negotiators to Qatar for more talks.

Netanyahu's office also said Friday that Israel has approved military plans to attack Rafah, the southernmost town in Gaza where some 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

It said the operation will involve the evacuation of the civilian population but did not give details or a timetable. The military said Wednesday it planned to direct civilians to "humanitarian islands" in central Gaza.

At Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third-holiest site in Islam, the first Friday prayers of Ramadan were held without a major outbreak of protest or violence.

The mosque has been a frequent flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence in the past. Israel limited West Bank Palestinians' access to Friday's prayers to men over 55, women over 50 and children under 10.

The compound has long been a deeply contested religious space, as it stands on the Temple Mount, which Jews consider their most sacred site.

## **US, G-7 allies warn Iran to back off deal to provide Russia ballistic missiles or face new sanctions**

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States and allies warned Iran on Friday that major Western economies will pile new sanctions on Tehran if it moves forward with an advancing plan to provide ballistic missiles to Russia for its war with Ukraine.

The Biden administration has raised alarms for months that Russia is seeking close-range ballistic mis-

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siles from Iran as Moscow struggles to replenish its dwindling supplies.

The U.S. has yet to confirm that missiles have moved from Iran to Russia. But U.S. officials are alarmed by comments by Iranian officials that suggest that a deal is imminent.

One action that the Group of Seven countries are mulling is to prohibit Iran Air, the country's national air carrier, from flying to Europe, according to a senior Biden administration official. The official, who was not authorized to comment and insisted on anonymity, declined to preview other sanctions that the U.S. is mulling beyond describing the potential action as "significant measures."

"Were Iran to proceed with providing ballistic missiles or related technology to Russia, we are prepared to respond swiftly and in a coordinated manner including with new and significant measures against Iran," the G-7 leaders said in a statement.

Iran's U.N. Mission said last month that there are no legal restrictions to prevent it from making ballistic missile sales but that is "morally obligated to refrain from weapon transactions during the Russia-Ukraine conflict to prevent fueling the war."

The U.S. and Europe already impose extensive sanctions against Iran targeting individuals as well as limiting the country's access to trade, financial services, energy, technology and other sectors. The sanctions on Iran are arguably the most extensive and comprehensive set of sanctions that the United States maintains on any country, with thousands of individuals and entities targeted.

The Democratic administration in January said that U.S. intelligence officials had determined a Russian-Iran deal had not been completed but that they were concerned that Russia's negotiations to acquire missiles from Iran were actively advancing.

In September, according to the White House, Iran hosted Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to show off a range of ballistic missile systems — a moment that sparked U.S. concern that a deal could come together.

Asked why the deal hasn't already been consummated, White House national security spokesman John Kirby said he could not "speak for the mullahs."

Iran last year completed a deal to buy Su-35 fighter jets from Russia and has been looking to buy additional advanced military equipment from the country, including attack helicopters, radars and combat-trainer aircraft, according to the White House.

The U.S. and other countries have taken steps aimed at thwarting the supply, sale or transfer involving Iran and ballistic missile-related items, including issuing guidance to private companies about Iranian missile procurement practices to make sure they aren't inadvertently supporting Iran's development efforts.

"We've sent very clear messages to Iran to not do it, this is a subject of considerable conversation among a number of countries in Europe and the United States and I think that the concern about that eventuality and the need to address it, if necessary, is very real and very strong," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a news conference on Friday in Vienna.

The Biden administration has repeatedly sought to make the case that the Kremlin has become reliant on Iran and North Korea for the arms it needs to fight its war against Ukraine and has disclosed intelligence findings that it says show as much.

Russia has acquired and used North Korean ballistic missiles against Ukraine. Ukrainian officials, however, say that North Korean missiles when deployed by Russian forces have frequently missed targets.

Russia has received hundreds of one-way attack drones, as well as drone production-related equipment, from Iran, according to the White House. The Biden administration also has accused Tehran of providing Russia with materials to build a drone manufacturing plant east of Moscow.

Iran initially denied supplying drones to Russia. Tehran later only acknowledged providing a small number before Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine

## Businesses are ready for April's total solar eclipse with celestial-themed doughnuts and beer

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer  
NEW YORK (AP) — Eclipse-themed beer. Jewelry and ornaments. And doughnuts that capture the sun's disappearing act with the help of buttercream frosting.

With April 8's total solar eclipse right around the corner, businesses are ready for the celestial event that will dim skies along a generous path across North America.

There are oodles of special eclipse safety glasses for sale, along with T-shirts emblazoned with clever slogans and other souvenirs — just like the last time the U.S. got a big piece of the total solar eclipse action in 2017.

Hotels and resorts along the prime path are luring in visitors with special packages and Southwest and Delta are selling seats on eclipse-viewing flights. Cities, museums and parks are staging watch parties to draw in tourists as well as residents.

"This is a special event and ... the travel industry certainly is in a very good spot," said Jie Zhang, a marketing professor at the University of Maryland's business school. She also noted the eclipse craze arrives at a time when consumers are continuing to ramp up spending on new experiences.

Closer to eclipse day, there are likely to be more special products and promotions from national brands springing up, like Moon Pie's "eclipse survival kit," made up of four mini versions of the chocolate snack and two pairs of eclipse glasses.

Small businesses within the eclipse's 115-mile-wide (185-kilometer-wide) path of totality appear to be leading the charge so far. Online shops and local vendors have put together a full array of creative, limited-edition merchandise: earrings, baby onesies, ornaments, games, banners and more.

Some towns and business owners have been anticipating the celestial event and huge crowds for years. After the 2017 eclipse, "I marked my calendar," said Sam McNulty, co-founder of Market Garden Brewery in Cleveland, which is in the eclipse path this time and will see nearly four minutes of dimmed skies.

Last year, McNulty's team brewed a hazy IPA called "The Totality" to help drum up interest in the eclipse. The on tap debut was a success, and the brewery was soon approached by local grocer Heinen's to partner for a canned collaboration.

In the coming weeks, "thousands and thousands" of cans are set to hit store shelves, McNulty said — adding they decided to go big because of how rare the event is. Cleveland won't be in the path of totality again for a long time — not until 2444.

"I don't want to have to wait 420 years to brew the next batch of cans," he joked. "So we made a very large one this time."

The eclipse-themed beverages don't stop at beer. Big Cuppa, a coffee shop in Morrilton, Arkansas, also has a full eclipse menu with a handful of specialty drinks. Its "Moon Pie Frappa" is a blended Moon Pie drink flavored with dark chocolate and toasted marshmallow.

Big Cuppa co-owner Joseph Adam Krutz said that he's excited to greet customers and the many new faces set to travel through town next month. Krutz said his shop has been gearing up for a while along with other businesses in downtown Morrilton. He drives by a countdown clock each day.

"We're prepared. Bring it on," Krutz said.

And don't forget the snacks. In Ohio's Butler County, a shop called The Donut Dude will have an "Eclipse Donut Special" that shows the eclipse's stages as the sun disappears behind the moon.

The special goes on sale later this month and consists of seven filled-doughnuts with rolled buttercream, two galaxy-themed cake doughnuts and safety glasses so customers can watch the event while snacking away.

"We're anticipating a lot of fun," co-owner Glen Huey said.

Since the doughnut shop is closed on Mondays, Huey is looking forward to watching the spectacle as it passes over his town between Cincinnati and Dayton.

In the U.S., Texas has the best odds for clear skies and the state expects to be swarmed with tourists.

With a prime location, eateries in the town of Grapevine have a multitude of offerings: a "Blackout Dinner" at Hotel Vin and a "Solar Eclipse Shake" at Son of a Butcher.

Many businesses along the path of totality are offering special events leading up to the eclipse, too.

New York's Cayuga Lake Wine Trail is promoting "Sips to the Eclipse" for the weekend ahead of April 8. Guests will be able to visit 10 wineries for tastings — some of which are offering additional attractions like an eclipse eve tarot card reading, special slushies and half-moon cookies.

Katherine Chase, executive director of the wine trail, said the promotion was planned in anticipation of all the people coming to the Finger Lakes region for the eclipse.

"The wineries can go as big or as little as they'd like to entice folks to come," she said.

## McDonald's apologizes for global system outage that shut down some stores for hours

By COURTNEY BONNELL AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — McDonald's apologized Friday for a global technology outage that shuttered some restaurants for hours.

The company said the outage was caused by a third-party technology provider and was not a cybersecurity issue. It started around 12 a.m. CDT during a configuration change and was close to being resolved about 12 hours later, the Chicago-based company said.

"Reliability and stability of our technology are a priority, and I know how frustrating it can be when there are outages. I understand that this impacts you, your restaurant teams and our customers," Brian Rice, the company's global chief information officer, said in a statement.

"What happened today has been an exception to the norm, and we are working with absolute urgency to resolve it. Thank you for your patience, and we sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this has caused," the statement added.

The company said the outage also wasn't related to its shift to Google Cloud as a technology provider. In December, McDonald's announced a multi-year partnership with Google that will move restaurant computations from servers into the cloud. The partnership is designed to speed up tasks like ordering at kiosks and to help managers optimize staffing.

Earlier Friday, McDonald's in Japan posted on X, formerly Twitter, that "operations are temporarily out at many of our stores nationwide," calling it "a system failure." In Hong Kong, the chain said on Facebook that a "computer system failure" knocked out orders online and through self-serve kiosks.

Downdetector, an outage tracker, also reported a spike in problems with the McDonald's app over several hours.

Some McDonald's restaurants were operating normally again after the outage, with people ordering and getting their food Friday at locations in Bangkok, Milan and London.

A worker at a restaurant in Bangkok said the system was down for about an hour, making it impossible to take online or credit card payments but allowing it to still accept cash for orders.

At another location in Thailand's capital, there was plywood over a door with a sign saying, "Technicians are updating the system," even as customers were ordering again and paying digitally.

A worker at a Milan restaurant noted that the system was offline for a couple of hours and a technician walked them through getting it back up and running.

A spokesperson for McDonald's in Denmark said the "technology failure" was resolved there and restaurants were open.

Media outlets reported that customers from Australia to the U.K. had complained of issues with ordering, including a customer in Australia who posted a photo to X saying a kiosk was unavailable.

## Russian missiles kill at least 16 people in the latest strike on southern Ukraine's Odesa

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A Russian ballistic missile attack blasted homes in the southern Ukrainian city of Odesa on Friday, followed by a second missile that targeted first responders who arrived at the scene, officials said. At least 16 people were killed.

The attack occurred as Russians began voting in a presidential election that is all but certain to extend Vladimir Putin's rule by another six years after he crushed dissent, and as the war in Ukraine stretches into its third year.

The dead included a paramedic and an emergency service worker. At least 53 other people were wounded by the Iskander-M missiles, officials said.

At least 10 houses in Odesa and some emergency service equipment were damaged in the strike, which started a blaze, according to emergency officials and regional Gov. Oleh Kiper.

The tactic of firing a second missile at the same location, aiming to hit rescuers, is known in military terms as a double tap. Such strikes often hit civilians.

Kiper announced that a day of mourning in Odesa would be held on Saturday — the second such observance in less than two weeks.

On March 2, a Russian drone struck a multistory building, killing 12 people, including five children.

Moscow has repeatedly claimed that its forces do not target civilian areas, despite substantial evidence to the contrary.

Since last summer, Russia has intensified its attacks on Odesa, a southern port city with a population of around 1 million.

The attacks have primarily targeted port infrastructure, aiming to disrupt the export of goods after Ukraine managed to restore maritime navigation with a series of successful operations in the Black Sea.

Moscow officials have also claimed they are aiming at facilities where Ukrainian sea drones are stored for attacks on Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

The Odesa region's ports were key to last year's international agreement that let Ukraine and Russia ship their grain to the rest of the world.

Odesa residents largely speak Russian, and the city's past is intertwined with some of Russia's most revered figures, including Catherine the Great, author Leo Tolstoy and poet Anna Akhmatova.

Its Orthodox cathedral belongs to Moscow's patriarchate and — at least until the Kremlin illegally annexed the nearby Crimean Peninsula in 2014 — its beaches were beloved by Russian tourists.

Meanwhile, in the Russian border region of Belgorod, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said a member of the regional territorial defense forces was killed and two people were injured in Ukrainian shelling Friday.

Overnight in Ukraine, two people were also killed and three wounded in the central Vinnytsia region after Russia struck a building with a drone, according to regional Gov. Serhii Borzov.

The Ukrainian air force said it shot down all 27 Shahed drones that Russia launched over the Kharkiv, Vinnytsia, Kirovohrad, Mykolaiv, Khmelnytskyi and Kyiv regions.

## Why are so many voters frustrated by the US economy? It's home prices

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Lori Shelton can't fathom ever having the money to buy a home — and that's a major reason why so many voters feel down on the economy ahead of this year's presidential election.

Shelton, 67, drives an Uber to help pay rent in Aurora, Colorado. An advance on her pay covered her apartment's security deposit. But it also cut into her next paycheck, leaving her bank account dangerously low when the rent was due — a cycle that never seems to end.

"I'm always one step behind," said Shelton, her voice choking up. "It's a nightmare, it's a freaking nightmare right now."

The United States is slogging through a housing affordability crisis that was decades in the making. At

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the root of this problem: America failed to build enough homes for its growing population. The shortage strikes at the heart of the American dream of homeownership — dampening President Joe Biden’s assurances that the U.S. economy is strong and underscoring the degree to which Republican Donald Trump, the former president and presumptive GOP nominee for 2024, has largely overlooked the shortage.

The lack of housing has caused a record number of renters to devote an excessive amount of income to housing, according to a Harvard University analysis. Not enough homes are for sale or being built, keeping prices elevated. Average mortgage rates have more than doubled and further worsened affordability.

In fact, the Census Bureau reported that homeownership fell slightly at the end of last year in an otherwise solid economy. If it wasn’t for shelter costs, inflation — Biden’s most pronounced economic problem — would be running at a healthy and stable 1.8%. Instead, it’s hovering around 3.2%.

Administration officials are confident that shelter inflation will soon cool, but the damage across several years is apparent to advocates and economists.

“I’ve been doing housing work for 30 years — the housing affordability challenge is the worst I’ve ever seen in my career,” said Shaun Donovan, a former secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the Obama years who now leads the nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners.

Donovan noted that this is an increasingly bipartisan challenge that could bring the political parties together. Expensive housing was once the domain of Democratic areas such as New York City and San Francisco. It’s now moved into Republican states as places such as Boise, Idaho, grapple with higher prices.

“It is a first-tier issue almost everywhere,” he said. “And that is changing the national politics around it in a way that I think is quite different than I’ve ever seen.”

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, said that the outcome of the November election could ultimately depend on the path of 30-year mortgage rates.

Rates currently average about 6.74%. If they dropped closer to 6%, the odds of a Biden victory would increase. But rates moving near 8% might enable Trump to prevail, Zandi said.

“Given the current housing affordability crisis, higher rates will make owning a home completely out of reach for nearly all potential first-time homebuyers,” he said. “Since homeownership is a key part of the American dream, if it appears unattainable, this will deeply impact voters’ sense of the economy.”

Biden, a Democrat, acknowledged the pain many are feeling in his State of the Union address earlier this month and in his budget proposal released on Monday.

The president wants to fund the building and preservation of 2 million housing units — a meaningful sum, but not enough to solve the shortage. He also proposed a tax credit worth up to \$10,000 to homebuyers. Over the past three years, he has increased rental assistance to 100,000 households.

“The bottom line is we have to build, build, build,” Biden said Monday in a speech to the National League of Cities. “That’s how we bring down housing costs for good.”

Rapidly climbing home prices were also a festering problem under Trump, who first achieved celebrity status as a real estate developer. While president, Trump called for limiting construction in the suburbs. He claimed during the 2020 election that Biden’s policies to spur building and affordability would “destroy your neighborhood.”

During the 2018 to 2020 years of Trump’s presidency, the country’s housing shortage surged 52% to 3.8 million units, according to the mortgage company Freddie Mac.

The Associated Press contacted Trump’s campaign for his policy plans but did not get a response. The America First Policy Institute, a think tank promoting Trump’s vision, said the key is to cut government borrowing to reduce mortgage rates. The former president has pledged to reduce deficits, but an analysis by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget shows that his policies in office will have likely added more than \$8 trillion to the national debt.

“The best way for us to improve access to homeownership for young people is to get interest rates back down, not to provide subsidies that cause housing unaffordability to worsen,” said Mike Faulkender, chief economist at the institute.

Lower rates might play well with voters, but most economists say they would at best offer temporary financial relief. Purchase prices would likely adjust upward in response to greater demand from falling rates.



Construction, the more enduring solution, would take years to achieve and require new rules by states and cities. The administration is trying to incentivize zoning changes, but the major choices are outside the White House's control.

"Even as incomes are going up and the economy is doing well and inflation is coming down, people can't buy homes," said Daryl Fairweather, chief economist at the brokerage Redfin. "That's like the biggest problem for Biden because it's not one that he can solve."

The general rule of thumb is that people should pay no more than 30% of their income on rent or a mortgage. A typical household looking to buy a home would have to devote 41% of its income to mortgage payments, according to Redfin.

There are far-reaching economic risks because of this. High housing costs can lead people to cut back spending elsewhere. Advocates said it enables landlords to neglect their properties since there is always a ready tenant.

Evictions can worsen health and educational outcomes for children and exact an even wider cost on society, said Zach Neumann, a Denver-based lawyer who provides more than \$30 million annually in rental assistance through the nonprofit Community Economic Defense Project.

The cumulative costs of evicting poorer renters are "\$20,000 to \$30,000 a year when you include shelter nights and emergency room visits," Neumann said. "It's really overwhelming when you think about the total numbers and these folks are fighting to have a roof over their heads."

While there is bipartisan agreement on the need for more housing, there has yet to be a significant plan that has passed the House and Senate. Biden has proposed housing aid throughout his administration that never materialized.

"Had Congress passed some of the investments that the president has called for since the beginning of the administration, had they done that three years ago, as he was advocating, we'd have affordable units coming online right now," said Daniel Hornung, deputy director of the White House National Economic Council.

But Mark Calabria, who was director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency during the Trump administration, said that many of the federal tools to increase housing such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit could further push up demand without adding enough construction.

"My worry would be we've done a number of things that increased demand when the problem is supply," said Calabria, now an adviser with the libertarian Cato Institute.

But for renters such as Lori Shelton in Colorado, the debate about how to add housing supply is cold comfort when she owes rent now. She's previously dealt with the threat of eviction and late fees. She gets some rent money from her son, but she has also relied at times on her church to cover the \$2,399 a month.

"I don't think the majority of us have that savings account," she said. "If you spend that much on your rent and your groceries and your car and your bills, you don't have much for a fallback."

## Supreme Court rules public officials can sometimes be sued for blocking critics on social media

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A unanimous Supreme Court ruled Friday that public officials can sometimes be sued for blocking their critics on social media, an issue that first arose for the high court in a case involving then-President Donald Trump.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, writing for the court, said that officials who use personal accounts to make official statements may not be free to delete comments about those statements or block critics altogether.

On the other hand, Barrett wrote, "State officials have private lives and their own constitutional rights."

The court ruled in two cases involving lawsuits filed by people who were blocked after leaving critical comments on social media accounts belonging to school board members in Southern California and a city manager in Port Huron, Michigan, northeast of Detroit. They are similar to a case involving Trump and his decision to block critics from his personal account on Twitter, now known as X. The justices dismissed the

case after Trump left office in January 2021.

The cases forced the court to deal with the competing free speech rights of public officials and their constituents, all in a rapidly evolving virtual world. They are among five social media cases on the court's docket this term.

Appeals courts in San Francisco and Cincinnati had reached conflicting decisions about when personal accounts become official, and the high court did not embrace either ruling, returning the cases to the appeals courts to apply the standard the justices laid out Friday.

"When a government official posts about job-related topics on social media, it can be difficult to tell whether the speech is official or private," Barrett said.

Officials must have the authority to speak on behalf of their governments and intend to use it for their posts to be regarded essentially as the government's, Barrett wrote. In such cases, they have to allow criticism, or risk being sued, she wrote.

In one case, James Freed, who was appointed the Port Huron city manager in 2014, used the Facebook page he first created while in college to communicate with the public, as well as recount the details of daily life.

In 2020, a resident, Kevin Lindke, used the page to comment several times from three Facebook profiles, including criticism of the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Freed blocked all three accounts and deleted Lindke's comments. Lindke sued, but the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Freed, noting that his Facebook page talked about his roles as "father, husband, and city manager."

The other case involved two elected members of a California school board, the Poway Unified School District Board of Trustees. The members, Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff and T.J. Zane, used their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts to communicate with the public. Two parents, Christopher and Kimberly Garnier, left critical comments and replies to posts on the board members' accounts and were blocked. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the board members had violated the parents' free speech rights by doing so. Zane no longer serves on the school board.

The court's other social media cases have a more partisan flavor. The justices are evaluating Republican-passed laws in Florida and Texas that prohibit large social media companies from taking down posts because of the views they express. The tech companies said the laws violate their First Amendment rights. The laws reflect a view among Republicans that the platforms disproportionately censor conservative viewpoints.

Next week, the court is hearing a challenge from Missouri and Louisiana to the Biden administration's efforts to combat controversial social media posts on topics including COVID-19 and election security. The states argue that the Democratic administration has been unconstitutionally coercing the platforms into cracking down on conservative positions.

The cases decided Friday are O'Connor-Ratcliff v. Garnier, 22-324, and Lindke v. Freed, 22-611.

## Severe storms with tornadoes kill at least 3 in the central US

By STEFANIE DAZIO and LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

Severe storms with probable tornadoes tore through several central U.S. states, damaging homes and businesses and killing at least three people, with more bodies likely to be discovered, authorities said. As the sun rose Friday, officials scrambled to assess the extent of the destruction with the power out.

The three deaths came in Logan County, Ohio, according to the sheriff's office there. Thursday night's storms also left trails of destruction in Kentucky, Indiana and Arkansas. Tornadoes were also suspected in Illinois and Missouri.

"3 people have been confirmed dead. We are working on identifying the victims," said a statement from Chief Deputy Joe Kopus of the Logan County Sheriff's Office.

There were "many, many significant injuries" after a suspected tornado in Winchester, Indiana, where search efforts were underway, officials said. There were no known fatalities as of Friday morning.

"I'm shaken; it's overwhelming," said Bob McCoy, mayor of the town of 4,700 about 70 miles (110 kilometers) northeast of Indianapolis. "I heard what sounded like a train, and then I started hearing sirens."

He and his wife were hunkered in a closet during the twister, which hit around 8 p.m.

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"I've never heard that sound before; I don't want to hear it again," McCoy said.

The Winchester storm damaged a Walmart store and a Taco Bell restaurant, Randolph County Sheriff Art Moystner told FOX59/CBS4. Travel throughout the county is restricted to emergency management workers, he said.

West of Winchester, emergency management officials said initial assessments suggested as many as half the structures in the town of Selma, population 750, were damaged by a possible tornado. Only minor injuries were reported, the Delaware County Emergency Management Agency said in a news release.

"Severe weather has impacted Hoosiers all across the state, and we have emergency response personnel in the impacted areas," Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb posted on Facebook Thursday night.

The Winchester school district was closed Friday, according to a Facebook post. A high school in Winchester had electricity and was open for people who "need somewhere warm and dry."

In Ohio's Logan County, a suspected tornado tore through the villages of Lakeview and Russells Point, county spokesperson Sheri Timmers said. An RV park was damaged, Timmers said, and there were likely "lots of injuries."

Amber Fagan, president and chief executive of the Indian Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, said the community of Lakeview was "completely demolished," with homes, campgrounds and a laundromat hit by the tornado.

"There's places burning," she said. "There's power lines through people's windows."

A shelter was opened for displaced people.

In Ohio's Huron County, emergency officials posted on Facebook that there was a "confirmed large and extremely dangerous tornado" near Plymouth, some 75 miles (120 kilometers) northeast of Indian Lake.

Storms also damaged homes and trailers in the Ohio River communities of Hanover and Lamb in Indiana.

Sgt. Stephen Wheelles of the Indiana State Police earlier said another suspected tornado struck Jefferson County, on the Ohio River north of Louisville, Kentucky, damaging homes and downing trees and power lines.

He posted photos on X showing one home with its roof torn off and another missing roof shingles, as well as an image of a baseball-sized hailstone.

In Kentucky, Trimble County Emergency Management Director Andrew Stark told the Courier Journal of Louisville that the storms damaged at least 50 structures, including homes.

There was significant damage in the town of Milton, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said in a statement, with potentially over 100 structures damaged.

In Arkansas, a suspected tornado struck the retirement community of Hot Springs Village, about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southwest of Little Rock, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Erik Green.

"It's pretty clear cut that a tornado did hit Hot Springs Village," Green said, and assessment teams will go to the area Friday to confirm the twister.

Baseball-sized hail also fell and some buildings were destroyed, but there were no reports of fatalities or injuries, Green said.

There were unconfirmed reports of tornadoes in Jefferson County, Missouri, and Monroe County, Illinois, but no immediate reports of damage. Large pieces of hail also was reported in parts of the St. Louis area Thursday afternoon.

## A trove from Pattie Boyd's life with George Harrison and Eric Clapton is up for sale at Christie's

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Pattie Boyd was at the epicenter of the Swinging 60s, but not always the center of attention.

The model and photographer, who was often in the shadow of her rock icon husbands George Harrison and Eric Clapton, comes into sharp focus through a trove of letters, photos and other items she is selling at Christie's auction house.

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The collection, which went on public display at Christie's London headquarters on Friday, provides a glimpse into the heart of the 1960s and 70s counterculture. The 111 lots up for sale include affectionate letters from both Harrison and Clapton, alongside clothing, jewelry, drawings and photographs — some of Boyd, and some by her.

If Boyd, 79, feels a pang at parting with them, she isn't saying.

"I look back without emotion," she told The Associated Press. "I can feel slightly sentimental, but not emotional.

"I've lived with all of these photographs and objets for so long — 40, 50 years," she said. "I want other people to enjoy them."

Boyd is famous as a musicians' muse, inspiration for The Beatles' song "Something," composed for her by Harrison, as well as for Clapton's scorching "Layla" and sweet "Wonderful Tonight."

The auction includes love letters from Clapton, written while Boyd was married to Harrison, and the original cover artwork for Derek and The Dominos' 1970 album "Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs," a painting of a blond model who reminded Clapton of Boyd. The painting is estimated to sell for between 40,000 and 60,000 pounds (\$51,000 and \$76,000).

Harrison's handwritten lyrics for the song "Mystical One" are on offer with an estimated price of 30,000 to 50,000 pounds (\$38,000 to \$63,000).

Boyd is an accomplished photographer, and the sale includes both large-scale portraits and informal Polaroids of Harrison, Clapton and other musicians, including Mick Jagger, Pete Townshend and Ronnie Wood.

"This is very much a snapshot of her life," said Christie's head of sale Adrian Hume-Sayer.

Hume-Sayer said the appetite for 1960s music memorabilia is growing, even as undiscovered material becomes scarcer year by year.

"This is quite unusual because it's primary provenance," he said. "A lot of the material out there is on the secondary market ... but here you've got it coming directly from the person who was there. Pattie had this all of her life.

"It's that visceral link with (a) moment that means so much to so many people that makes it so interesting."

Taken as a whole, the collection feels both personal and revealing.

In one room is a psychedelic acid green and pink minidress worn by Boyd in the 1960s. In another stands an ornate grandfather clock that was a wedding present to Boyd and Harrison from Beatles manager Brian Epstein in 1966.

There are handwritten letters from Harrison — "say hello to Hubby!" — and a handmade Christmas card he gave Boyd in 1968.

Letters and postcards from Clapton — in extremely elegant handwriting — provide snapshots from the rock star life. In one he says he's off to the Caribbean island of Montserrat "to work on Sting's album." Another reveals: "Here I am in South America. Everybody's got dodgy tummies."

Harrison and Boyd divorced in 1977, and he died in 2001. In a 2007 memoir, Boyd described Harrison as her soulmate.

Her turbulent 10-year marriage to Clapton, which ended in 1989, was marred — as the musician later acknowledged — by his alcoholism.

Boyd says she feels no bitterness.

"That was almost like another lifetime ago," she said. "And he has his own life and I have my own life. But this is just a bit of history that we shared."

Mostly, she recalls the "great fun" of the 1960s, a seismic era whose creative influence rumbles across the decades.

"Sometimes I can be walking down a street somewhere in London, and I see a girl wearing what I would have worn in the 60s," she said. "I mean, how many years ago was that? And it just makes me smile."

The Pattie Boyd collection is on display at Christie's until March 21. Online bidding closes March 22.

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## Today in History: March 16

### US soldiers kill hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese in My Lai massacre

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, March 16, the 76th day of 2024. There are 290 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history:

On March 16, 1968, the My Lai (mee ly) massacre took place during the Vietnam War as U.S. Army soldiers hunting for Viet Cong fighters and sympathizers killed unarmed villagers in two hamlets of Son My (suhn mee) village; estimates of the death toll vary from 347 to 504.

On this date:

In 1521, Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan and his crew reached the Philippines, where Magellan was killed during a battle with natives the following month.

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson signed a measure authorizing the establishment of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York.

In 1935, Adolf Hitler decided to break the military terms set by the Treaty of Versailles by ordering the rearming of Germany.

In 1945, during World War II, American forces declared they had secured Iwo Jima, although pockets of Japanese resistance remained.

In 1968, Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1972, in a nationally broadcast address, President Richard Nixon called for a moratorium on court-ordered school busing to achieve racial desegregation.

In 1984, William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Beirut, was kidnapped by Hezbollah militants (he was tortured by his captors and killed in 1985).

In 1994, figure skater Tonya Harding pleaded guilty in Portland, Oregon, to conspiracy to hinder prosecution for covering up an attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan, avoiding jail but drawing a \$100,000 fine.

In 2004, China declared victory in its fight against bird flu, saying it had "stamped out" all its known cases.

In 2014, Crimeans voted to leave Ukraine and join Russia, overwhelmingly approving a referendum that sought to unite the strategically important Black Sea region with the country it was part of for some 250 years.

In 2016, President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland to take the seat of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who had died the previous month. (Republicans who controlled the Senate would stick to their pledge to leave the seat empty until after the presidential election; they confirmed Trump nominee Neil Gorsuch in April 2017.)

In 2018, singer Aretha Franklin canceled two upcoming concerts, saying a doctor had told her to stay off the road and rest completely for at least two months. (Franklin died five months later from pancreatic cancer.)

In 2020, amid coronavirus concerns, global stocks plunged again with Wall Street seeing a 12% decline, its worst in more than 30 years, and Ohio called off its presidential primary just hours before polls were to open while Arizona, Florida and Illinois went ahead with their plans.

In 2021, a gunman killed eight people, mostly women of Asian descent, at three Atlanta-area massage parlors in an attack that sent terror through the Asian-American community, which had increasingly been targeted during the pandemic; the white gunman, Robert Long, told police that the attack was not racially motivated, and that he had a "sex addiction." (Long was sentenced to life in prison after pleading guilty in four of the deaths.)

In 2022, a powerful 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Fukushima in northern Japan.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Ray Walker (The Jordanaires) is 90. Game show host Chuck Woolery is 83. Country singer Robin Williams is 77. Actor Erik Estrada is 75. Actor Victor Garber is 75. Country singer Ray Benson (Asleep at the Wheel) is 73. Bluegrass musician Tim O'Brien (Hot Rize; Earls of Leicester) is 70.

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Rock singer-musician Nancy Wilson (Heart) is 70. World Golf Hall of Famer Hollis Stacy is 70. Actor Clifton Powell is 68. Rapper-actor Flavor Flav is 65. Rock musician Jimmy DeGrasso is 61. Actor Jerome Flynn is 61. Folk singer Patty Griffin is 60. Movie director Gore Verbinski is 60. Country singer Tracy Bonham is 57. Actor Lauren Graham is 57. Actor Judah Friedlander is 55. Actor Alan Tudyk is 53. Actor Tim Kang is 51. R&B singer Blu Cantrell is 48. Actor Brooke Burns is 46. Actor Kimrie Lewis is 42. Actor Brett Davern is 41. Actor Alexandra Daddario is 38. R&B singer Jhené Aiko is 36. Rock musician Wolfgang Van Halen is 33. Toronto Blue Jays baseball star Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is 25.